

The transforming role of women in territorial development: An approach from the theory of capabilities.

El rol transformador de las mujeres en el desarrollo territorial: Un enfoque desde las teorías de las capacidades.

Fátima Yelina Vanegas Avilés ^a, Martha Miurel Suarez Soza ^b, Clifford Jerry Herrera Castrillo ^c

Abstract:

This essay analyses women's contribution to territorial development from a gender equality perspective, addressing their role in building inclusive and sustainable communities. Through a historical and theoretical overview, it explores the structural barriers and achievements of feminist movements, highlighting the impact of women in the economic and social sectors. Employing Amartya Sen's capability theory, it examines how women's empowerment and participation enhance collective well-being and promote equitable progress. This analysis underscores the need to remove gender barriers and strengthen women's capabilities for inclusive territorial development.

Keywords:

Territorial development, gender equality, women's empowerment, feminism, capability theory, sustainability, social inclusion

Resumen:

Este ensayo analiza la contribución de las mujeres al desarrollo territorial desde una perspectiva de igualdad de género, abordando su papel en la construcción de comunidades inclusivas y sostenibles. A través de un recorrido histórico y teórico, se exploran las barreras estructurales y los logros de los movimientos feministas, destacando el impacto de las mujeres en el ámbito económico y social. Empleando la teoría de las capacidades de Amartya Sen, se examina cómo el empoderamiento y la participación de las mujeres potencian el bienestar colectivo y promueven un progreso equitativo. Este análisis subraya la necesidad de eliminar obstáculos de género y fortalecer las capacidades de las mujeres para un desarrollo territorial inclusivo.

Palabras Clave:

Desarrollo territorial, igualdad de género, empoderamiento femenino, feminismo, teoría de las capacidades, sostenibilidad, inclusión social

INTRODUCTION

Social inequalities have deeply disturbed women's lives, enhancing the rise of proposals that seek to transform cognitive and historical society's structures. In this context, Madrugá (2023) discusses the ontological distinction between men and women, resulting in social and political inequalities. Thus, women have been perceived in some theoretical approaches as inferior beings, justifying their subordination in diverse aspects.

An example of this derogatory conceptualization towards the existence of women in Schopenhauer's work (1981) in his trial, he expressed an entirely negative vision of feminine nature, claiming that women exist in this world mainly to procreate and they are animals of long hair with short ideas.

Throughout history, women have questioned the roles imposed by patriarchal societies, challenging the limitations that exclude their fundamental rights and having equal participation. An example of this challenge was during the French Revolution period from 1789 to 1799, in which people like Olympe de Gouges used their voices and writings to defend women's rights

^a Estelí Municipal Government | Citizen Power | Estelí, Estelí | Nicaragua, <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7455-3786>, Email: yelinaaviles2@gmail.com

^b National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, Managua | Estelí Regional University Center | Estelí, Estelí | Nicaragua, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1851-3774>, Email: msuarezs@unan.edu.ni

^c Corresponding Author. National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, Managua | Estelí Regional University Center | Estelí, Estelí | Country, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7663-2499>, Email: cliffor.herrera@unan.edu.ni

and other marginalized groups, observing injustice in the public sector. In the words of Clegg (2021, quoted in Chaparro 2023). It is crucial to discuss these oppressions from historical contexts, considering both the individual agency and the power structures that lead to inequality.

Women's fight for equality has become a force for change to construct more legitimate and inclusive societies. The Feminist Movement in Europe emerged in the eighteenth century and was one of the first movements to question the lack of women's rights. Although, it had influential people such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), Simone de Beauvoir (1949) & Judith Butler (1990).

These contributions expanded feminism worldwide, inspiring movements looking for the right to vote, educate, and have equal opportunities in America and other regions. According to Postigo (2014), feminism emerged like "an unwished child" of the Illustration, becoming a critical theory redefining the occidental thought from an anon-androcentric perspective.

It is relevant to retake Lagarde's contribution, who describes "insistent feminism" as a persevering struggle over two centuries and has tried to comprehend and analyze the patriarchal origins and their reproduction mechanisms. This system accomplishes that by employing laws, coercion, or consent, women focus their energy and even the senses of their lives to subordinate to someone else's projects without reciprocity. Sexual inequality shows a lack of mutuality including daily interactions and relationships between men and women (Alvarado, 2018).

Nowadays, the struggle for women's rights has reached national and international visibility, causing meaningful commitments to eradicate discrimination, violence, and gender inequality. One of the essential aspects of understanding this evolution is the role of women in territorial development, a topic that becomes relevant to building equal and inclusive societies.

Understanding advances and challenges faced by women's inclusion in distinct areas has resulted in discussing their participation, integration, and active role in different relationship systems, which contributes to the development of their communities and improvement in the quality of life of their familiar and social environments.

This trial explores the contributions related to feminism of equality and gender equality not only in social but also in familiar and community sectors. Moreover, the concepts of territorial development will be considered from a human perspective, in which progress is not only measured in economic terms, but also in constructing the integration of rights, duties, and opportunities. For this reason, it will refer to the theory of capacities of Amartya Sen, who emphasizes individual development as part of a social whole.

Finally, this analysis is part of the hypothesis in which nowadays women take an active and leading role which transforms realities and contributes to a more fair and sustainable territorial development. Based on a systematic perspective, it will be examined, in which women who live in inclusive environments encourage their capacities and foster the

advancement and evolution of their families, communities, and socializing spaces.

DEVELOPMENT

1. Historical Context of Women's Subordination

Historical subordination of women has been deeply rooted in theories and systems of thought that would sustain inequalities among women and men.

Over the course of history, distinct thinkers established ideas about women's inferiority, justifying their exclusion from spaces of power and decision. On one side, Aristotle claimed that "a man was superior by nature and a woman was inferior". A thought established the rationale for subordination in multiple areas (*Aristotle, Politics*). On the other hand, Rousseau believed that "all education given to women must be relative to men", relegating women to subordinate roles, which prevented them from developing autonomously. (*Emilio, or Of Education*).

These ideas enhanced a social structure in which women had limited roles of submission and obedience, excluding them from public life and decision-making. Due to the emergence of feminist theories in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this belief was questioned, fostering a new vision that would recognize women's full humanity.

When inequalities arise, it is imperative to know those other divisions that provoke controversy and tension among human beings. A relevant case is "Latin American philosophical feminism", which has been marginalized not only for its feminist approach but also for its origin in the Global South. From the sixties decade, currents like dependence theory and freedom of philosophy have examined topics of conquest, colonization, and extractivism, positioning Latin America in a center-periphery and North-South dynamic.

Regarding these bases, the women's experiences and perspectives in Latin America have limited critical and alternative territories related to feminist theory, developing approaches that demand patriarchy and colonial and capitalist structures that sustain inequalities (Alvarado, 2018).

Historical subordination of women has generated profound inequalities that limit their access to resources and their capacity to participate actively in the development of their communities. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: Gender Equality seeks to empower all women and girls, enhancing their participation in all levels of society and decision-making.

This goal sets a challenge to reverse centuries of exclusion and build a territorial development in which women are the main characters and not only spectators. Furthermore, enhancing gender equality promotes other SDG, like SDG 10: Reducing Inequalities, fostering a more righteous and equitable society (Narváez Ibarra & Holguín Alvarado, 2024).

2. Evolution of the Feminist Movement and Fight for Equality

During the eighteenth century in Europe, the Feminist Movement framed the beginning of an extensive change in the conception of women's rights. For instance, theorists like Mary Wollstonecraft, with her work *Demanding Women's Rights* (1792), openly criticized injustices and promoted equality of rights between men and women.

Afterward, characters such as Simone de Beauvoir & Judith Butler inquired about social gender constructions and denounced women's invisibility in public spaces. Because of that, feminism was consolidated as a critical movement, offering an alternative perspective that sought not only equality but also transformed androcentric structures (Postigo, 2014).

Not only has feminism been a social movement, but also a critical theory that has allowed redefining Western thought and querying the patriarchal structure of societies. In the words of Alvarez (2014), feminism has become a platform that seeks a complete life without oppression for women, promoting a vision of a human being not biased by androcentrism.

The feminist struggle has been essential to reaching advances related to social, economic, and political rights since they are in line with global objectives. SDG 4: Education of Quality is entirely linked with feminist development because of equal access to education, allowing women to increase their capacities and work opportunities. The feminist movements, especially in Latin America, have advocated for women to be given an active role in their communities in addition to what was aligned to SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Solid Institutions that enhance women's inclusion in justice processes and local and national decision-making.

3. Crucial Feminist Theories: Situated Knowledge and Intersectionality

Epistemological feminism has introduced fundamental concepts like situated knowledge, proposed by Donna Haraway (1988), who claimed that knowledge is not neutral but is molded by the experiences and social positions of those who produce it. In other words, the perspective of gender directly affects women who perceive it and understand the world contributing to a more inclusive and reflexive science.

Meanwhile, intersectionality theory, stated by authors such as Patricia Hill Collins, allows us to discuss multiple forms of oppression. For example, gender, race, and social status interact and affect women's lives, especially those that belong to marginalized groups. Collins argues that black women's empowerment requires a profound analysis of the structures of power that limit their development (Collins, 2022).

This approach is vital to understand that oppression is not monolithic, but it shows different ways based on each woman's social and cultural context.

The intersectionality perspective within feminism allows us to comprehend how inequalities related to gender, race, and social status are connected and are affected differently by women, which is crucial to achieving SDG 10: Reduction of Inequalities.

This approach demands adopting politics that note these multiple oppressions to design more inclusive and effective interventions. Considering intersectionality based on territorial development, we can work with objectives like SDG 11: Cities and Sustainable Communities enhancing urban inclusive growth in which the voices and needs of all women are contemplated (Narváez Ibarra & Holguín Alvarado, 2024).

4. The Role of Women in Territorial Development

Territorial development does not refer only to the economic growth of a region but also reflects an integral approach that includes the inhabitants' social, cultural, and environmental well-being (Corzo-Arevalo & Cuadra, 2020). Traditionally, women were neglected in the domestic domain; nevertheless, they have proved to be foremost agents for constructing more inclusive and sustainable territories. Additionally, their participation in the local economy, politics, and management of community resources is critical to ensure that territorial development is righteous and equal.

Amartya Sen, with her capacity theory, proposes that social progress must be measured by a human perspective that assesses not only material achievements but also opportunities and people's abilities (Urquijo, 2014). When women participate actively in their communities, they contribute to a more equal development that prioritizes the population's well-being by enhancing sustainable practices and fostering social cohesion.

Territorial development contemplates economic growth and its inhabitants' social and environmental well-being, which aligns with SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 13: Action to Climate. Once women participate in territorial development, initiatives, and sustainable practices are promoted to contribute to climate change mitigation and enhance the responsible use of natural resources, together with SDG 12 production and Responsible Consumption. At the same time, their participation fosters equal development that can reduce the mitigation until cities align with SDG 11 (Narváez Ibarra & Holguín Alvarado, 2024).

5. The Economic and Social Contributions to Women to Territorial Development

Women play a fundamental aspect in the economic development of the territories, participating in formal and information-productive activities, mainly in unpaid labor. Their involvement in cooperatives, small companies, and family undertakings increases incomes and enhances the communities' economic resilience. Hoinle et al. (2013) stated in their study about women favelas of Rio de Janeiro that their profitable participation provides them autonomy to make strategic decisions and change their family and community roles.

In the social environment, women ensure that territorial development projects cover the needs of all the community members, facilitating inclusive politics and social justice. Their participation as caregivers and educators allows them to

transmit their ancient knowledge and cultural practices vital to maintaining identity and local biodiversity.

6. Challenges and opportunities for women in Territorial Development

Women still face barriers to their complete participation in territorial development, even through their significant contributions. Factors, such as discrimination of gender, lack of access to resources and services, and limitation of spaces for decision-making complicate their empowerment. Notwithstanding, these difficulties also represent opportunities for growth and social transformation. Once women can recognize and overcome these barriers, they can enhance their leading role and contribute to the more effective development of their communities.

The present trial shows the challenges as starting points to fulfill a more equal society. Insofar as women can evolve in more inclusive and fair environments, their contribution to territorial development will be higher, strengthening their capacities and promoting positive change at all levels.

The profitable contribution of women in the territories has a direct impact on SDG 2:Free Hunger since their participation in productive and cooperative activities facilitates economic local growth and improves food safety. Regarding the social environment, women contribute to SDG 3 Health and Well-being to advance community health practices and support social cohesion. Besides, their participation in transmitting cultural knowledge and natural resources management is crucial to maintaining biodiversity, promoting SDG 15:Terrestrial Ecosystem Life (Narváez Ibarra & Holguín Alvarado, 2024).

6. Challenges and Opportunities to Women in Territorial Development (Using the Theory of Amartya Sen)

Amartya Sen argues that development must be understood as the use of human capacities, in other words, as the opportunity of people to have a life they value. From this perspective, development is not limited to economic income. Although, it considers real opportunities that people have to fully participate in their communities and fulfill a worthy and satisfactory life (Sen, 1999).

For women in a territorial environment, applying this theory means knowing that their development not only depends on their participation in profitable activities but also their capacity to access decision-making spaces, have control over their resources, and live in environments in which their autonomies and rights can be respected. Sen highlights a person's well-being, including his achievements and possibilities to fulfill them. Therefore, to boost the role of women in territorial development, it is necessary to overcome barriers that limit their capacities.

Structural barriers, such as gender discrimination, lack of access to profitable resources, and exclusion of spaces of power, restrict women's capacity to contribute effectively to the

development of their communities. Overcoming these barriers not only allows their participation but also fosters their access to the resources and their capacity to influence decision-making that affects their communities. It means creating inclusive politics and guaranteeing equal access to education, health, and women's financial services in all stages of life.

Overcoming these barriers women face in territorial development requires policies that enhance empowerment and equality, together with SDG 5:Gender Equality and SDG 10:Reducing Inequalities. The theory of the capacities of Amartya Sen suggests that accurate development allows people to expand their opportunities to have a worthy and significant life.

Implementing this theory with SDG can boost a vision of territorial development in which women have access to the same resources and opportunities as men have, allowing them a more effective well-being of their communities and fulfillment of objectives of sustainable development as a whole(Narváez Ibarra & Holguín Alvarado, 2024).

What is more, Sen claims that people's capacities are interrelated. For instance, when women succeed in expanding their opportunities for participation and leadership. Furthermore, they enrich the capacities of the communities since they foster sustainable practices, social equality, and community cohesion. Thus, a territorial development approach is based on capacities, and the role of the women becomes a force for progress that not only is beneficial for them but also for the society to construct more inclusive and resilient territories.

It is necessary to promote the role of women in territorial development from the theory of Sen :

- **Eliminating gender barriers** in the access to resources and spaces of decision-making.
- **Fostering policies that expand their capacities** through education and health programs.In addition to professional training, especially in rural and marginalized communities.
- **Enhancing autonomy and women's leadership** in territorial development projects, allowing their voices and experiences to be an axis of constructing local policies.

This approach of capacities turns women into fundamental leading roles of transforming their territories, achieving not only their inclusive participation but also their effectiveness and sustainability. To the extent that women can thrive in environments that strengthen their capacities, their contribution to territorial development will be higher, improving their quality of life meaningfully.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis carried out in this study emphasizes the importance of transforming women's roles in territorial development, highlighting their empowerment and active participation, which are essential to the construction of more equal, sustainable, and resilient territories. Even though they have faced structural barriers that historically have limited their access to resources, decision-making spaces, and development opportunities,

women have proven to be foremost agents of change. Overcoming these limitations requires systematic interventions and inclusive policies that promote gender equality, together with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Women's contributions to territorial development reflect their capacity to lead initiatives that can positively impact the management of resources, social cohesion, and promoting sustainable practices. Participating actively in their communities not only causes economic or social benefits but also fosters environmental resilience. Their roles as community leaders, educators, and resource managers place them as fundamental characters in constructing righteous and sustainable territories.

From the perspective of Amartya Sen's theory of capabilities, territorial development should be understood as the expansion of people's opportunities and abilities to lead fulfilling lives. In this sense, recognizing women's unique capabilities and empowering their development not only benefits the women themselves but also boosts their communities' overall progress. Equity in access to resources, education, and decision-making spaces is crucial to ensure their effective participation.

Similarly, intersectionality emerges as a critical tool for understanding the multiple forms of oppression that women face, including those related to gender, race, and class. This approach makes it possible to design inclusive strategies that respond to the specific needs of different groups, promoting more equitable and effective public policies in territorial development.

In conclusion, women have an essential role to play in the construction of equitable and sustainable societies. Fostering their empowerment, removing barriers that limit their capabilities, and ensuring their active participation is not only an ethical imperative but also a cornerstone for achieving more equitable and resilient territorial development. Inclusive policies that expand opportunities for women are a direct investment in improving communities' quality of life and achieving global sustainability goals.

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