

DCF VIENNA POLICY DIALOGUE

Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment:

The role of development cooperation

December 13-14, 2012

Wendy Harcourt¹ Keynote Address – December 13, 2012:

"New dynamics for gender equality in a changing context"

Thank you for the invitation and the challenge to speak off the cuff, and be provocative.

Among many proposals about what I could speak about 'off the cuff' was 'the major threats of discussion on gender equality and development cooperation and the post 2015 UN development agenda'.

I suspect the word should have been 'threads', however to start my provocation I will choose to look at the threats to our discussion. But then, turn from those threats to points of a strategic narrative that I hope participants can 'thread' together themselves in their discussions of this policy dialogue.

So to begin with threats to our discussion

The biggest threat is that we ourselves go on with business as usual. Quite frankly we cannot afford to do so.

We need to put to one side all those professional, technical issues, all the debates about indicators, targets, goals, gender

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mainstreaming, that we keep saying are not working and need to be refined and rethought and replanned ...

This would be our business as usual

It is not longer enough to say we have to be more efficient in our planning, more accountable to the people, more strict in our measurements, more careful in our spending money, more appealing to our targets, more in tune with our beneficiaries, more clever in our advocacy ...

We need to look at the underlying problems that are causing the increasing inequalities and the crises we are facing.

We need to recognize the world has changed in these last 15 years in ways that the old MDG framework cannot address.

That all our tools and analysis cannot capture, yet.

The world has changed in ways that challenge our business as usual

We need to look them in the face, we need to take them on board , we need to engage them in our business, and if we do so, our business is going to change.

So let me name just three:

First, there are different actors on the scene:

The new players, the BRICS These powerful countries are made up of governments and business that are not caught in the same colonial narrative and history that has formed the OECD development agenda of today.

OECD, particularly old Europe, is as a result also a very different player now on the global stage – it is dealing with its own internal crises – the faltering financial system, the strains of governance, the increasing precarity of work, youth unemployment, care crisis with the crumbling of the welfare state, uncertainty, rise of racism, violence and protest.

So as new players come onto the global scene,

We need to consider what would a post-colonial decolonialised development look like?

Are these new players in 2015 going to create a new culture for development?

What does that look like?

Where is gender equality in these new cultures? What will be these new narratives of development?

Second

We are all aware of the power of social media, cyber space escapism, cyber organising flash mobs, getting people on the streets in the Arab spring in the UK lootings, mobilising people on the streets, everywhere – of all ages, the unemployed, the pensioners, the marginalised, the school children, the sex workers. So where are all those different social movements the social networks, those who say they don't believe in TINA? These are not the old organised labour, these a new types of political citizens, netizens, holding out a promise of new forms of governance, citizenship and democracy not wanting to be beholden to the state.

How are they to be engaged in the development agenda?

What kind of gender equality is informing their efforts to organise in new ways?

Third

The reality of the climate crisis, the energy crisis, the food crisis, the financial crisis, the care crisis.

It seems there is general agreement that we need to revisit the sustainable development debate, go back to the future. Two decades after the Earth Summit, people recognize that that sustainability has to be at the core of the post 2015 agenda.

So, what are these sustainable production models, how can we ensure energy efficiency and green technologies, and most importantly how are we to change consumption patterns?

As we, in our search for sustainability issues, going to turn to big business, to technologies? Or are we going to listen to non-western knowledges – indigenous knowledges about 'buen vivir' 'ubuntu' caring for the Earth, acknowledging its limitations, and the dangers if we ignore it in our pursuit of what is now being called 'inclusive growth' resilience and green economy. What will be the role of indigenous women, of peasant women and rural women farmers? Can we learn from those knowledges about the limits to growth (rather than inclusive growth).

Are we going to acknowledge that sustainability is not about resources as such, it is about systemic change, institutional change, it is about building capacities and new systems from peoples' knowledge and experience of nature and culture, and recognizing the damage and violence of development

It means listening and respecting other cultures and knowledges and not imposing our predefined models, prescription. It means taking responsibility for the damage to the environment and cultures.

Can we finally recognize that sustainability means that the post 2015 agenda is as much about the realities of a woman in Italy as a woman in Kenya. Can we talk about development universally, not about those that know and those that don't? Not talk about voices of marginalized women, but listen to them?

So given these challenges to our business as usual, where is gender equality to be in this fierce new world?

Is it to be about getting more poorly paid jobs for women in factories making shoes and jeans, or flowers and bananas to be flown across the world for other women to buy? Is it about better rights for domestic workers living for years away from their family and communities to clean the toilets of rich women? Is it about ensuring more condoms for sex workers women to service tourists in exotic locations? Do we want 50% women in the Forbes 500?

Is this what 'investment' in gender equality means?

It would be if we go about business as usual.

But let us stay with that uncomfortable thought, that we do not want to do business as usual, so how do we stay with the troubles and difficulties we face and build new narratives from them? What are the threads then for our discussion here?

We could, for a start, ask why are gender inequalities are replicated in so many institutions? The UN, the office, the factory, the village, the home?

Patriarchy is alive and well, and we need to be able to call it in different political, economic, social and cultural arenas much more forcibly. We need to look at masculinity in development as part of our gender equality agenda.

Then, whatever happened to all the work we have done? Agenda 21, CEDAW, Beijing, Cairo, there are gender norms, negotiated principles of human rights that can be built on, worked on and used put into action, we have agreed frameworks, why is it we cannot make them stick? When we look at the MDGs we might get one answer in their reductionism which missed the insights of those agreed norms.

Another thread is the human rights agenda. Why is that human rights, though so well documented, so talked about, is seen as an optional extra when it comes to economic and social rights? How can it become something that every Finance Minister, every Planning Commission, every Minister for Trade, Industry and Agriculture, every Central Bank, must pay attention? And what about the rights of the planet? And what rights do businesses feel accountable to? Is fair trade the answer? What would gender responsive budgeting look like if those in power understood the care work continuum?

And business - how can we include businesses in the post-2015 agenda? We all hold our suspicions about Nike campaigns for girls but these are the players who are with us now. We know that the private sector if not held accountable lead to inequality, precarious work, tax avoidance and evasion, systemic financial risk,

environmental degradation and failure to realize human rights. Is there here a strong role for civil society? What type of democracy do we envisage for netizens, what about accountability to future citizens?

Finally what is the gender perspective on the Global Commons, or Mother Earth, where do women, other cultures, fit in this sense now of nature once something we felt we could tame is taking its revenge? Is that the right narrative? – how do we work with our nature cultures moving away from the modern development framework with its fixation on the economic to include the ecological and social needs of people and the planet?