ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES
The Heart of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Future We Want for All
*Global Thematic Consultation*

GETTING AT THE ROOTS: RE-INTEGRATING HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE
POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to debates on addressing root causes of inequalities, including gender inequality, within the post-2015 development process. It examines shortfalls in past development policy and practice, and implications of that experience for the post-2015 development agenda. An integrated and systematic gender perspective and strong political commitment to women’s rights must be central parts of any new development framework. Rather than jumping to discussions of goals, this paper proposes deeper exploration of key considerations for grounding the post-2015 framework in the goals reflected in existing human rights instruments and agreements. As an initial contribution, AWID offers some general recommendations that we believe are critical for long-term, sustainable, inclusive, and just development for all.

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I. Introduction

"We can no longer avoid the fact that substantive changes in models of production, consumption, of organizing life must not be delayed. Feminist proposals for an economy oriented around care for life, based in cooperation, complementarity, reciprocity and solidarity...are not just proposals by women for women, but by women for countries, for humanity.”—Magdalena León T (2008).

The process for a post-2015 development agenda comes at a time when the failures of the current, predominant patriarchal and neoliberal model of growth and development are widely acknowledged and visible. Women’s rights organizations have long called for a development paradigm that is inclusive, sustainable and just – recognizing and valuing reproductive and care work and enabling all people to have their rights respected, protected, and fulfilled (Schoenstein & Alemany, 2011). While there is no single ideal development model given diverse local realities, some basic principles, grounded in a human rights based approach, can serve as an important basis for any development framework.

As pointed out in the UNICEF and UN Women call for papers, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) “have not managed adequately to integrate all principles outlined in the Millennium Declaration, especially in relation to human rights and equality, including gender inequality. Furthermore, the MDGs’ focus on national and global averages and progress can mask much slower progress or even growing disparities at the sub-national level and among specific populations. Addressing inequalities is a moral imperative from a human rights perspective”. (UNICEF & UN Women 2012, p. 2).

No dimension of development is gender-neutral, therefore any post-2015 development framework must integrate a systematic gender perspective and strong political commitment to women’s rights and gender equality. At the same time, broad structural changes are fundamental if the new development agenda aims to address inequalities of all kinds.
This paper draws lessons and insights from past development policy processes using two cases: the impact of policy responses to the 2008 financial crisis on women and the limited impact thus far of development cooperation in advancing gender equality and women’s rights. It goes on to extract considerations and recommendations for building a post-2015 development agenda seeking to address the root causes of inequalities.

II. Challenges of the Current Development Model in Addressing Gender Equality and Women’s Rights: Two Cases

The historical reasons for the instabilities that lead to crises, including the most recent financial/economic crisis, are often ignored. Recurrent crises point clearly to the limits of the mainstream model of development, yet critical reflection on the model is largely absent from the dialogue surrounding both responses to the crisis and the post-2015 official dialogues. Nevertheless, both processes have far reaching implications for the future ability of individuals and communities to enjoy their human rights and for the sustainability of the planet.

The economic and financial crises cannot be seen in isolation from the food, fuel, water, environment/climate, human rights, and care crises. These interlocking crises are part and parcel of a failed development model that sees economic growth as both the meaning and ultimate goal of development. This despite evidence that growth alone does not necessarily lead to social justice and often, pursuit of growth results in extensive environmental/ecological degradation. “Economic indicators and social well-being indicators do not correlate” (Bissio, 2012).

The examples below illustrate shortcomings of the mainstream development model and its related policies in effectively advancing gender equality and justice. These experiences make clear the importance of questioning and unpacking the ideology at the heart of future global development frameworks, while also offering insights into critical considerations or dimensions for more fully addressing gender equality in a post-2015 framework.
a. Shortcomings of Government Policy Responses to the Crisis from a Feminist Perspective

According to research AWID coordinated from 2009-2011, governments have responded to the financial/economic crisis as if it were an isolated anomaly, rather than reflective of a broad systemic crisis. Government responses have, on the whole, been successful in the sense that a looming depression like that of the 1930s has been averted though most countries have returned to significantly slower economic growth, if judged by gross domestic product (GDP) figures. Yet looking past the aggregate and examining the social and distributive impact of the crisis reveals a different picture.

The 2008 financial/economic crisis has disproportionately affected the most excluded and discriminated communities across the world, who continue to bear both the brunt of the crisis’ fallout and the impact of limited government responses and austerity measures.\(^1\) Insecurity has risen, social safety nets have been dismantled or weakened and unemployment has grown significantly, deepening the crisis of decent work, with youth and migrants particularly hard hit.\(^ii\) As a result, inequality (which had already been growing) has risen within and between countries\(^iii\) in a context of persistent, historical crisis and insecurity for many communities and countries.

Below, we identify several major shortcomings of the responses that contributed to this outcome and, in so doing, offer insights into the limitations of a model of development that is focused on growth, private profit, and efficiency.

The manner in which countries have used monetary and fiscal policies to respond to crises has, in part, reinforced the disproportionate, negative impacts the crisis has on women’s rights (ESCR-NET et al). Macroeconomic policy design has a significant impact on the type of development policies a country can implement as well as the distributional impacts they have. While tight macroeconomic policies may benefit some sectors and groups, they may have detrimental impacts on others, such as industrial sectors, employees, or the poor who often do not benefit from higher growth rates, employment creation, or public investment in essential
services (Waeyenberge et al, 2010). Yet the priority of most governments has been to stabilize markets and return to economic growth (without regard for equitable distribution), by recapitalizing banks, infusing funds into the private sector and thus stabilizing financial markets and assuaging the fears of international investors. By saving failing financial institutions (rather than focusing on guaranteeing the rights of people) response priorities have meant a return to the status quo.

The International Labour Organisation noted that stimulus packages implemented until 2009 had insufficiently addressed employment and social protection (ILO, 2009). In instances where fiscal stimulus packages have supported job creation, they have failed to account for the gender differentiated impacts of the crisis, further perpetuating the exclusion of marginalized groups. For example, a number of stimulus initiatives planned in the Pacific involve infrastructure development; however, women tend to be underrepresented in this sector and are therefore excluded from benefiting from the response (Sumeo, 2009).

Responses from International Financial Institutions have aggravated the crisis for many developing countries by placing conditions on their loans that limit national policy space. While the G20 pledged to replenish and expand the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Fund’s crisis loans still require cutting public sector expenditures, reducing fiscal deficits, and increasing interest rates (Bhumika Muchhala qtd in Weissman, 2009). Most recently its austerity measures have been applied to Europe. These conditions ignore and limit countries’ abilities to meet their human rights obligations, instead prioritizing low inflation and stable growth (Balakrishnan & Heintz, 2010). Conditionalities placed on developing countries further reduce policy space and prevent states’ strengthening the provision of social services. These measures have detrimental impacts on both poor women and men; however, due to women’s gendered role in maintaining communities and families in society, they are disproportionately impacted. Spending cuts in health, education and other essential services translate to expanded unpaid work burdens on women; women are often among the first to lose their jobs when public sector employment is downsized; and the user fees associated with many conditionalities constrain access to services for women and girls (Gender Action, 2009).
Government responses that focus on short-term fixes within a neoliberal framework do nothing to avert the risk of similar or even deeper crises (re)occurring. In fact, much of the developing world has been for decades and remains in a state of perpetual crisis. Jayati Ghosh aptly notes that three primary aspects of the most recent crisis of international capitalism have not been addressed:

“the imbalance between finance and the real economy; the macroeconomic imbalances between major players in the international economy; and the ecological imbalance that will necessarily become a constraint on future growth, not only because of climate change but because of other environmental problems and the demand for energy” (Ghosh, 2010).

Instead of attempting to address root causes of the crisis, responses have focused on recapitalizing banks and the private sector. Concomitantly, transnational corporations, including particularly the finance sectors, have seen exorbitant profits, high executive salaries even as sustained violations to human rights continue.

Austerity measures being implemented in some places have undermined the already weak stimulus responses and their implementation has/will have gendered impacts. Western Europe and the U.S., for example, have implemented cuts in public sector employment (an area in which women often predominate) and social services spending. In Spain, in spite of high levels of unemployment (which for youth reaches 50%), the government recently announced another round of cuts aimed at reducing the central government’s budget deficit by $80 billion USD over two and a half years (BBC, 2012). Women and girls tend to compensate for these cuts with their own (unpaid) labor and time in addition to their already high levels of work burden (both paid and unpaid). Austerity measures across Europe and the U.S. have exacerbated inequality to levels not seen before or since the world wars in XX Century. Such measures have a particularly deep impact on populations that already experience discrimination and exclusion, such as migrant workers, LGBTI people, youth and of course women.

All of the above, which reflect key dimensions of government responses to the financial crisis, are in keeping with the broad historical trend that started over three decades ago: a neoliberal
reorientation of economic policies. As the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) notes, in order to comprehend the causes of growing inequality:

“In many countries trade liberalization was accompanied by deregulation of the domestic financial system and capital-account liberalization, giving rise to a rapid expansion of international capital flows...the previous more interventionist approach of public policy, which strongly focused on reducing high unemployment and income inequality, was abandoned” (UNCTAD 2012, p. IX).

Clearly for a post-2015 agenda that seeks to address inequalities, a critical perspective on and alternative approaches to neoliberal policies are key.

b. Challenges in development cooperation practice to date and the limited impact of cooperation for gender equality, women’s organizations and women’s rights agendas

The international “aid” system has long been in crisis, leading in 2003 to the emergence of the “aid effectiveness” agenda and its first High Level Forum (HLF-1) in Rome. It was there that donors and “partner” countries agreed that progress made in programmes and projects on the ground should be a concrete and important measure of their success, for which harmonization efforts at the international and regional levels were needed (OECD, 2003, p. 11). The Paris Declaration of the HLF-2 in 2005 and the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) coming out of the 2008 HLF-3 in Ghana were, until recently, the guiding agreements in place for the donor community concerning the impact and effectiveness of aid and the relationship between donors and recipients. Women’s rights organizations had identified the aid effectiveness agenda as highly political, donor-dominated, lacking legitimacy, gender-blind and with a weak monitoring and accountability system, in addition to critiques of it as a highly technical process with insufficient attention to the impact aid has on actual results for reducing poverty and eliminating gender inequalities (Schoenstein & Alemany, 2011).

**Findings from the voluntary Gender Equality Module of the 2011 Paris Declaration monitoring survey** show that countries have made more progress in the indicator on “ownership of gender equality” than the indicators on “gender equality results” and “mutual accountability for gender
equality.” The module found that gender equality and women’s empowerment are, overall, relatively well grounded in countries’ national development strategies and gender mainstreaming was the most common approach in national strategies. However, resources allocated by countries or donors for gender equality were found to be insufficient, hampering implementation. Moreover, the module showed that gender-disaggregated data are rarely available, collected, or analysed systematically. In the cases where data was disaggregated and used as a basis for decision making, there was an indication that this led to an increased focus on gender equality and women’s empowerment as well as budget allocations from donors and the country concerned (OECD-DAC, 2011, p. 6).

**Gender mainstreaming** became the main tool in the 1990s aimed at integrating gender equality throughout all phases and layers of development cooperation policies, international organizations, and national policy processes. Gender mainstreaming was intended to overcome the marginalization of women-specific projects implemented in the 1970s and 1980s and to bring a gender equality perspective to all development activities (AWID & GEAR, 2010).

While mainstreaming offers some opportunities, in practice, many significant challenges have emerged. Mehra and Gupta (2006, p. 6) caution that gender mainstreaming:

> “has not been pursued fully or systematically enough to support definitive conclusions about its success or failure. In most cases, the process is incomplete or not properly implemented and, in some cases, it has been abandoned midstream. Most importantly, especially in the context of multilateral and bilateral development organizations, the process of gender mainstreaming has stopped short of operations – of the very dimension that impacts development on the ground and can show results in terms of development effectiveness.”

In addition, the impact of public and development policies on women and on gender equality is often not accurately measured or monitored. Institutional capacity on women’s rights and gender equality remains a challenge, with in-depth knowledge depending on specialized staff rather than seen as a key competency for all. Mainstreaming is sometimes seen as a “check box” exercise and inclusiveness requirements are very lightly addressed. At the same time, the availability of resources to advance gender equality and women’s rights has also been
negatively impacted by gender mainstreaming. This can be seen in reductions of funding for NGOs, especially women’s organizations, when funding agencies, particularly bilateral agencies, applied mainstreaming strategies, reasoning that resources would instead be integrated across programming areas (Schoenstein & Alemany, 2011, pp. 10-11).

Concerning accountability it can be seen as a positive development that the indicators approved in the post-Busan process include one indicator that measures the percentage of countries with systems that track and publish public allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment. The Busan Partnership document also states that all parties involved in development cooperation must collect gender-sensitive and sex disaggregated data and use that data to guide implementation. While this is a window of opportunity to advance gender equality in development cooperation, there is no explicit mention of women’s rights, nor do the Busan HLF-4 outcomes integrate an overall human rights-based approach to development and development cooperation, in addition to other shortcomings. Moreover, there is a serious gap in comprehensively holding donors to account and tracking their performance and financing for gender equality, women’s organizing, and women’s collective empowerment.

What further hampers the realization of gender equality and women’s rights in the context of development and development cooperation are falling levels of ODA (OECD, 2012) despite pledges for aid to constitute 0.7% of GDP. Some donor countries are reducing their aid budgets due to the crisis, which further exacerbates and extends the impact of the crisis, affecting the budgets of countries receiving ODA and subsequently further reducing public spending. For countries that rely heavily on remittances or exports, the short-term shock and the heavy financial burden of higher interest rates and devaluing currencies could lead to less spending on social assistance programs, pension schemes, schools, and credit transfers (ITUC, 2009).

Oftentimes, women’s rights and feminist agendas are addressed narrowly or not at all by development policies and development cooperation practice. For example, one of the “critical omissions” in the MDGs has been “the failure to address gender-based violence, abortion
rights, sexual health and rights, including gender identity and sexual orientation, or the needs and rights of young people, and instead defining reproductive health solely under the purview of maternal health” (DAWN, 2012, p. 2). Further, beyond the MDG3 focus on maternal health, legislation and programs relating to other dimensions of sexual and reproductive health and rights have been largely overlooked by major development cooperation actors, despite existing human rights commitments to that broader agenda.

In sum, experience to date with gender equality and women’s rights in the development cooperation agenda suggests that a post-2015 framework should consider: clear articulation of accountability mechanisms, including specific requirements for gathering gender disaggregated data and linking accountability to results; getting real about the operational challenges in gender mainstreaming and providing direct support for gender equality initiatives; and taking a holistic view of gender equality and women’s rights, recognizing commitments articulated in existing human rights instruments.

III. Considerations for a Post-2015 Agenda that transforms the mainstream development model and addresses root causes of inequalities from a gender perspective

Specific development goals are already being proposed as part of the new framework and there is active debate around a dedicated gender equality goal. AWID is concerned that this rush to define goals takes attention and energy away from more fundamental questions and discussions crucial for building an effective development framework for post-2015 and obscuring the fact that other widely internationally agreed goals, Human Rights, are still far from being implemented. Given the widely recognized shortcomings of the MDGs (AWID, 2008), AWID is convinced that a new development framework must draw from lessons learned and critically question the long-standing assumptions driving dominant development models. This is not simply a matter of revisiting policy proposals. “[The] market-based growth paradigm determines not only our economic conditions and relations with nature, but has also created a value system that is deeply engrained in our social consciousness” (Wichterich, 2012, p. 37). As
with gender norms and discrimination, a fundamental reorientation is necessary. For that reason, the post-2015 agenda must pose the question: **What type of development or economic organization best supports gender equality and human rights?**

Building on the insights offered from the examples in the previous section, we conclude by offering some considerations or recommendations that speak to a fundamentally different way of understanding development, with gender equality and human rights at its core. The points below are primarily taken from past AWID research collaborations as well as insights shared during our 2012 International Forum, *Transforming Economic Power to Advance Women’s Rights and Justice*.

**On understandings of and approaches to development:**

- Any development agenda must be grounded in human rights. Development goals have been amply articulated in diverse human rights instruments; what has been missing is real progress toward their realization. A human rights approach requires that human rights (such as the right to food, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, and the right to live free from violence, etc) be at the center of development processes, with rights serving as an ethical lens through which economic and other policy is judged.

- Development must be sustainable, applying an ‘ecosystem lens’ to the challenges the world faces. We cannot afford a development agenda that does not closely link the well-being of people with well-being of the planet. For this we can draw from some of the values that underpin non-market based economies such as reciprocity, collectivity, solidarity, and harmony with nature.

- Development policies and practices must confront the injustices of a neoliberal model and patriarchal societies. This requires transforming the development model to enable social and gender justice, inclusive and participatory democracies, and a more sustainable and equitable global system. Any framework that is focused on inequalities should not only aim to ameliorate inequalities as they manifest, but examine and
address root causes of and intersections across gender, economic, social, and other inequalities.

• Social provisioning must be recognized as critical to development, with visibility for the diversity of unpaid work on which the commodified economy relies.

• Diverse groups are exploring systemic alternatives from which we can learn and adapt in revising understandings of development well beyond economic growth. For example:
  
  o El Buen Vivir, grounded in an Andean indigenous cosmovision (or worldview) focuses on the collective (rather than individual) achievement of a balanced life, in harmony with other human beings, living entities, and nature. Complementarity, reciprocity, and cooperation are organizing principles.
  
  o Food sovereignty can be understood as a critique of corporate driven agribusiness (a component of the mainstream development model), its impact on the right of people to define their own food and agriculture systems and to enjoy healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods (Declaration of Nyéléni).
  
  o The Degrowth Movement offers a radical reframing of growth (or development) toward sustainable alternatives (for example organic agriculture, renewable energy, or sustainable transport). A “degrowth” or reduction in unsustainable portions of the economy (for example, the use of fossil fuels, nuclear power, air transport, cars etc.) is sought (Wichterich, 2011, IDEA Debate Article).

On mechanisms to facilitate and monitor real implementation of development commitments:

• Go beyond existing indicators (like GDP) so that diverse communities can claim their own indicators of well being and sustainability that are responsive to their realities and rooted in the socioeconomic condition of each nation (and still in line with universal human rights commitments). This would require broad and deep discussions across cross sections of people to unearth the principles and priorities that would guide these indicators.
• Apply a “multiple accountability” approach, which recognizes and includes diverse development actors such as CSOs (including feminist and women's rights organizations), parliamentarians, local governments, the private sector, and others, working at all levels (from national to regional and global) and builds on existing accountability mechanisms within the UN human rights system that allow for CSO participation, such as the Universal Periodic Review process. Such an approach becomes ever more important with the surge of new actors, particularly private and corporate sector institutions, that are engaged in development.

• While donor governments must meet their obligations that ODA constitute 0.7% of GDP, new mechanisms for financing for development need to be put in place, replacing the problematic aid system with one of international solidarity, cooperation among countries and appropriate governance.

**On aligning economic policy and practice with development aims:**

• Promote policy coherence, specifically, coherence between development cooperation policies on the one hand, and policies on trade, debt, foreign direct investment, and taxation on the other hand. All must be in line with and support international agreements on human and labor rights.

• Reform international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF and World Bank so that their guiding framework is not an imposition of neoliberal economic policies aimed at maximizing economic growth, but advancing human rights and international solidarity as part of a more equitable and appropriate global governance system. This would include elimination of loan policy conditionalities so that countries could choose to use counter-cyclical policies to protect living standards, trade, and employment (Molina-Gallart, 2009; see also Waeyenberge et al 2011 & Muchhal et al 2009).

• Commit to global stimulus packages that create full, decent productive employment, and protect social floors, food security, and human development (WWG on FfD, 2009). To this end, governments and IFIs should prioritize social spending to fulfill human rights obligations, not debt servicing obligations.
• Address global financial instability and engage in a committed negotiation to establish a new international monetary system that prevents speculation against currencies, puts an end to a single country’s currency being the reference of the system, rules out the need of holding considerable foreign reserves and provides for a certain level of currency-exchange predictability.

On further considerations for addressing gender equality and women’s rights concerns:
• Advancing gender equality requires strengthening different dimensions of women’s autonomy: economic autonomy, political autonomy and full citizenship, freedom from all forms of violence, sexual autonomy, reproductive autonomy (Alpízar Durán, 2010). A comprehensive development framework must use an intersectional approach to address these multiple dimensions of gender equality and the way they play out across different development sectors.
• We must be prepared to move beyond inadequate gender mainstreaming approaches to recapture the essence of what it would mean to integrate gender equality and women’s rights at the core of every development priority, area and sector. The post-2015 agenda should be an opportunity to engage diverse actors in such a debate.
• Women’s organizations and movements, in all their diversities, are engaged in some of the most important innovations and meaningful interventions to advance women’s rights and gender equality. They should be recognized as key partners in development processes at all levels.

AWID offers these considerations as an initial contribution to the important debates and discussions underway. We look forward to continued active dialogue and are committed to engaging our members and allies to expand relevant inputs for ensuring that the future international development agenda is aligned to human rights principles and integrates gender equality, building a strong foundation for long-term, sustainable, inclusive, and just development for all.
References


Alpízar Durán, L. (2010). Keynote speech during the 54th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) High-Level Roundtable, “The implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals.”


World Food Summit, 1996. See [http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm)
Notes

i High-income countries (such as Iceland, Greece and Spain) are facing the same policy space constraints which have historically been reserved for low and middle-income countries. The policy conditions attached to IMF loans in these countries have constricted their ability to shape their national policies.


Further, see the briefing co-produced by ActionAid, the Bretton Woods Project, Europad, and Third World Network. “IMF Financial Package for Low-income Countries: Much Ado about Nothing?” http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/art-565055


vii See for example publications from AWID and other women’s rights organisations on aid effectiveness: http://www.awid.org/AWID-s-Publications/Aid-Effectiveness

viii Findings based on survey data collected from close to 1000 women’s organizations, see: Kerr, Joanna (2007). Financial Sustainability for Women’s Movements Worldwide. Second FundHer Report. Association for Women’s Rights in Development.

ix For details on the indicators see: http://www.undp.org/content/dam/usp/\docs/Indicators_targets_and_process_for_global_monitoring_Pdf

x See also AWID Friday File (7 September 2012). “A New Development Cooperation Framework That Works For Whom?” From http://awid.org/News-Analysis/Friday-Files/A-New-Development-Cooperation-Framework-that-works-for-whom