

Discuss the view that modernisation has improved life for women in the developing world.

Since its creation by American economist Walt Whitman Rostow, modernisation theory has come to dominate the development policies of nations and supranational bodies alike. Its aims of technological advancement and so called 'westernisation' have changed the lives of millions of people across the developing world, perhaps most of all, those of women. Modernisation has changed the traditional role of women from key members of self-sufficient communities to casual labourers dependant on employment by multi-national corporations. However, a move towards more 'western' values and norms could also be said to have freed women from the household and introduced them into a workforce which relies just as much on them as they do on it.

The emphasis placed on moving from traditional to modern roles and systems has changed women's lives in many positive ways. It could be argued, to use Nussbaum's terminology, that women are now capable of far more than they had been in traditional societies. An article from the Washington Examiner attributes this new 'capability' to the arrival of free markets. It argues that improvements in technology sparked by increased market demand have cut the hours which women must spend on homemaking dramatically. This argument can be seen most clearly of all in developing countries where even utilities such as running water and electricity have eased the burden on women to provide for their families.

However, to use a quote from Walby, it could be concluded that women 'liberated from the home, now have the whole of society in which to be exploited.' Many examples exist of how women, having moved from traditional roles to modern one's self-sufficient roles to dependant ones, have now become little more than a source of cheap labour for multinationals. The UN food and agriculture organisation has shown that women make up 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, yet they are, according to the world economic forum, still paid only 63% of what men earn. These inequalities have largely come about due to a move from wholistic living to a division of labour which consistently discriminates against women.

The division of labour, while having enabled women to work outside the family setting, has also made them extremely vulnerable. A report by writer Zaffirah Zein in 'Eco Business' has highlighted the case of women working in the Indonesian palm oil industry