

How should the L20 take gender considerations into account in deciding what it wants from overseas development aid?

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The practical case for incorporating gender considerations in the aid agenda has been made repeatedly and is well documented. The results include a great deal of national and international activity, legislation and organisation but many of the practical steps people could take remain ignoredⁱ because the issues are complicated and it is difficult to incorporate gender matters. Yet, moral, political and practical reasons make it worth incorporating them more widely than simply by putting the steps identified into practice. They also add a different perspective to the overall question about what we want from overseas development aid.

The L20 has the authority to establish the lead needed to catalyse national and international institutions and peoples to concentrate on properly incorporating gender considerations. It is worth doing this so overseas development aid has desired results and avoids undesired ones.

Human Development Imperative

The dual importance of men and women to human progress, growth – or any other category used to describe human development - is not seriously arguable. It is reflected consistently across the world's faiths, communities, cultures and in national constitutions: the oldest sacred texts draw no distinction between women's and men's abilities to advance humanityⁱⁱ, and some of the latest scientific research even suggests that the female brain drives group evolutionⁱⁱⁱ. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes no distinction between people.

There is an overwhelming case for taking issues related to gender into account in development, and in helping to create the conditions for development. The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women states, "*Gender inequalities are one of the primary obstacles to the universal realization of human rights, citizenship, development and health.*"^{iv}. Women and men in stable societies have vital (though different) roles and stability is the basis from which a society develops.

The logical and moral arguments for eliminating gender discrimination are forceful: development is more likely if the whole of a society is involved. The systems and structures that exist for the world's governance are beginning to reflect this in their laws, agreements and organisations^v. The 1995 Human Development Report focused on Gender and Human Development stating, "*Investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself but also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development*". The third Millennium Development Goal focuses on gender equality, beginning "*Gender inequalities have important negative implications for development outcomes and families' well-being. Women and girls generally bear the most direct costs of these inequalities because of discriminatory social norms, incentives, and legal institutions*"^{vi}.

But it is not clear how to take gender considerations into account: the overall logic, politics and practice of overseas development are complicated. In order to make a start, it is necessary to acknowledge that three aspects of development – the cultures and institutions involved, and its practical effects – differ in every context. They need to be understood and allowed for so that overseas development aid can take effects related to gender constructively into account.

1. Cultures are Different

Reflecting the dual importance of men and women to human development and progress does not usually equate to treating men and women equally. Women and men take on different roles in different cultures at different times^{vii}. The institutions delivering aid and the cultures receiving it usually have different ideas and standards and often do not understand each other's. It generally takes longer to build understanding than to implement a development programme. There are no acceptable universal standards as to what the roles of men and women should be. But universal standards are not necessary in order to understand – and allow for - their dual importance. Head of the World Bank, Paul Wolfowitz, illustrated this when he quoted a Punjabi woman “*development is like a cart: it has two wheels and if one of the wheels is not turning you will not get very far*”. Development activities need to take human behaviour; social and organisational structures^{viii} into account. It is not necessarily productive to separate gender from issues to do with the overall structure of a society, its cultural norms and associated social influences (as well as the international context in which it is offered) because they are connected. Development aid is ideally offered in ways attuned to the whole cultural context^{ix}.

2. Effects Vary

Development aid ought to be adapted to the human effects that it has, so that it can be adjusted if it is counter-productive or ineffective. Women and men are often differently affected by development programmes, and can have different effects on how aid is delivered. But understanding about what this means is patchy in governments and international institutions. Many organisations continue to assume that policy areas like economics and credit, are “gender neutral”. That is, the effects on men and women are not different. This assumption limits the practical effects these programmes can have^x.

This does not mean that the effects cannot be quantified or qualified and there has been some progress, though it is difficult to identify the practical effects of taking gender considerations into account. Existing indicators, like the United Nations Development Program’s “gender-related development Index” and “gender empowerment measure”^{xi} provide ways of making international comparisons. But more specific and detailed mapping is needed to see what the actual effects are and in order properly to incorporate gender-related issues. Different measures are needed for different cultures. As the introduction of Guyana's submission to the UN's 4th World Conference on Women last year in Beijing notes, “*When a gender-specific data base is lacking, it becomes problematic to make any meaningful assessment that would serve as a guide for the future*”.

3. Institutions Need to Adapt

International institutional arrangements pose their own challenges. Our structures and systems for governing international affairs have not always found tactful ways to reflect the dual importance of men and women, though there are some innovations^{xii} and recent structures have found ways of incorporating gender-related steps where there has been political will to do so^{xiii}.

It can be unclear that gender is an appropriate focus in development. Former Special Representative for the Secretary General to East Timor, Sergio Vieira de Mello, said “*I was against the creation of a Gender Affairs Unit for the UN’s Transitional Authority in East Timor. I did not think a Gender Unit would help rebuild institutions from the ashes of what the militia left.*” But he went on to say, “*I was wrong*”^{xiv}.

Despite such positive views, gender remains an uncomfortable term in political debate and defining it usefully is hard. The UN sees it in terms of differences in social roles: “*the socially*

constructed roles played by women and men that are ascribed to them on the basis of their sex... These roles are usually specific to a given area and time that is, since gender roles are contingent on the social and economic context, they can vary according to the specific context and can change over time. In terms of the use of language the word 'sex' is used to refer to physical and biological characteristics of women and men, while gender is used to refer to the explanations for observed differences between men and women based on socially assigned roles."^{xv}.

Questions about how to incorporate gender considerations in practice, and which are important in development also throw up wider debate around the extent to which it is acceptable for one country or culture to intervene in another's, including by suggesting standards relating to gender. They highlight the fact that much to do with development is implemented quickly, with relatively little time allowed to consult and generate local participation, and without allowing for a period of gradual adjustment.

There follow two ways in which the L20 might use its political authority to get constructive progress.

1. Establish a political lead:-

Recognising that overseas development priorities ought to reflect the dual importance of men and women to development; that what needs to be done in order to incorporate gender considerations is different in each case; and that existing institutions and political priorities need to evolve to acknowledge and act on these matters, the L20 will issue a commitment to:

- *recognise and reflect the importance of both men and women to human development, and call for the international community to implement measures to translate this into practical effect.*
- *propagate a simple, coherent understanding about what human development is, and involves, of which gender considerations form an integral part.*
- *advocate the recognition of human factors, and means of doing so, in international affairs and development.*
- *call on all activity relating to overseas development aid to take account of the dual importance of men and women in devising, structuring and delivering activities, including by advocating the incorporation of existing practical recommendations.*

2. Initiate practical steps:-

Recognising that disconnection between the international system, local cultures and individuals is the critical barrier to taking account of gender considerations in overseas development aid, the L20 will call on the United Nations and OECD to establish a Centre for Human Factors tasked to incorporate understanding of human behaviour, societies, communities and culture in international affairs, including by:

- *catalysing activity, including in national and international institutions, legislation and media to overcome key constraints, including lack of data, appropriate resourcing, beliefs, institutions, access and delivery, nature of development and nature of "gender" and advise about human factors – including gender considerations – which relate to key issues, including poverty, employment, health and education.*
- *advising and recommending desirable changes (including to financial incentives and resourcing), to which the L20 will lend its authority.*
- *propagating rigorous, authoritative quantitative and qualitative analysis to improve the quality of international policies and their effects.*

- *actively providing ways for people to participate in national and international affairs, especially where they are otherwise unrepresented. It will be tasked to develop new techniques for different parts of the world in order to mobilise human forces which contribute positively towards development, including on gender-related matters where appropriate. It will be a focus for civil society and civic participation groups.*

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Collated evidence is summarised by Carolyn Hannan (Director of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' Division for the Advancement of Women): "According to responses from Governments about progress against the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, progress has been uneven.... Persistent gaps included low levels of women's representation in decision-making positions; stereotypical attitudes and discriminatory practices; and discrimination in employment, including occupational segregation and wage gaps. Violence against women, including domestic violence, was noted as a major challenge worldwide. In some regions, Governments noted disproportionately high poverty levels among women, and their insufficient access to or control of economic resources. Governments also noted the serious effects of conflict on women, particularly sexual violence. In many countries, women's health, in particular lack of access to reproductive health services and high levels of maternal mortality, continued to give cause for concern. Countries reported high prevalence of HIV/AIDS among women and trafficking in women and girls was of concern to many Governments." Presentation on "Transforming the mainstream: New goals and strategies" to 9th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women, 19-24 June 2005, Korean Women's Development Institute.

ⁱⁱ The following extract from Zoroaster's Yasna 46/10 draws no distinction between women and men. "Wise Lord, whoever in this world, man or woman performs the best in life, good deeds according to righteousness and service to humanity based on good mind, I shall accompany them in glorifying you and shall with all of them cross the bridge of judgement". Zoroaster was thought to live around 1000-2000BC and Zoroastrianism, which he founded, is thought to be one of the world's oldest identifiable religions, if not the oldest.

ⁱⁱⁱ In primatology, the "social intelligence hypothesis" relates neocortex size to social complexity and group size. At the same time, research on primate social evolution indicates that male and female group sizes evolve in relation to different demands. While females mostly group according to conditions set by the environment, males go where the females are. There was found to be no correlation between the male neocortex and group size but there was a positive correlation between female neocortex size and group size. Thus it appears that the female brain drives primate group, and species, evolution. Lindenfors P 2005 Neocortex evolution in primates: the 'social brain' is for females. *Biology Letters*. Lindenfors P, Fröberg L & Nunn CL 2004 Females drive primate social evolution. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London Series B (Supplement), Biology Letters* 271: S101-S103

^{iv} INSTRAW, the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women goes on to state, "Gender continues to be omitted from the majority of programs and projects designed to address sustainable development and poverty eradication, making capacity-building resources on gender more important than ever."

^v The most notable international agreements are: the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (18 December 1979); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995); UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security; the European Council resolution on Integrating Gender in Development (20 December 1995). Guidelines include the OECD Development Assistance Committee Working Party on Gender Equality's guidelines. Dedicated organisations include UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, which was established in 1975 at the First World Conference on Women as a voluntary fund within the United Nations Development Programme.

^{vi} Millennium Development Goal No. 3 aims to promote gender equality and empower women. Explaining its target to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, the Goal goes on to state: *“While women’s status has improved in recent decades, gender inequalities affecting them remain pervasive. Gender inequality starts early and keeps women at a disadvantage throughout their lives. In some countries, infant girls are less likely to survive than infant boys because of parental discrimination and neglect – even though biologically infant girls should survive in greater numbers. Girls are more likely to drop out of school and to receive less education than boys because of discrimination, education expenses, and household duties.”* The UN Secretary-General’s report, *“In larger freedom: Towards development, security and human rights for all”* lists the recommendations of the Millennium Project Taskforce on this Millennium Development Goal: *“strengthening opportunities for post-primary education for girls while simultaneously meeting commitments to universal primary education; guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights; investing in infrastructure to reduce women’s and girls’ time burdens; guaranteeing women’s and girls’ property and inheritance rights; eliminating gender inequality in employment by decreasing women’s reliance on informal employment, closing gender gaps in earnings, and reducing occupational segregation; increasing women’s share of seats in national parliaments and local governmental bodies; and combating violence against women and girls.”*

^{vii} Thirteenth Century Arab historian, Ibn Khallikan, reported that, during the Abbasid dynasty (750-1258 A.D.), there were no restrictions on women attending lessons in Arabian mosque schools. Women taught classes in which men took lessons. Arab women contributed a great deal to the social, economic and political life, in medicine, mysticism, poetry, teaching, and oratory and took active roles in military conflicts. In contrast, under the Taliban in Afghanistan women were not allowed an education, though some secret schools taught girls.

^{viii} Human factors is an established discipline in health and aviation. Professor Elwyn Edwards defines it as *“concerned to optimize the relationship between people and their activities”*. (from Wiener and Nagel, eds. *Human factors in Aviation*. Academic Press, 1989).

^{ix} A study in Linden (Guyana) illustrates the need to take the whole cultural context into account when it unexpectedly discovered that women’s income affected child health because mothers do not attend clinics if they think that their children’s clothes are unpresentable (Jackson, 1995).

^x For example, as Guyana’s National Development Strategy states *“legally women are neither denied access to loans, mortgages and credit nor required to have consent from their husbands or male partners to obtain credit. However, the demand for high levels of collateral, as well as the high interest rates, puts formal credit beyond the reach of many women. The result is that women often have to turn to moneylenders and pay extremely high rates interest.”* The UN’s Human Development Report 1995 estimates that if a market wage were imputed to women’s labour time, the global output figure would increase by US\$11 trillion, stating that *“the failure to value most of their work reduces women to virtual non-entities in most economic transactions - such as property ownership or offering collateral for bank loans. Because status in contemporary society is so often equated with income-earning power, women suffer a major undervaluation of their economic status. This is so despite their larger share of the total work burden [more hours and more concurrent tasks] and notwithstanding the reality that men’s paid work is often the result of ‘joint production,’ much of which would not be possible if women did not stay at home looking after the children and the household”*.

^{xi} The UNDP’s gender-related development index adjusts average achievement in the three dimensions captured in the human development index to account for inequalities between men and women. Its gender empowerment measure captures gender inequality in three areas: political participation and decision-making (measured by women’s and men’s percentage shares of parliamentary seats); economic participation and decision-making (measured (i) women’s and men’s percentage shares of positions as legislators, senior officials and managers and (ii) women’s and men’s percentage shares of professional and technical positions); power over economic resources (measured by women’s and men’s estimated earned income (PPP US\$)).

^{xii} These are recorded in guidance like the World Bank’s Promising Approaches to Engendering Development series to showcase projects, research, and activities that address inequalities. Government international development agencies produce manuals to help development specialists identify and address gender issues in their work. But existing institutions usually focus on how to go about development, rather than on implementing guidelines to take gender considerations into account in their organisations and some methods, like introducing quotas for numbers of men and women, tend to be controversial.

^{xiii} The Inter-Parliamentary Union's PARLINE database collates statistics for women in national Parliaments using figures last provided by national Parliaments by September 2005. In the resulting rankings, Rwanda beats the Scandinavian countries to top position. 48.8% of its Parliamentary seats are occupied by women (39 of 80 seats filled). Iraq is ranked sixteenth, and Timor-Leste 26th. In contrast, Canada is ranked 43rd (21.1% of its 308 seats are filled by women); the United Kingdom is 51st (19.7% of 646 seats), and the United States of America 67th (15.2% of 435 seats).

^{xiv} Statement to the UN in New York (2001) to commemorate the first anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325.

^{xv} Report of the UN Secretary General on the Implementation of the Outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, September 3, 1996.