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Re-envisioning Development, Exploring Alternative Constructions Across the Globe

Debates from the 2012 AWID Forum

IDeA Debate Articles #2, 2013

Editorial

Alejandra Scampini

Between 2009 and 2011, AWID worked with partners to analyze the multiple impacts of the systemic crisis on women. That work explored the ways in which the crisis that sparked in 2008 was yet another in a long line of signals of the failure of the neoliberal model to address poverty and inequality. We saw that responses to the crisis, rather than addressing that failure, were simply patching up the system using the same paradigm. What other paradigms or approaches to political economy could serve as alternative points of reference, alternatives that might value human rights over profit? AWID joined the voices of movements, networks and campaigns resisting the dominant system grounded in accumulation-depletion by initiating a process of collaboration with diverse feminist activists from around the world. In this work, AWID has supported the systematization and understanding of alternatives to the current geopolitical and economic system, particularly from the perspective of women and feminist movements. We launched the first contribution from this group at AWID's 12th International Forum in April 2012 (2012 AWID Forum).

AWID convened the 2012 AWID Forum under the theme of *Transforming Economic Power to Advance Women's Rights and Justice,* in a context heavily marked by the deepening of multiple converging crises. Several debates took place at the 2012 AWID Forum that reflected feminist and women´s rights analysis on the various crises: for example, the role of the financial markets in weakening the economies of developed countries; and testimonies from indigenous women of Guatemala on the phenomenon of land grabbing promoted by financial speculation or as a consequence of the agribusiness model.The ***extractivist development model*** was also central to the debates: the extraction of minerals and natural resources around the world is eroding and destroying nature and sustainable livelihoods of women and men.

Given this context, the 2012 AWID Forum offered a two-day in-depth debate session on "Re-envisioning Development, Exploring Alternative Constructions Across the Globe". Raquel Romero from Bolivia spoke about the process of the now plurinational State of Bolivia and the participation of peasant, indigenous, and women's movements that have advanced new proposals to challenge the current neoliberal system. Romero highlighted new economic, political, cultural, and social alternatives to the neoliberal model but also noted the current challenges and permanent contradictions given the internal and external economic pressure that results from Bolivia's insertion in the present global political economy. The new Bolivian constitution, the inclusion of collective and territorial rights, the rights of mother Earth, and the vocal participation of indigenous peoples have to confront the demands for natural resources that come from old and new emerging powerful economies. In spite of these contradictions, the audience and panelists appreciated the transformation processes in Bolivia and also in Ecuador that symbolize a break from the neoliberal, capitalist vision of development. As Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos expressed in the debate: "***we have new***

concepts, we have the concept of the living well paradigm; the right of nature, la Pachamama; the legalization of common land; we have new concepts to participate in these debates. He then referred to self-determination as a term that opens the possibility to think of new societies, institutions, structures, and knowledge.

This discussion exemplifies the spirit of the in-depth session: *to open a space to share new proposals and visions and also to challenge the collective thinking*. AWID set the space to hear new debates around what an alternative would mean, what are feminist perspectives, analysis, and contributions to these debates; what are the new concepts or frameworks; how can we include debates around happiness and well being while we try to transform economic power and move towards a better world?

The authors of the two issues of the IDeA Debate Articles met for the first time to launch its common work and generate debates around what development for whom; what processes and experiences have been generated in a vast array of contexts, ranging from the formal state to the contributions from indigenous cultures.

During the in-depth session, we started the debates with Diane Elson and Gina Vargas putting the concept of development at the center, while affirming that today this concept is still very much tied to a western, capitalist, colonial way of thinking about well being and livelihoods. The concept of development is also very much related to an instrumental, quantitative approach that permeates related policies and practices around the world.

Yet, we see this is changing; and there are many important criticisms to this concept of development and new debates emerging that move us ***beyond the linear, modern model of development***, as Vargas said. The inclusion of feminist analyses on this issue was central as a contribution to the debates.

A second part of the in-depth session referred to more local forms of resistance that also refer to the construction of alternative practices in different contexts: agroecology in Brazil; food sovereignty proposals in Latin America; solidarity economy; transitional strategies as part of the de-growth movement in Europe; empowerment of women heads of household in Indonesia; resistance against land-grabbing in Kenya; and women's access to the commons including natural resources in India. The experiences included in this publication are a good basis to explore more in depth the lessons, the commonalities, and the opportunities for collective and collaborative action that we have ahead of us.

Debates on strategies and alternative visions to the current model should further examine progressive proposals and the extent to which they challenge extractivism as a driving force behind newly emerging economies and the massive presence of transnational companies and corporate influence in our societies and democracies. We should ask ourselves, what state is necessary to overcome the current neoliberal model? What institutions? How do we move away from colonial approaches to development? What are the desirable and possible transformations? What is the role and contributions of feminist movements towards these transformations?

The questions are many and we do not claim to answer them here. AWID's hope is to advance and contribute to collective, cross-movement debates that show us paths and strategies of transition toward the construction of multiple alternatives, new societies, and new ways of organizing ourselves economically, culturally, and politically. The well being paradigm process depicted by Romero and the experience of the decolonization and depatriarchalization projects give us a horizon to think about experiences of well being from other contexts, identities, and situations.

This second issue of the IDeA Debate Articles includes highlights and summaries of some of the presentations during the session on "Re-envisioning Development, Exploring Alternative Constructions Across the Globe", and should be read as complementary to the first issue released in March 2012. These articles critically examined the mainstream development model and looked for transformation strategies that go parallel to or beyond growth and profit driven development. The use of the term alternatives was one of the first challenges faced, so rather than get trapped in an attempt to define the term, we sought focus on the spirit of the group and the debate—to mark varied political transformatory positions to challenge the current model.

We hope these articles contribute to an examination of new paths that challenge the mainstream model, built from the work, analysis, and visions of feminist and women's rights movements and activists, who have historically and repeatedly called for a non racist, non patriarchal, democratic, and just world.

Diverse Development Models and Strategies Revisited[1]

By Natalie Raaber and Alejandra Scampini

Abstract: Natalie Raaber and Alejandra Scampini explore the different forms of resistance to neoliberal or capitalist globalization and ways in which people, movements, and communities are building sustainable societies. Their article is based on discussions at the in-depth session entitled "Re-envisioning development, exploring alternative constructions across the globe" held at the 2012 AWID International Forum. The in-depth session was part of AWID's program of research on the gendered impacts of the 2008 financial/economic crisis and alternative feminist responses to the crisis, including the envisioning of systemic alternatives. Raaber and Scampini aim to provide a snapshot of the range of views expressed at this session, highlighting, in particular, concrete examples of alternatives to (and within) the mainstream development model. In this way, the article aims to critically question the utility of the mainstream development model, underscoring, as feminists have repeatedly noted, its inability to fulfill the most basic rights of the world's people and the environment.

The vision of Buen Vivir (living well) paradigm proposes the extension of freedoms, rights, opportunities and capacities of human beings, communities, peoples and societies. It guarantees the recognition of diversities and the search for a common and shared future. This implies a conceptual break and new ethics and principles will mark the way towards the construction of a just, free and democratic society. (Raquel Romero, 2012 AWID Forum).

Exploring debates around development alternatives[2]

The in-depth session on "Re-envisioning Development, Exploring Alternative Constructions Across the Globe" held at the 2012 AWID Forum aimed to contribute, in an open, "de-colonized" manner, to the dialogue on challenging the mainstream development model from a feminist perspective.

Feminist activists and academics working to challenge neo-liberal globalization and/or the mainstream development model (albeit from different frameworks and perspectives, in different ways and in different spaces) have generated a myriad of critical thinking and perspectives on development along with strategies for advancing the implementation of alternatives.

Unpacking the concept of development: What development are we talking about?

The concept of development is in crisis, not simply because of its colonialist roots, but for its poor results and inability to address people's needs and human rights. (GinaVargas).

Different visions of development

As many women's rights activists, feminist groups and others have highlighted, the financial and economic crisis of 2008 is an instance (one of many) of the failure of the mainstream development model; it is representative of a systemic failure. Unpacking, analyzing, and grappling with the very concept of development are critical activities when thinking about social transformation and alternative visions of development/economy.

Development as a concept and process is constructed, contested, and dynamic. Development has been understood in different ways in different moments and its impacts have often been challenged. Depending on the particular moment in history, development has been understood as national development; state-led development, which focuses on controls on the private sector, international trade and investment; neocolonial or neoliberal development; or nation building, a

development focused on constructing a country in decolonization processes. There are also other terms such as community development, local development, human/people-centered development and sustainable development.

Despite the varied ways in which development has been conceived, the goal has often, nonetheless, been on economic growth, emptying potentially transformative concepts or frameworks of their intent. When debating development, it is important to question how women's human rights (collective and individual) fit into different development strategies and approaches.

Development can also be refuted fully. According to Gina Vargas, a speaker at the in-depth session, the very concept of development has been "born out of capitalism and patriarchy, leading to fundamentalisms and authoritarianisms of all types"[3]. She and others at the session point to western ideas of "progress" that have permeated constructions and visions of society, creating a hegemonic vision of economy and society, and, as a result, invisibilizing the wisdom and strategies of many communities, peoples and nations.

It is important, too, to not to romanticize other visions of organizing life. It is critical to question women's positioning in any vision, model or strategy of development.

We see here that while development can be understood in a variety of ways, the way in which it is understood in a given moment (and subsequently implemented) speaks to a particular vision of where those in power believe a society, a country and a people should head.

Regardless of the various ways in which development has been envisioned and implemented, women and women's human rights are perpetually subject to marginalization, sidelining or instrumentalization. As such, questions such as "in which type of development do we wish to see women's equality and women's human rights realized? Equally, what type of development or economic organization would best support women's human rights?" remain critical.

In this context, feminists and others have (and continue to) construct alternatives, both within the mainstream system (typically at the margins) and outside the system, grounded in the dynamics and politics of day-to-day life, in the right to land and territory, in the right to the commons and to a vision of life and society that is based in equality and justice.

The failure of mainstream development/ neo-liberal globalization

Development turned in the 1970s towards the market, the private sector and liberalization leading to a restructuring of governance, trade and investment in favor of international business.

An obsessive focus on efficiency was part of the recipe, resulting in a transfer of costs from the public sector to households and communities and specifically onto women and girls in the form of unpaid care work. It also led to deterioration in rights, including poorer working conditions for service workers (as subcontracting services to private sector companies flourished). As Diane Elson pointed out at the in-depth session, development and subsequently citizenship has become about private wealth accumulation and individual consumption, particularly in emerging economies, with serious implications for those who do not fit this mould and for the environment. Box 1 below highlights some of the key threats, as delineated by Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos[4], of the mainstream development model to humanity.

While the rhetoric of gender equality began to enter the development agenda, this did not lead to equality within a system that was just but rather strategies on how to incorporate women into a model that was concerned with profit and growth. The manner in which production, exchange and consumption are organized within this mainstream system does not pay attention to the recovery cycles of the environment, or to social reproduction (as evidenced by the underlying assumptions of infinite elasticity of social reproduction). This is acutely so in the extractivist model of development implemented in many countries in the South, as a way to raise revenue and create/maintain an economic elite. In this model, natural resources are extracted and exported for profit and, in the process, territories and ways of life are destroyed. The concept of "green economy" is the latest example of this logic. Ostensibly concerned with sustainability, the green economy is grounded in the logic of the market and profit. Natural resources, including air, land and water, are seen as yet another frontier for monetization, given a market value and exchanged or exploited.

Thirty years or more have passed since neoliberalism erupted and we are witnessing revitalized debates on development. As we unpack the impact of the systemic crisis on women and women's rights, discussions on alternatives continue to be critical.

Box 1. Seven threats shared by the global community

In the in-depth session, Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos highlighted the main threats posed by the mainstream model to the global community:

- Disorganization of the state
- De-consolidation/destabilization of democracy
- A lack of a global labor market: people cannot organize as workers across borders, enabling capital to continue to reign supreme
- Marketization and commodification of knowledge: the value of knowledge is increasingly the market value of knowledge
- Criminalization of dissent and protest: for example, women in Chile named terrorists because of their opposition to mining companies in their communities/on their land
- A new colonization: the colonized as a dangerous person, potentially disruptive, s/he without rights, only obligations
- The destruction of nature

A growing need for alternatives

There are a range of ways to think about economy and how it is organized. Here, questions such as 'what is it that we are producing and for whom to consume where? For what purpose is energy being produced and who will use/benefit from it?' become central. If we think about production and consumption (and waste) vis-à-vis their contribution to the public good, the commons, the collective and human rights rather than to the market, growth and profit we might begin to find entry points to advance alternatives.

Some of the alternative visions presented in the in-depth session spoke to specific changes or transformations (in energy consumption, care giving or social protection, e.g.) within the system while other proposals spoke in broader strokes about transformation to the mainstream development model as a whole. The aim, though, was to share and promote critical analysis on a range of alternative visions and practices that progressive social movements and feminist groups are putting forward around the world. As we think about alternatives, we must keep in mind though that given the difference in levels of fulfillment of basic rights across regions, struggles for changes in the development model are shaped in some cases by the need to achieve rights that are already at a higher level of fulfillment in other contexts.

Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos and others at the in-depth session spoke about the concept of auto-determination or self-determination: a right to self-determination as a call/claim and a space to which one can transition (as opposed to development).

Self-determination, instead of development (which, many argue, is inextricably linked to neo-liberalism/capitalism and tainted by hegemonic notions of that which is modern and progressive), is grounded in democratic participation, collaboration and reflection, and offers a space for debate and decolonization. It speaks and uncovers 'epistemologies of the South', the knowledge of those marginalized, unseen, delegitimized and made invisible.

We also heard strong critiques of microcredit used instrumentally and in the service of profit —a microcredit that operates within and supports the system— and the ways in which it has undermined women's human rights. Calls of other ways of organizing for economic empowerment and women's human rights, grounded in the context of Indonesia, were made. The Commons as both a demand and a form of resistance to privatization (particularly in the context of the push for a greener capitalism) was discussed as an alternative, raising important questions on land and land rights for women. We also heard about el Buen Vivir as a vision being put forward in Ecuador and Bolivia as well as about the concept of food sovereignty, a concept developed by Via Campesina and grounded in the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable practices.

The contribution of women and feminist movements

As we have seen, development can be seen as a historical process, a discourse or a point to be reached, but also as a way to homogenize the world, something that must be overthrown.

There are a range of views on development and, indeed, alternatives to development. As a result, the development or non-development to be constructed must necessarily speak to local needs and the specifics of a place and time. As we advance in this political project, we see that the ways in which we live and that which we value should define the development we seek, not vice versa.

Feminists are continuing to resist, create, reinvent and uncover in face of the criticism leveled at times that we lack a coherent whole. There is the search to define the transformation to *what, which* alternative. Both the transformation and the constitution of 'something else' are processes, long, contradictory processes that should not result in one alternative model that then, itself, becomes hegemonic. Rather, as we move forward, we might think about creating a system that allows and embraces, as Yvonne Underhill-Sem noted, diverse economies and visions, different ways of relating and interacting socially, culturally, politically and with nature.

We see, too, that the debates on the crisis and alternatives continue to occur in different silos, difficult to unite. At times they can be vague or general, or romanticize local traditions or the proposals of social movements (as if, in those spaces, power relations were equal). As a result, the contradictions that emerge when attempting to implement "alternatives" are, at times, "pushed under the rug". For example, we see this with "el Buen Vivir". Although it is the basis of the Bolivian constitution and laws/policies are to be shaped along its lines, we see resource extraction for export continues, destroying territories and indigenous lands. We also see contradictions with the commons, as the commons, although a critique of privatization, is a space that is gendered and imbued with patriarchy, as is the local family farm, which some advocate as an alternative to corporate-led agribusiness.

Therefore, when looking forward we must be vigilant and demand the re-politicization of development—to ask of any vision of society and economy the following: Are feminist visions incorporated? If so, in which way? What is the vision of women's rights/empowerment being put forward in a given construction? Indeed, we must also ask: How do we link up in effective ways, across borders, across strategies to advance a vision of equality, given, too, our very siloed work? We must also reflect on our own organization and solidarity. Women's movements today are being challenged to organize and build collective power in the face of severe threats posed by the systemic crisis. What roles do women and women's/feminist movements play as political actors? What can we do together—as feminists coming from perhaps radically different political positions- and with other progressive social movements and groups to advance alternatives grounded in equality, rights and justice?

Envisioning the future

We are in a moment, too, of UN review conferences that examine the development model as a whole and conversations about a post- 2015 development framework. Discussions on any development agenda must be firmly grounded in the range of international human rights obligations/agreements that have yet to be implemented and the sustainable alternatives people are building now—not in another set of politically and materially regressive targets.

We also write and reflect in a moment of courageous social mobilizations, uprisings and demands around the world for democracy, a radical democracy and a just system.

Women have extensive experience in survival and resistance strategies to failed development and recurring crises/constant states of insecurity. This article has tried to highlight these resistances—as well as alternative visionings.

As we look forward and continue to struggle for change, justice and alternative economic policies/structures that serve communities/people and respect the full range of human rights, we hope that this article—and the work process in which it is embedded— will contribute to the rich dialogue, debate and action taking place in so many corners of the world. The AWID Forum attempted to provide a space for women and feminists around the globe to contribute to these dialogues and analysis, to exchange and build, as Christa Wichterich noted, 'intercultural competencies' —and to push for and strategize for alternative models of growth and development that ensure the human rights of all people and the environment. The conversation, process and fight, as always, continues.

Endnotes

1. This article appeared in *Development* 55.3, the flagship journal of the Society for International Development special issue on "Gender and Economic Justice".

2 This article also captures some of the discussions reflected in a recent piece produced by AWID's Strategic Initiative IDeA (Influencing Development Actors and Practices from a Feminist Perspective) entitled "Debate Article #1: Diverse Development Models and Strategies Revisited: A special contribution to the 12th AWID International Forum". This debate article is available online at AWID's website.

3 Unless otherwise noted, all names mentioned in the article refer to the speakers' contributions in the In-Depth Session on "Re-envisioning Development, Exploring Alternative Constructions around the Globe" at the AWID International Forum held in Istanbul, April 2012.

4. Read more about the works of Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos at: http://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt

Organizing for Women's Economic Empowerment: Access to resources and principles for change

Contribution by Just Associates (JASS)

Contributors: Lisa VeneKlasen and Alia Khan, JASS.

Abstract: At the 2012 AWID Forum, JASS organized the in-depth session *"*Access to and Control over Resources: Organizing for Women's EmPOWERment*"*. The following article presents some of the key ideas discussed in an attempt to broaden the understanding of access to and control of resources from an analysis of power and rights. An example of these power dynamics is illustrated in a case from Guatemala where indigenous women and their communities' struggle for recognition, rights, and resources are threatened by mining industries. Finally, JASS shares a few principles for change in the struggle for women's economic empowerment and to create alternatives that improve lives and promote reciprocity, justice, and wellbeing for people and the planet.

An overview[1]

"*Empowerment… is the process by which those who've been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire that ability.*" — Naila Kabeer

"*…empowerment refers to a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge …power relations …Empowerment…is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces that marginalize women…*"
—Srilatha Batliwala

Access to and control over resources is about power. Today, the ferocious scramble to control and exploit resources—from land and forests to technology and human DNA—is a scramble for power. Women's seemingly micro-struggles for access and control of resources are shaped by "macro" dynamics at the household, community, national and global levels. Organizing for women's economic empowerment means understanding how power operates in all of these realms and transforming it to achieve more just and democratic ends. This includes broadening our understanding of access and control of resources from an analysis of power and rights; and identifying and learning from women's strategies that tap into and build upon many kinds of resources to create alternatives that improve lives and promote reciprocity, justice and wellbeing for people and the planet.

What do we mean by resources?

"…not only material resources in the most conventional economic sense, but also the various human and social resources which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice." - Naila Kabeer

There's a tendency to think resources are about money or economic goods. We understand resources to mean a full range of tangible and intangible assets that are essential for translating access into choices and change. These resources include **concrete economic and political stuff:** money, funding, credit, jobs, land, property, tools, equipment, fertilizer, healthcare, water and other natural resources, technology, education, information, food, housing, police protection, legal services, healthcare, political representation; and it includes **intangible stuff like:** time, safety, wellbeing, political networks and social capital, credibility, self-confidence, creativity, organization, friends, fun, love, etc.

What do we mean by access and control?[2]

Access: the opportunity to make use of something/resources for a larger gain. Access will reflect the rules and norms that govern distribution and exchange in different institutional arenas.

Control: the ability to choose or define how and for what purpose it will be used, and even to impose that definition on others—in other words, another word for "control" might be **power**, and power can be positive or negative depending on its purpose.

Common myths about access: many efforts and policies to **improve women's access to resources** focus on making a resource available and improving so-called "equality of opportunity." Such approaches usually fail to rectify discrimination because people are not in the same position to be able to take advantage of the opportunity due to historical disadvantages and social norms.

What do we mean by power?

Behind questions of inequality, exploitation and oppression are the dynamics of power and privilege. We define power as the degree of control over material, human, intellectual, and financial resources exercised by different sections of society. Power is dynamic, exercised in the social, economic, and political relations between individuals and groups, and can be used for both positive and negative ends.

Most people associate power with "***power over***"—that is, the ability to control and make decisions for others, with or without their consent. Power over can take on oppressive and destructive forms, perpetuated by the threat or use of violence. But there are other positive forms of power too. ***Power within*** is one's own sense of self and agency; ***power with*** is collective power, the power of numbers built through common cause and solidarity.

Many advocacy strategies focus on shaping **visible** forms of *power over*—for example, laws, policies, and elections. However, *power over* operates in less tangible ways that, if left unaddressed, make any policy victory tenuous. **Hidden power** operates in the unspoken rules, behind-the-scenes negotiations, and agendas of influential actors and institutions. **Invisible power** includes cultural and/or religious beliefs, norms, values, many of which are internalized through the process of socialization.

What do we mean by feminist movement-building?

Movement building is a process of organizing and mobilizing a broad constituency around a particular social, economic or political change developed over time through joint analysis, education and building connections. It is important to distinguish between the ideas of ***building feminist movements*** and ***feminist movement building*** (adapted from Srilatha Batliwala).

***Building feminist* movements** is a process that mobilizes women, women's organizations (and their allies or supporters) for struggles whose goals are specific to gender equality outcomes—for instance, for eradicating practices like female genital mutilation, bride-burning and female foeticide, or violence against women, or for expanding equality of access to citizenship (e.g. franchise), land or inheritance rights, education, employment, health, or reproductive and sexual rights.

***Feminist movement building*,** on the other hand, could be defined as the attempt to bring feminist analysis and gender-equality perspectives into other agendas and movements—classic examples are the efforts of many feminists to engender the analyses, goals and strategies of the environment, peace, human rights, and peasant and labour movements around the world. Feminist movement-building can also involve building movements among women from different movements or agendas

Adapting the ideas of Naila Kabeer, Martha Nussbaum and others, resources are essential for realizing rights and equality. Women need power to translate **access** into real improvements in their lives and world. Challenging the institutional and social barriers that prevent women's access to resources is political and risky, and demands individual and collective empowerment and organizing strategies as the case studies demonstrate. Put simply:

RESOURCES
(pre-conditions)

AGENCY
(individual and collective power in action)

CHANGE, RIGHTS AND JUSTICE
(improvements in women's status, condition and possibilities, and more just and sustainable alternatives)

Guatemala: "The Rape of Mother Earth" - Marlin Gold Mine

The closer one gets to the Marlin mine, the greater the evidence of deforestation and the scars of mega project development which tears at the land.

The Marlin Mine is the largest gold mine in Guatemala, one of the poorest countries in Latin America, and accounts for ninety percent of the country's precious metals exports. It is one hundred percent owned by Montana Exploradora de Guatemala, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Canadian mining group Goldcorp Inc., who have head offices in Vancouver, British Columbia Canada.

At the Marlin Mine, cyanide is used to separate gold particles from rock in a process known as leaching. The process has been banned in several countries, but in Guatemala it continues. Opponents say this waste has polluted the local water and eco-systems and is making people sick.

The Pastoral Commission for Peace and the Environment (COPAE) along with its adherents in the trade union movement in Guatemala, and the democratic indigenous assemblies believe the mining and hydro-electric mega projects herald the third great wave of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation.

First came the Conquest, then came the great post-colonial land grab by the new neo-liberal oligarchy, who created coffee estates by clearances that forced native people to the mountains. Now comes unfettered globalisation and the rush for gold.

Indigenous organisations have faced the full plethora of murder, assassination, harassment, threats, disinformation, hostility, bribery, and corruption from the oligarch-controlled state and its cohorts.

Instead of mega projects, indigenous activists are calling for an integrated national development program that revitalizes and rescues the rural agricultural economy.

And in terms of mining, they want greater controls over the shipment and handling of toxic substances; more detailed environmental impact studies; an independent monitoring system; a disasters and emergencies fund; transparent auditing of materials being mined; free access to information; and rigorous control over the discharge of residual waters used in the industrial mining process.

"Like anyone else, of course we want to live well," says K'iche community leader Aura Lolita Chavez Ixcaquic. "But we can still live well in Guatemala without gold, without mines. Of course we need food, water, land, clothing. You can have one vehicle; but you don't need ten.

"This is more than an environmental crisis; this is a crisis of civilization," she warns. "We believe we can make a vital contribution to this debate: how to live in harmony. This is not a battle. There are no winners and losers. This is about life.

"Ours is a democratic and non-violent movement. We need the international community to know what is going on. We are not alone in this; 375,000 people have said 'No' to the Marlin Mine. We have no confidence in these mining companies, based on their activities around the world.

"They have already cut a deal with the government. This is illegal, unjust, illegitimate. It is savage capitalism, economic gangsterism. They are cheating us once again, this time in the name of progress and development.

"Our concept of living well is living in harmony with nature: air, water, energy, earth. In our culture we do not talk about so-called progress and development.

"This is a new confrontation between the Mayan People and the state. We have a different way of looking at the cosmos and life and they are breaking the relationship between human beings and nature. Where is the reciprocation?

"We are not the owners of the earth. We have to live in harmony. They are raping our territory. They are violating Mother Earth, there is no consensus.

"They – the state, the army, trans-nationals, the big families – are not consulting us. They are taking the land, as if they were the private owners."

Adapted from the article by David Browne, ITUC newsletter #23, August 2011, pgs.2-5.

Seven Principles for Change in the Struggle towards Women's Economic Empowerment[3]

1. **Needs and rights:** Organizing for political rights should not be separated from practical needs. In the context of poverty, if we want women to be involved politically, we have to support them to organize for access to economic resources -cash and property- and for the freedom that these provide.

2. **Start with women's solutions**: As always, when states relinquish their responsibility to provide for the basic welfare of their citizens, women step in to fill the gaps. From savings cooperatives to home-based care networks to mother's demanding justice for family members, women are on the frontlines of all social justice struggles. Their leadership, strategies, and their demands for sustainable alternatives are different and important. While society depends on this work, it is largely invisible and unrecognized.

3. **Bring power and politics to the forefront of our analysis and strategies:** Efforts to translate economic and political concepts (including rights) often do little more than simplify arcane terminology without linking it to real life economic problems and political realities. In many cases, these programmes have lacked a full appreciation of power or its implications for strategy.

4. **Engaging hearts and minds:** For lasting change, poverty reduction and empowerment strategies need to help people critically understand and question conventional economic wisdom and identify the institutions and interests who benefit from it. This is best approached as a process that enables people to understand their own circumstances within the context of prevailing norms and economic arrangements.

5. **Building bridges between movements, NGOs, and constituencies:** Social movements, as well as NGOs, must take the time to unpack assumptions and ensure clear communication as we may use a common language of change (from feminism to racial justice) but have diverse interpretations. We need honest conversation to address conflict and negotiate political differences as well as fresh thinking and diversified funding sources to address competition for resources. And we must honestly address the prickly questions of representation and legitimacy—on whose behalf are we speaking, and how are we ensuring that those voices are up front, visible, and influential?

6. **Revisiting and refining our understanding of key economic problems and their solutions:** While groups are concerned with dividing up the pieces of the economic pie, it is also important for them to be able to question the assumptions that define the size of the pie and the rules governing the people with access to the pie (e.g., investment policies, labour standards, public goods etc.).We need to examine the ideologies that underpin dominant economic agendas and their impact on our strategic choices and messages; begin to define the ideas and principles that shape a gender equality and justice worldview that might frame our messages and alternatives going forward.

7. **Revisit traditional advocacy targets and entry points:** With limited resources and capacity, the question has to be raised: When is a political space worthwhile? Invited policy spaces (from the MDGs to the World Bank) with their pre-cooked and controlled agendas, need to be assessed and compared against the alternative of claiming policy spaces that advance women's rights and economic justice interests in both the public and private sectors[4].

Further reading:

JASS website page on Economic Resources

Resources, Agency, Achievements—Reflections on Measurement of Women's Empowerment (Naila Kabeer 1999). Reflects JASS' broad definition of "resources" and the multiple dimensions that influence women's "access to" and "control over" resources

Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment: Definition, Framework and Indicators (ICRW 2011)

Endnotes:

1. Adapted from the overview document of the session "Access to and Control over Resources: Organizing for Women's EmPOWERment" at the 2012 AWID Forum.

2. Adapted from Making Change Happen 3: Revisioning Power for Justice, Just Associates, 2006

3. Adapted from Veneklasen, Lisa and Alia Khan (2012) "Women's Movements and Economic Power: Connecting the local and the global" published in "Development", 2012, 55(3), Society for International Development.

4. Cornwall, Andrea and John Gaventa (2001), Power, Knowledge and Political Spaces in the Framing of Poverty Policy, IDS WP 143; and Gaventa, John (2006), 'Finding the Spaces for Change: A power analysis', in Exploring Power for Change, IDS Bulletin 37.6, Brighton, IDS.

Access to Common Resources:
Narratives from women's organizations and movements in India

Based on the presentation by Soma Kishore Parthasarathy (available online)

Summary by Natalie Raaber, AWID

Abstract: Soma K. Parthasarathy, feminist researcher, activist, and speaker at the 2012 AWID Forum in-depth session "Re-envisioning development, exploring alternative constructions across the globe", examined the relationship between marginalized populations, including particularly women, and the commons/access to natural resources. She focused specifically on the gendered nature of the commons itself as well as the impacts of legislation on the commons in India. The following is a summary of her presentation, available to read in PDF in full at awid.org.

While a range of legislation relating to the commons exists, Parthasarathy focuses on two arenas of legislative provisions: the Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2010 (an amendment to the Land Acquisition Act of 1894) and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act 2006, which deals specifically with forests and forest dwellers.

She argues that poor, historically, and multiply marginalized peoples (due to class, caste, ethnicity, and gender) bear a disproportionate burden of the adverse impact of land policies and their implementation (or lack thereof). Delineated as the state's domain since colonial times and prior, open and community lands and forests have often been designated as eminent domain, allowing the state to determine the limits and norms of access, use and disposal of such lands and their resources, often at the cost of the predominantly marginalized communities that are dependent on them.

Impacts

Land policies have in many cases been shaped by a dominant development paradigm focused on market driven policies, liberalization, and growth—with enclosure, eviction, and extraction a means to the latter's end. Thus, those for whom the commons and its resources provide livelihoods and dignity and, indeed, are a matter of cultural significance and a way to envision differently the economy/society, are further marginalized, compelled to eke out a living through whatever means the economic model offers.

While land related legislations have serious repercussions on the lives of women, their status and their roles in development, a feminist/gendered perspective continues to elude policy-makers and planners—and gender has hitherto remained an almost invisible subject in the land discourse until recently. In addition to the gendered impacts of state legislation, women, indigenous groups and others are *also* affected by exclusion perpetuated within their own communities: women's groups and indigenous communities seeking access to resources and claiming rights to [the commons] are constantly confronted by the boundaries of inclusion at village or community level. This is most acutely felt by women from marginal communities within subsistence societies.

The Forest Rights Act (FRA), however, presents a positive development. The FRA recognizes the rights of women, albeit in the limited scope of rights as joint titleholders with the spouse and in the context of other male household members. Parthasarathy explores this further in her full presentation paper available online in PDF.

Resistance

The broader struggles for land rights by forest dwellers and by those dispossessed and displaced by the project of development, while ostensibly representative of people's interests, have seldom articulated a gender, feminist, women's human rights perspective. Often, too, what is initiated by women as a protest or demand at local level is, once the movement gains visibility and momentum, subjected to patriarchal privilege by which men (local or otherwise) retain dominance of leadership positions. Yet, at local levels, women continue to organize and agitate for rights, dignity, and livelihood; challenging both the state/dominant development model and the patriarchal character of movements.

While scattered and on a localized scale, these intense efforts of women to mobilize, voice their concerns, and negotiate issues have created awareness and rendered women visible in struggles to protect the environment, the forests, and lands—and have drawn them to the forefront of movements that protest, for example industrialization, big dams, and mining. In addition to movements, women have also sought to impact and intervene in the planning space by negotiating with state and local institutions of governance to ensure that a range of priorities are addressed—including food and livelihoods needs—while at the same time, clarifying the inter-linkage of the commons and their lives. Still, more needs to be done. Parthasarathy points out, despite several initiatives and struggles of grassroots women's organizations, the women's movements have yet to prioritize a serious engagement with the issues of women's rights in the realm of development and natural resources as a key agenda in their strategies; women's movements need to evolve a position and analysis to challenge the patriarchal moorings of land and natural resource policies, processes and relations in the region. Despite the efforts of networks (such as DAWN), feminist researchers, activists, organizations (such as CWDS and those involved in the WSF process), and networks to raise issues of women's land rights, the systematic engagement with development issues that relate to natural resource policies for poor rural women's lives is yet to evolve. A recent step in this direction has been the engagement of a a feminist economist group with the planning commission in engendering the planning processes.

Through their numerous struggles, women have offered the pathways that can lead to sustainable development, wellbeing, and to a life of dignity. Their resilience and struggles to claim commons and negotiate their rights to resources for livelihood needs and as equal citizens, even as the establishment colludes to privatize them, offers hope for a future vision of development and equality from a feminist lens.

Experiences of Women Head of Household Economic Empowerment in Indonesia

Based on the presentation by Nani Zulminarni

Edited by Ana Abelenda

Abstract: Amidst Indonesia's fast growing economy, every year a growing number of rural women are left to suddenly fend for themselves and their families as the sole breadwinners, facing poverty and discrimination. Presenting at the 2012 AWID Forum, Nani Zulminarni, Indonesia National Coordinator of PEKKA (Women Headed Household Empowerment Program) and Regional Coordinator for JASS South-East Asia gave examples of women's community organizing and empowerment to break the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

Women's poverty in rural Indonesia

Indonesia has a population of around 250 million and is one of the fastest growing countries in the world with all the positive growth indicators that the government is proud of. But huge inequalities persist between rich and poor and between rural and urban areas. The country has opened its economy to global markets, which has had tremendous impact on people's lives. One of these impacts is the massive migration of men from rural to urban areas in search of better job opportunities, leaving many women behind, often in situations of stark poverty.

The government's poverty reduction program has been insufficient and inadequate. It has included mainly two aspects: one is cash transfers that end up being used to gain votes ("money politics"); and the other is microcredit that not only has become industrialized by commercial banks, but it also ends up encouraging NGOs to play the role of banks.

Men are usually considered the head of the household, but there are around 9 million poor women heads of household who are invisible in the statistics and thus are excluded from development policies in Indonesia. There is a problem of empowerment too, because the women see themselves as weak without a husband, worthless and incompetent to deal with changing contexts. There are other factors that contribute to their poverty, for example, they very much depend on nature to feed themselves and their children. With growing environmental degradation, it is becoming difficult to secure food production.

Two examples vividly illustrate some of the changes impacting these women's lives. Many women heads of households in rural Indonesia work as traditional weavers. They used to buy natural products to dye fabrics using the monies they made from trading their products in local markets. The government began to introduce factory-made thread, saying that this would help weavers in their task by saving precious time (assembling products with thread instead of weaving). Women shifted their way of working, but when the times of crisis came, the price of manufactured threads increased and so they faced losing their job and source of income.

Another example has to do with changes in food consumption. In most parts of rural Indonesia, people were not really rice eaters. But in the 70's and 80's the government implemented a massive development program to introduce rice plantations in some areas and encourage rice consumption. Rice started to replace indigenous crops and this changed the pattern of consumption. The problem was that some areas were not fit to grow rice so people were forced to buy at higher costs from the market when they didn't really have cash.

Poor rural women became the target of development programs to alleviate poverty that responded with policies of cash transfers,

microcredit, and money lending. But women became trapped and dependent on others rather than independent and self-sufficient.

Breaking the cycle of poverty: women's organizing and empowerment

How did we challenge this situation? With PEKKA, we started organizing these women and building collective understanding of what made their lives difficult. This included not only exploring the visible power of institutions and development policy-makers but also the invisible power, the values, the social constructions that put these women in a very low position, completely dependent on their husbands in order to be recognized by society.

One of the first steps was changing the relationship with money and breaking the cycle of dependence on cash transfers or government money that usually comes near elections. The initial thinking of these women was that they are too poor to save money. However, through a collective thinking exercise, a few other ideas emerged.

For example, some were giving their children money to buy junk food as a quick fix while they were busy at work, so they proposed to cut that expenditure. Others where suggesting to cut their sugar consumption in their daily drinks and use substitute fruits such as coconut or bananas that are easily accessible for them.

They also began to think collectively about how to spend their savings. They decided that it depended on who needed funds the most at a particular moment. Women could borrow provided they were able to return the same amount within a certain time.

There are also lending possibilities for women who want to increase their capacity as producers. This point is important because as a result of different development programs in rural areas in Indonesia, women have gone from mainly food producers to food consumers. The vegetables they grow in their garden now represent only a small amount of the food they consume, the rest is bought in the market. The key was to restore the notion that it is possible to grow your own food, and as a result, save money for you and the community. This has also meant reclaiming indigenous crops. For example, in the Eastern part of Indonesia, women involved in projects led by PEKKA managed to restore seven varieties of their main staple foods to replace the rice that they have to buy.

In lending and borrowing, rural women heads of household are also putting into practice power-sharing systems, leadership, and democracy. No matter how much women save, each member has one vote. Accountability is also part of the project since all women members have to report back on how they have spent the money and decide together on future plans.

In more than 50% of these women headed households, the women are illiterate – even though the government claims that there are no longer illiterate people in the country. In the process of organizing themselves, women also learn to read and write through peer teaching. And with that comes a greater awareness of the importance of claiming their rights and being part of negotiations that deal with local policies. They also use different kinds of media to inform themselves and their communities.

Women headed households are growing rapidly. In many villages, women head more than 50% of households because the men have left for other countries or cities to earn money, but never return. Their growing numbers also increases their political bargaining power, including within the indigenous system that often denies women's rights to land tenure, for example. They are slowly also starting to stand for public office.

In PEKKA, we know this is not perfect and it may sometimes appear that we face too big an enemy, but we have reasons for hope. Looking back ten years ago, we started in four provinces. Now we are working in nineteen provinces engaging a collective of more than seven hundred and fifty women heads of household. We have learnt the importance of claiming rights and dignity and fighting against different forms of oppressive power, not only the visible power of policy-makers but also the invisible power in the mindsets that exclude women from development processes.

Experiences of Women's Community Organizing in Kenya: Land access in a context of HIV and AIDS

Based on presentation by Esther Mwaura-Muiru

Abstract: The following article is based on the presentation by Esther Mwaura-Muiru, National Coordinator and Founder of GROOTS Kenya[1], at the in-depth session "Re-envisioning Development, Exploring Alternative Constructions Across the Globe" that took place at the 2012 AWID Forum. Drawing from her experience with women community organizing in Kenya, she reflects on how HIV and AIDS has had a particular impact in women's economic autonomy by restricting access to resources, particularly land, and aggravating the care crisis.

The dominant perception the world has of Africa surfaces when programs and policies are developed, particularly within an international development context. Poor women in poor communities are seen as passive recipients of donor aid. Not as actors and important participants who have the capability to contribute to their own development. The contribution by poor people to advance their own course is often ignored and unaccounted. In measuring progress, development agencies will recount how much money has been put into Africa's development, but still the levels of poverty have not changed substantially. Ultimately, poverty is still increasing and is bound to persist in Africa because the dominant model of development is not targeted to halt poverty.

Women continue to shoulder disproportionately the impact of poverty in Africa. They are not only excluded in the discussions to end poverty, but lack access to major resources like land and capital that generate wealth. In Kenya, there are basically two ways by which women are expected to access a key resource such as land. One is through a legal framework to register and acquire the title to land. Unfortunately statics show that only less than 5% of women hold title deeds in Kenya. The other is through inheritance rights governed by traditional clans or leaders – mostly led by men- who can determine who is granted access, control, and ownership of land. The emergency of HIV and AIDS in Africa has subjected women's access and control of land and property to major threats.

Just like resources committed by the global world to fight poverty has not achieved the overall objective, not all the resources targeted to halt the spread and manage the impact of HIV and AIDS was put to this course. In the last two decades, HIV and AIDS had a high profile in the development agenda with large amounts of financial resources dedicated to countries like Kenya, though little was coming to communities. When HIV and AIDS became a major problem in Kenya it was clear that some people and institutions were making it a big business and were seizing the opportunity to accumulate wealth in different ways. In addition, existing weak institutions were unable to seal loopholes. While this looting was happening, poor people were struggling to take care of their relatives who were bed-ridden as the health institutions could not cope with escalating number of ailing people. Because the sick could no longer provide for themselves, poor neighbors and relatives had to stretch their earnings to provide food for themselves, their families, and also for those who were sick. The vast majority of those bearing the burden of caring for the sick and providing food for the families were women. This became unsustainable and many lives were lost.

Below are a few examples of how women's community organizing managed to challenge these problems in practical ways, not just in Kenya but also in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

Women organizing for organic farming

The way food crop production and consumption is organized at the country level also exacerbated the food and care crisis. For the past ten to fifteen years we have seen governments across sub-Saharan Africa pushing for industrialized food production, largely inorganic seeds and pesticides, in the name of expanding "food security". Inorganic farming began to erode traditional knowledge of using inexpensive local seeds and other farming techniques. Consequently, subsistence poor farmers left their land idle since they could not afford to buy these seeds and fertilizers. Lack of proper quality control has also seen rise to influx of substandard farm input, negatively impacting on productivity. In addition, climate change has also affected local food production provoking long periods of draught or intense rains that ruin farm harvest.

In realizing all these problems, women farmers decided to systematically map and interrogate what was happening in their communities in relation to food production. Organizing in grassroots women-led communities, they came to the conclusion that the former traditional way of growing food, using organic farming, using drought resistant food crops, was an important alternative food production method to resolve the crisis. They began with demonstration farms that replaced inorganic farming with organic inputs. Armed with facts of the increased farm produce they engaged the extension service officials at the ministry of agriculture. Initially, the government officials insisted on the inorganic/industrialized model of food production seen to be more effective. But the women pushed for an alternative way, growing food through collective organic farming and advocating for government-funded technical support to organic farming. Though the struggle continues, these women have succeeded in changing the mindsets on the food production model and are receiving considerable government support.

Securing women's access to land in a context of HIV and AIDS

Another major problem affecting mostly women living in a context of HIV and AIDS, particularly in rural areas, is their loss of land and property once the husband dies. The husband's relatives often blame women for the death of their son or brother due to HIV and AIDS and thus force her to leave and grab her land. In most cases, even if women own the title of the land and are protected by the rule of law, they are forced to leave once the leaders of the clan deny them protection.

To challenge this reality, women organized what they call "Community Land Watch Groups" that are led by women to make sure that in the community nobody takes away any land that belongs to an orphan, a widow, or any vulnerable member of the community. The groups provide legal awareness to the community and engage institutions that are mandated to provide protection to act accordingly. This informal justice mechanism that is community led is widely becoming acceptable and is being replicated in different parts of the country. The groups have also lobbied government institutions to recognize it as an effective approach to secure the rights of women and orphans to access and control land and other valuable properties.

Organizing to track budget expenditures

Home based care providers became concerned by the ever increasing burden of HIV and AIDS on poor families, yet huge amount of resources continued to be committed to fight the pandemic. They were becoming fatigued by their efforts to subsidize the government in providing health care, a situation that escalated with the advance of HIV and AIDS. In order to strongly push their case, women started to track their own contribution to development. They began to value the activities they were doing to ensure the decrease in the prevalence of HIV and AIDS and to manage its impact. Armed with this information, they also began to discuss strategies to influence proper use of funds that was dedicated to HIV and AIDS. Through this mapping, home-based care providers can now demand their rights because they have a solid understanding of the contribution they make. They go to negotiation tables not as complainants demanding funds but as women demanding their rights. This has also had a positive impact in the way donors, government, and even NGOs are working in these communities. Many now value home-based care providers as equal partners in halting the pandemic. This is key, because women offer innovative solutions and have the capacity to

judge where investments need to be targeted, based on their own knowledge and lived experiences. They have ceased to be passive recipients waiting for external projects to arrive to work in their communities.

It has taken massive organizing to ensure that poor people who are directly affected -particularly women- have collective power at the global, national, and regional levels. The women from poor communities have claimed space to speak for themselves and influence the development agenda. Documenting our own knowledge has been a large part of this work of building movements. In GROOTS International as well as in our networks in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, we take care to document our own knowledge and share it across national boundaries. We have been able to create solidarity among ourselves globally. This has meant that we are able to engage at the global level with institutions like the World Bank by influencing their planning and programming towards making investments for the poor.

Over the years, we have seen many grassroots women taking leadership, not just political leadership in government, but becoming leaders in their own clans. As a single local movement it would not have worked but as a national, regional, and global movement we are able to confront these actors and claim space.

Endnote

1. GROOTS Kenya is a movement building organization that brings together organized groups of communities that are women led. It is a member of GROOTS International, a global movement that brings organized international movements to work together and confront dominant power and development models.

An Overview of the Arab Uprisings: From "Arab Springs" to a fleeting revolutionary moment

By Ghadeer Malek

Abstract: The series of uprisings that took place across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region during 2011 and 2012 brought unprecedented opportunities for change. But how far have entrenched patriarchal and gender norms affected women's participation in this transition? Young women activists at the frontline of these processes gathered for the 2012 AWID Forum session "Bringing Gender to the Streets: Young women amidst the Arab uprisings" to share their views and experiences of resistance. This article is the presentation made by AWID's young feminist activist, Ghadeer Malek[1]. She reflects on the opportunities and challenges for young women in building alternative strategies for transformation.

The Arab Uprisings that shook the Arab world at the beginning of 2011 were dubbed the "Arab Springs". They came at a time when any hope for change in the Middle East was met with cynicism and despair. The last sixty years were marked with economic regression, political repression, and civil poverty. Arab unity was a hopeless romantic notion that old and new generations referred to with nostalgia and disappointment. And hence the "Arab Springs" had arrived; a domino effect of uprisings that rippled across the region signaling to Arab leaders that "enough was enough".

A year later, the discourse on the Arab Uprisings changed from a "spring" promising numerous possibilities, to a chilling "winter" forecasting instability and insecurity. American imperialism, prior to the Uprisings, worked in tandem with corrupted Arab regimes to create the illusion that the only alternative to Western liberal democracy is fundamentalist Islam, and that mass liberation in the Middle East is equivalent to its unleashing.

Post- the Arab Uprisings, United States and dominant international forces are working along with other regional forces and agendas to sensationalize the Arab revolts, in an effort to strip the power from them and prioritize some over others, such as the case with the little coverage given to the uprisings in Bahrain and Yemen. There have also been attempts to market the Arab Uprisings as a Hollywood storyline with tools such as Facebook and Twitter as their main actors rather than exposing the real class struggles and dynamics that threaten the economic structures that thrive on the marginalization and repression of the poor.

International and Western liberal discourses pre-and post- the Arab Uprisings have not changed much. They still carry an Orientalist rhetoric that reduces Muslim and Arab cultures and religion to violent and incapable of determining their own destinies, and more importantly, Arab women to passive victims of that violence.

As Arabs, we have also witnessed change in our own perspective of the Uprisings where we moved from being convinced, prior to the Uprisings, that our dignity belonged in the hands of the lost integrity of Arab puppet regimes, to facing a new reality where we are trying to protect the Uprising from internal and external forces, be it NATO intervention or Islamists, that threaten the integrity of the Uprisings and hijack an opportunity for change that many have sacrificed their lives for.

History has taught us that political vacuums are not left untended to and that there are always rising opposing forces at work. As the Left in the Arab world emerged from underneath the rubble of the Mubarak dictatorship, so did Islamist forces along with military rulers and the persistence of old regime structures.

We heard at the 2012 AWID Forum how these forces are affecting feminist and women's rights movements. We heard iterations that the true test to the revolutionary impacts of the Arab Uprisings is in the depth of transformation of gender social relations. Will the democratization process include women? What forces are playing against these inclusions? How hard is it to assert a discourse where women's rights are seen as part and parcel of human rights and not secondary to national struggles?

Whether we understand the Arab Uprisings to be a "spring" or simply a fleeting revolutionary moment, the words of a protestor cleaning the streets of Cairo during the first 15 days of the Egyptian Uprising carry some hope: "The past 15 days will guard the Arab Republic of Egypt for the next 50 years. Any potential ruler will think a million times before doing what Mubarak did because the question she or he will always be faced with is: do you remember what happened on Jan 25, 2011?"

A precedent has been set, for when the masses overruled the state, for when collective power triumphed over individual capitalist interests. A date has been established for when Egyptians, self-empowered, asserted themselves to achieving their own victory. Is this enough?

Further reading:

Women and the 'Arab spring' - coverage by OpenDemocracy
http://www.opendemocracy.net/editorial-tags/women-and-arab-spring

Delegation of Activists from the MENA region participate at 12th AWID Forum
http://www.el-karama.org/content/delegation-activists-mena-region-participate-12th-awid-forum

Endnote

1. Ghadeer Malek is a Palestinian feminist activist working in AWID's Young Feminist Activism (YFA) Program.

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international feminist membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development, and women's human rights. AWID's mission is to strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations, and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women.

This publication was coordinated by AWID's strategic initative Influencing Development Actors and Practices for Women's Rights (IDeA).

IDeA aims to amplify the voices of women's rights advocates and organizations in key development discussions. We build alliances and plan strategies with our partners to influence development policy and practices. Our team also produces and disseminates resource materials to increase the capacity of women's groups to engage in economic and development policy processes.

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A special thank you to those who collaborated in editing, proofreading, layout, and translation, particularly to Natalie Raaber, Cindy Clark, Lynn O'Rourke.

This publication is available online at www.awid.org.
This publication is available in English and Spanish.

Published by Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID) in Toronto, Mexico City, Cape Town.

AWID gratefully acknowledges the generous support of Cordaid, Ford Foundation, Hivos, Levi Strauss Foundation, Oak Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and an anonymous contributor.

This is the second issue of a series of IDeA Debate articles. Issue one is available on the AWID website. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of AWID.

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