

***Does Aid Work? Can it Work Better? Crucial Questions on the Road to Accra and Doha***  
**North-South Institute Conference, June 17-18, Ottawa**

**“Gender, the Paris Declaration and Women’s Emancipation”**  
**Speaking Notes for Molly Kane, Inter Pares**

I should confess that when Roy Culpeper<sup>i</sup> asked me to speak about gender and the Paris Declaration my heart sank. But, of course, I would not say no to Roy. In taking on the topic I had to track down my own discomfort, which may seem a bit strange at first. I am a feminist. I work in a development NGO that works with an explicit feminist analysis and in close collaboration with many women’s organizations. But there is something in the framing of the gender equality and aid discussion that bothers me. Something in the mainstreaming and cross-cutting and now harmonizing and aligning that leaves me at best uninspired, at worst alarmed.

I am often reminded of my first visit to West Africa a little over ten years ago. I was with a colleague from Canada visiting projects for women in northern Mali. One afternoon, we were touring a market garden run by the local women’s association. The community leaders explained the benefits of the project, how the women had some additional income to look after family needs and family nutrition had improved. After admiring the vegetable plots, I asked one of the women what the project meant to her. She said, with a somewhat ironic smile, “We are working an even longer day now. We don’t need any more of these gender and development projects. We women need a break.”

This is the voice I hear while tracking down the malaise regarding the discourse of aid and gender equality: “*Women need a break.*” Does aid work to address inequality? What kinds of inequality? Where does gender equality fit it to the purpose of aid? What is the specificity of gender inequality and what is the relationship of aid to that specificity?

I will do two things in this presentation. First, I will share with you a summary of the commentary to date on the Paris Declaration coming from CSO networks concerned with women’s rights and development. I won’t repeat what has already been presented regarding more general civil society concerns about the Paris Declaration. The analysis that Brian Tomlinson provided in the previous session on issues of omission and

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<sup>i</sup> Roy Culpeper is President of the North-South Institute, Ottawa. For more information on the conference, *Does Aid Work?* see <http://www.nsi-ins.ca/english/events/aid.asp>.

interpretation has been expressed by women's rights networks such as AWID and WIDE as well. I will only mention the commentary coming from those networks that is specifically about gender inequality and women's rights.<sup>ii</sup> Secondly, I will place this in the context of the main theme of this conference by highlighting some perspectives and principles that could help frame a meaningful discussion regarding aid and inequality.

The women's rights networks assert as first principles that gender equality and human rights are not a parallel debate of aid and development policies, but central development goals. And yet the only reference the Paris Declaration makes to gender equality is: "similar harmonization efforts [that is similar to the harmonized approach to environmental impact assessments] are also needed on other *cross cutting issues such as gender equality and other thematic issues including those financed by dedicated funds*" (my emphasis).

Gender equality is mentioned only twice in the March Draft of the Accra Agenda for Action: First: "*The Paris principles are providing a solid platform for accelerated progress on gender equity, environmental stability, respect for human rights, and good governance that is fundamental to good development results.*" And second: "*We will invest more in gender disaggregated data as a way of increasing the impact of aid.*"

Regarding gender equality and the five principles of the Paris Declaration, the women's networks have made the following observations and recommendations:

**1. Ownership:** Democratic ownership of national development programs should involve citizens, including women's organizations, in the formulation and delivery of policies and programs. It is not the international financial institutions, but the people who should be the beneficiaries of aid, the majority of whom are women, who should have the final say in development strategies.

**2. Alignment:** Given the concern about weak democratic ownership noted above, as more bilateral and multilateral funding is "aligned," the key question is aligned with what, and to what benefit? Women's movements around the world have contributed to and rely on United Nations processes to advance their agendas at home, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) of the 1995 Fourth World Conference for Women for Development and Peace and Equality. Unlike the Paris Declaration, these processes and agreements include an explicit analysis of women's status and of poverty. The Beijing Platform for Action declares:

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<sup>ii</sup> See AWID and WIDE (2008), Alemany, C. et al. "Implementing the Paris Declaration: Implications for the promotion of Women's Rights and Gender Equality," January 2008; and "Better Aid: A Civil Society Position Paper for the 2008 Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness," International Civil Society Steering Group, May 2008, [www.betteraid.org](http://www.betteraid.org).

*In order to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development, women and men must participate fully and equally in the formulation of macroeconomic and social policies and strategies for the eradication of poverty. The eradication of poverty cannot be accomplished through anti-poverty programmes alone but will require democratic participation and changes in economic structures in order to ensure access for all women to resources, opportunities and public services.*

**3. Harmonization:** Commentaries about harmonization are similar to those regarding alignment in terms of general concerns about macro-economic conditionality and the reinforcement of more powerful players (the donors) in the aid relationship. Harmonization among the powerful makes the powerful more so, at the expense of the weaker partners (the recipient countries).

**4. Managing for results:** Improvement in management of resources and decision-making for results can only happen if sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis are integrated into monitoring, implementation, and evaluation processes. Adherence to human rights principles and to the legal obligations of donors and recipient governments should be used to measure the effectiveness of policies and programs. These obligations and standards should include the requirements of the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as MDG targets and indicators.

**5. Mutual Accountability:** In many countries women's rights organizations have significant challenges in securing accountability from their governments. There are limited opportunities for women's rights advocates to hold donor countries and the IFIs to account. While the new aid modalities (budget support, Sector Wide Approaches, PRSPs, basket funding and Joint Assistance Strategies) come in the context of a scaling-up of aid flows generally, they tend to result in a scaling-down of specific funding for women's rights and gender equality, due to a lack of political will to ensure gender equality is one of the main pillars of development and due to the nature of the analysis of poverty underpinning those aid modalities (which also affects support for civil society and dissent more broadly).

There are four main areas of recommendations coming from the commentary on the Paris Declaration so far:

1. Donors and governments should deliver on commitments under international human rights frameworks and key agreements on women's rights and development such as the BPFA, CEDAW, and MDGs with adequate financial resources, and the effective involvement of *national machineries* for gender equality in development planning and implementation.
2. To strengthen democratic ownership and women's participation in the aid effectiveness agenda, donors and governments need to promote mechanisms for

effective participation by citizens and CSOs, including women's organizations, in planning, monitoring and evaluation of development processes. Autonomous and responsive support to civil society development actors, including women's organizations, is an important requirement of inclusive new aid mechanisms.

3. Gender equality should be included in the monitoring and evaluation of the Paris Declaration using gender-based instruments such as gender responsive budgets and gender audits, disaggregated statistics by sex to monitor gender gaps, and local capacities to collect, analyze and strategically disseminate the data.
4. Guidelines and tools on the contribution of the new aid modalities to national obligations to gender equality should be developed as well as documentation of the experience of gender advocacy and promotion in the PRSP processes and the provision of an analysis of women's poverty in direct relationship to the national macroeconomic policies.

To return to the central question of this conference: Does aid work?

We cannot answer that question without taking into account the system it is part of. What does the gender equality challenge of aid tell us about that system? I would like to mention three threads of concern:

- a) Firstly, the Paris Declaration, as an agreement of the aid regime, has been criticized for being (among other things, of course) "gender-blind." This is not simply an omission, and it must be taken into consideration when assessing how the aid regime works. It has been noted correctly that nothing in the Paris Declaration directly or fundamentally addresses the gendered nature of poverty. One has to ask: if the gendered nature of poverty is not addressed, then what possible confidence could one have in the declaration's underlying assumptions about poverty itself? And without a more rigorous and complete analysis, or framework, how does one have confidence in its effectiveness to reduce poverty? What phenomenon is being addressed through this agreement on aid? This question is especially important for a regime whose authority is justified with a rationale of superior technical expertise to address a technical problem.
- b) Secondly, we should challenge the instrumentalization of women for the "greater good" of poverty reduction. Do our interventions and policy recommendations aim for more autonomy *for* women or more care *from* them? The goal of gender equality is a goal of justice, which necessarily requires changes in relations of power which cannot be redressed or addressed with the instrumentalization of women for development. Women need a break.

The instrumentalization of women in the discourse of poverty reduction and development is pervasive. As an example of this formulation, a recent CIDA document states: “Research has shown that development activities yield better results when designed to foster access of both women and men to program resources and benefits.”

Women’s centrality in development should not be because women are better caregivers and therefore able to contribute to maintaining what is still a dysfunctional system, but because women have inherent rights, and because their historical social inequality is one dimension of systems and practices of other kinds of social inequality and discrimination. The transformation in social and economic relations needed to bring about equality between men and women would require profound changes in other power relationships that would also change, due to the necessary systemic transformation in the production and redistribution of wealth, political representation, and the recognition of the value of all members of society.

- c) And finally, we should interrogate the principle of country ownership which is so central to Aid Effectiveness discourse. The tensions around ownership and national sovereignty are especially important in relation to women’s emancipation. Women’s exclusion from political space is widespread and profound, resulting in women’s systemic misrepresentation. What is the relationship between aid and the complexity of women’s subjugation in the private and public spheres? If women could “frame” the issue of development through authentic representation, what would women want?

When we talk about “country ownership” we should not ignore a critical element of that national political space: women perform nearly two-thirds of the world’s work, yet receive less than 10 per cent of the world’s income, and own less than 1 per cent of world’s property.<sup>iii</sup> That reality of ownership translates to disadvantageous relations of power in social negotiations to change the status quo.

In her analysis of the challenge of justice in a globalizing world, the American feminist scholar Nancy Fraser presents three dimensions of justice: the economic dimension of redistribution, the cultural dimension of recognition, and the political dimension of representation. She says:

Justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life...The political furnishes the stage on which the struggles over distribution and recognition are played out. [The] question to be asked is how do the boundaries of the political community actually exclude some who are entitled to representation?...

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<sup>iii</sup> See CCIC’s *10-Point Agenda to End Poverty and Injustice*, [www.ccic.ca](http://www.ccic.ca).

When the community's boundaries are drawn in such a way as to wrongly exclude some people from participating at all in its authorized contests over justice, misrepresentation takes a deeper form [which is] misframing. Akin to what Hannah Arendt called the "right to have rights" that sort of misframing is a kind of "political death." Those who suffer it may become objects of charity or benevolence. But deprived of the possibility of authoring first-order claims they become non-persons with respect to justice.<sup>iv</sup>

Following Fraser's insights, what is needed for "democratic ownership" of development strategies are fair and open processes of deliberation in which all can participate as peers, transforming the structures and legacies of colonialism and patriarchy. The struggles against mal-distribution and mis-recognition cannot succeed unless they are joined with struggles against misrepresentation by creating accessible, equitable, and consequential political spaces. So, the question, "Does aid work?" can be reformulated in this way: Under what conditions does aid support people who have been disenfranchised, expropriated, and discriminated against to realize the full dimensions of justice?

In conclusion, at an immediate and practical level, we who work in the aid industry need to think about the relationship between the historical struggle for women's emancipation and the current discourse and practice of aid effectiveness and gender equality. We should seriously question whether the politics of those historical movements for women's emancipation are being captured (in the sense of caught) in log frames as a cross-cutting issue, with all the linear, mechanistic, technocratic, and apolitical theories of change that aid effectiveness discourse implies.

The gender equality agenda that is now being "mainstreamed" emerged from historical struggles against great odds from the margins – from many kinds of margins. And therefore if we seek to support such movements, such expressions of human dignity and aspiration, we must be wary of orthodoxies, and even more so of harmonized orthodoxies, and theoretical monocultures.

We need a better understanding of the fundamentals of impoverishment to address the ways in which economies actually generate inequality. Our analysis of poverty should indicate ways forward to transform economies to be productive in ways that meet the needs of human dignity, with greater equality of benefit, including decent jobs and livelihoods, and with sound environmental stewardship.

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<sup>iv</sup> Fraser, Nancy, "Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World," in Held, David and Kaya, Ayse, *Global Inequality*, Polity Press, 2007, pp. 252-272.

We need to recognize the specificity of women's conditions and aspirations. We have not reached the end of history. And we really aren't talking about "gender balance"; we are still talking about women's emancipation.

And finally, as we take on the effectiveness of aid to contribute to women's equality, we must acknowledge that women's emancipation is a struggle for justice that includes and requires the political dimension of representation. In many ways, this is the easiest part to change – it requires only the political will to open public policy processes to new actors, and to the visions, priorities and frameworks that their participation would inevitably bring.

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