

# An Overview of Current International Campaigns on Gender in a Development Context

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*This Research Note is based on work carried out in September 2006 on current international approaches in advocacy and campaigning on gender in a development context. It briefly examines the rationale for campaigns and advocacy work on gender issues and then reviews activity in the key areas of gender equality in public decision-making and gender based violence. It also considers advocacy around the funding of gender issues and how progress in gender equality is measured.*

Gender inequality remains a persistent challenge and barrier to equal development and although it is a feature of every region in the world, in developing countries this inequality is exacerbated by extreme poverty. As governments around the world, including the Irish government, have placed a priority on achieving the targets set out within the internationally agreed framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),<sup>1</sup> there is a broad realisation that the impact of actions “will be greater if issues of gender equality are taken into account at the outset and if the realisation of the human rights of women informs everything we

do”.<sup>2</sup> It is also recognised in the development community that the promotion of gender equality and women’s rights is not only crucial “in achieving all the MDGs” but that this also requires the implementation of “the Beijing platform for Action, the Cairo Programme of Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women”.<sup>3</sup> These form part of the international policy framework within which gender advocacy takes place. It is within this context that this research examined the range of internationally focused, currently active, campaigns on gender issues, relevant to the work of Irish development NGOs. Based on this research, this paper discusses advocacy approaches in five areas:

- Women’s participation in decision-making;
- Gender based violence (GBV);
- Women in conflict situations;
- The financing of gender based advocacy and projects;
- How progress in gender equality is measured.

To begin with, the paper considers the different approaches that have been taken to the question of gender in a development context and why it is considered important to empower women, in order to contextualise the advocacy.

## **Gender and development**

There are two main ways in which issues of inequality between men and women have been dealt with in development work. The first approach is a focus on women’s rights, which usually involves comparing the legal position of women to that of men, or looking at aggregate data that measure economic and social outcomes, such as comparative property ownership statistics or literacy rates. The second approach focuses on gender relations. Here gender relations describes both the unequal power relationships that exist between men and women as collective social categories and also the different social roles that men and women play – resulting in differences in perspective on particular situations. An awareness of its own internalised gender values is also important for an organisation campaigning on issues of gender if they are to be effective.

International conventions and the policies of international organisations are attempts to find common ground in

establishing women's rights in gendered societies. Implementing even the conventions that exist has been problematic primarily because women's rights (and the related rights of the girl child) have been considered a lower order of right when compared to, for example, cultural rights, or the right to national sovereignty.

"Gender and development" is much wider than a focus on women or on women's rights and welfare; however, using a gender model is useful for those concerned with improving the welfare of women and girls. Including a gender perspective in policy analysis recognises that women's collective welfare is determined by socially constructed gender roles and relationships, and that this social construction tends to devalue the feminine and to grant women less legal, economic and social rights than it grants men. For example, it is not possible to understand women's comparative poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa without understanding the legal and cultural restrictions on women's property and inheritance rights that work to the disadvantage of women and to the advantage of men leading to an unequal power relationship in the family and in society generally.

The importance of empowering and supporting women as active agents in development is widely recognised: empirical research by the World Bank, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund and numerous civil society organisations "show that gender equality and development are closely related and positively correlated".<sup>4</sup> The argument that there is a positive relationship between empowering women and development is made from two different perspectives. Firstly, the point is made that by not fully using the capabilities of women, a major source of development potential is being ignored. As Sen argues there "is nothing more important in the political economy of development than the adequate recognition of women's participation and political, economic, and social leadership".<sup>5</sup> The second perspective is that due to their socially constructed roles women and men have different priorities in terms of policy and spending, and that a greater emphasis on the priorities of women would have beneficial developmental impacts. For example, placing more of the family income in the hands of women means that on aggregate more money is spent on the welfare of children.

Focusing on the rights and welfare of women in development can also be justified in terms of rights alone irrespective of its impact on overall development. It has been argued that by ignoring the specific needs of women, development agencies

might be accused of, at best, perpetuating injustice, and at worst actually increasing gender inequality.

There have been campaigns on gender for over two decades, and currently some of the strongest are in areas of public participation and GBV. Related to these specific issue campaigns is an awareness that there needs to be advocacy on funding for gender projects and on how to measure progress in gender equality.

## **Women in the public sphere: participation in national and international decision-making**

One of the barriers to women as actors in development is their unequal representation in political office and limited participation in national decision-making. This is now a widely held development goal and is one of the four indicators for tracking progress toward MDG 3, the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.<sup>6</sup> The Beijing Platform for Action recommended that governments set a target of 30% of seats for women in national parliaments.<sup>7</sup> An international campaign in this area is the Global 50/50 Campaign, organised by the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO),<sup>8</sup> which seeks to increase women's representation and participation in all decision-making processes worldwide with an emphasis on national parliaments. The Inter-Parliamentary Union<sup>9</sup> is also working in this area, primarily through contacts with national parliaments, political parties and groups of women politician, highlighting the fact that the global average for women's representation (in both houses of parliament) is 17%.<sup>10</sup> In relation to gender in decision-making at an international level, there are challenges to the UN reform process. The Centre for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) and the WEDO lobbied for "the creation of a well-resourced, women-specific independent entity...a body with normative, operational and oversight capacity, a universal country presence and led by an Under-Secretary General".<sup>11</sup>

## Gender based violence as a barrier to women's roles as actors in development

Research demonstrates that public issues such as political representation and key economic and social rights such as access to land and family law cannot be accessed meaningfully by women without tackling the universal and pervasive issue of GBV in the private and public spheres. GBV, primarily violence directed at women and girl children because of their sex, has been identified as a key challenge to development and has a strong international campaign focus. This is a very broad area, including the areas of domestic violence; traditional practices; female genital mutilation; “son preference”, including foetal or female infanticide and the neglect of the girl child over her brother in terms of essential needs such as nutrition, basic health care and education; dowry-related violence and early marriage; rape; sexual assault within marriage; sexual harassment; prostitution and trafficking; violence against women migrant workers; pornography; custodial violence against women; violence against women in situations of armed conflict, and violence against refugee and displaced women.<sup>12</sup>

GBV is a pervasive and international problem that transcends levels of development. The international policy framework on gender highlights GBV as a key issue. CEDAW General Recommendation No 19 (1992) on violence against women requires that “States parties should take appropriate and effective measures to overcome all forms of gender-based violence, whether by public or private act”. The Beijing Declaration commits to: “prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls”,<sup>13</sup> while the Platform for Action has violence against women as a strategic objective.<sup>14</sup> The UN Task Force on Gender Equality, part of the Millennium Project, called for a new global campaign last year to end violence against women which would mobilise leadership at all levels, and would include support for collecting and analysing country-level data on violence against women, and an infusion of resources to the UNIFEM trust fund. The recommendations in the UN Secretary General's recent *In-depth study on all forms of violence against women: Report of the Secretary-General*, published in 2006, “constitute a clear strategy for Member States, and the United Nations system to make measurable progress in preventing and eliminating violence against women”.<sup>15</sup>

A number of campaigns exist in response to this framework:

- A global campaign on violence against women is the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence which has run annually since 1991 from 25 November, International Day against Violence against Women, to 10 December.<sup>16</sup>
- The We Can End Violence against Women campaign based in South-east Asia responds to the fact that “Many girls and women endure daily beatings, harassment for dowry, verbal abuse and acid attacks for refusing to comply with male demands. Other women become targets of extreme forms of violence like incest, rape, public humiliation, trafficking, honour killing and dowry deaths”.<sup>17</sup> The campaign aims “to reach and influence 50 million ordinary men and women across South Asia to oppose violence against women” by 2011.
- Amnesty International’s Stop Violence against Women is a key international campaign on the issue of GBV. It is a stated goal of the campaign to change the thinking of the 2 million members of Amnesty worldwide which will in turn hopefully act as a catalyst for change in their broader societies. Internationally, it is a campaign that is beginning to involve other NGOs.<sup>18</sup>

Within Ireland, Amnesty International has been a leading actor in bringing together a grouping of Irish human rights, humanitarian and development agencies, along with Irish Aid, to focus on the issue of GBV, particularly in relation to personnel who work overseas, including members of the Defence Forces. Set up initially in reaction to the abuse inflicted on the many thousands of women in Darfur, the Consortium has published a report *Gender Based Violence: A Failure to Protect – Challenge to Action*<sup>19</sup> which challenges “Ireland – and the international community – ... to move from isolated and ad hoc examples of good practice at a project level to a more systematic response at an institutional level, and seek to develop a model of best practice that would be developed and promoted for adoption at the international level. In effect, what is needed is zero tolerance of GBV.” The ongoing work of the Consortium in this area is under review with an address delivered by Mary Robinson in November 2006.<sup>20</sup>

## Women in conflict

The issue of women in conflict, a sub-topic in the wider area of GBV, is recognised as a major barrier to development and has become a significant campaign issue.

From a UN perspective, over the past decade, “women and girls have become prime targets of armed conflict and suffered its impact disproportionately; particularly as gender-based and sexual violence have become weapons of warfare and are one of the defining characteristics of contemporary armed conflict”.<sup>21</sup> In October 2000, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security,<sup>22</sup> and internationally NGOs have been campaigning on the implementation of the Resolution at national levels:

- In the lead up to International Women’s Day 2004, Canadian women’s groups initiated a postcard campaign intended to raise public and political awareness on the protection of the rights of girls and women in times of war, increased involvement of women in building peace and an end to impunity for perpetrators of violence.
- In 2004, the Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform put certain aspects of the resolution “on trial” in Belfast.<sup>23</sup>
- In the UK NGOs have successfully lobbied the government to introduce a national plan on the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

Currently a national plan on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 does not exist in Ireland. However, given the Conflict Analysis and Resolution Unit to be established within the Political Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs as a result of the White Paper process<sup>24</sup> and the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, along with Ireland’s experience of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, such a national plan would seem a logical and useful step internationally. UNSCR 1325 calls for, among other things, the inclusion of gender perspectives in training for peacekeeping; the protection of women and girls in conflict, and the participation of women in decision-making and peace processes.

Other advocacy campaigns within this area include the Global Call to Action: Stop Rape in War Initiative, and the Brussels Call to Action to Address Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond.<sup>25</sup>

The Stop Violence against Women and Control Arms campaign is part of Amnesty International's Stop Violence against Women campaign, in partnership with Oxfam and the International Network on Small Arms, which focuses on the impact of guns on women's lives and highlights the fact that "in many countries women have become powerful forces for peace and human rights in their communities. Their actions show how real change can be effected and women's lives made safer."<sup>26</sup>

## Finance and gender work

In spite of an increased awareness of the impact of gender issues for development, the gender implications of development processes are often neglected and accessing funding is a constant challenge for projects addressing gender inequality. The report *Where is the money for Women's Rights?* (2005)<sup>27</sup> examined the funding trends related to gender equality work and support to women's rights organisations. The results showed starkly that there is now less funding available. Carried out by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), the research assessed the resources and the role of donors in the promotion of women's rights and the support of women's rights organisations. It concluded that "while public awareness of women's rights violations internationally may have increased, funding for women's organisations to guarantee those rights has not. Many groups are in a state of survival and resistance and trying to adjust to the new funding landscape, particularly as a result of shifts in development assistance and cutbacks by the large independent foundations". Some interesting trends demonstrated in the report include the facts that development assistance and funding by bilateral and multilateral agencies have become increasingly harder to access for women's rights organisations as a result of gender mainstreaming and new aid modalities, and that many of the more influential international NGOs that supported women's groups through the Beijing process have reduced their commitment and have acknowledged that they have lost much of their explicit attention to gender equality. This report was followed up by an international meeting, *Money and Movements*,<sup>28</sup> which took place in Mexico on 9-11 November 2006.<sup>29</sup>

The quality as well as the quantity of funding for gender work is under examination internationally. Strategic funding is necessary from donors to target gender inequality, for example by

looking at the issue of women's legal ownership of land or property within aid programming. Also highlighted is the importance of the impact of shifting aid modalities on existing gender work. The DAC Network on Gender Equality published a report in July 2006, the *Paris Declaration Commitments and Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*. This report highlighted that "most PRS [Poverty Reduction Strategies] are gender blind and without budgetary allocations". However it also argued that it is important to "integrate gender equality goals in harmonisation and accountability mechanisms" and to "build on existing strengths of national actors, strengthen national capacities and support regional and national political processes" through development aid.<sup>30</sup> This aspiration reflects positive correlations between aid modalities and gender relations and women's wellbeing found in research such as that by the International Center for Research on Women. This research cites the example of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) which since 1998 "has approved more than \$123 million in lending for the control and prevention of domestic violence... These loans raised substantial domestic counterparts in the five countries. Some loans also integrated gender concerns... funding also goes to women's nongovernmental organisations that specialise in the research, advocacy, and treatment of violence against women".<sup>31</sup>

## Measuring progress in gender work

The lack of disaggregated statistics on gender<sup>32</sup> emerges as a barrier to the knowledge necessary to tackle gender equality effectively, including GBV. The nature of the indicators used by donors to evaluate progress in gender related work are also considered to be problematic. According to UNRISID, "the dominant narrative concerning women's progress found in the publications of the main development institutions continues to make two assumptions that have long been problematised: that progress in equalising gender relations is under way as part of an inevitable and *linear* process of modernisation and development; and that such progress is promoted principally by economic growth and, by extension, by the policies that are considered most able to secure that growth".<sup>33</sup>

The CEDAW Assessment Tool, based on the Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination against Women is an interesting initiative in this area, which could be used to inform

development gender equality indicators.<sup>34</sup> The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and the OECD-DAC Network on Gender Equality concluded that measures such as the “support [of] CEDAW reporting as an important accountability process and advocacy tool to increase visibility of gender equality and women’s empowerment issues... could counteract concerns [which] have been expressed about the increased risk of women’s voices not being heard amongst the wide range of stakeholders engaged in national-level consensus building”.<sup>35</sup>

While the MDGs are the most public face of international development policy, and have the most publicly tracked development indicators, doubt on the potential progressive gender impact of the MDGs has been debated by Trócaire.<sup>36</sup> According to Banúlacht “in terms of gender equality, the MDGs are disappointing [as they] do not adequately address either the structural nature of poverty or the structural nature of gender equality, and the complex interactions between poverty and gender inequality”.<sup>37</sup> However, in the context of such drawbacks, UNIFEM argues that “the opportunity provided by the MDGs can be embraced – without lowering the existing standard of gender equality analysis and strategies and without weakening recognition of established global gender equality processes – if pursuit of the MDGs remains true to the spirit of the Millennium Declaration. This means that efforts to achieve the MDGs must be guided not only by the global goals, targets and indicators but also, most crucially, by the Declaration’s recognition of the central importance of gender equality to all progress in development”.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusions

In terms of the relevance of the international campaigns in an Irish context, a number of areas emerged particularly strongly. On the topic of GBV as a barrier to women as actors in development (and to women’s own development), the existence of an Irish Consortium with commitment from a wide range of development NGOs, along with the Irish government, points to the potential to continue to add value to international advocacy in this area. Within the area of women in conflict, the proposed Department of Foreign Affairs Conflict Analysis and Resolution Unit and the recently established UN Peacebuilding Commission, along with Ireland’s own experience of conflict

resolution and peacebuilding, pointed to the relevance of UNSCR 1325 as a possible advocacy tool within Ireland. The development of an Irish national plan on UNSCR 1325, and the Irish government's advocacy of it with international partners, would seem a logical and useful step internationally. Finally, in relation to development aid, this review suggests that the Irish government could use its leverage as a growing aid donor to seek improvement in both the levels of assistance and ways in which gender work is funded internationally. This should be done with a view to strategically funding work on gender equality, including those areas outlined above, as a cornerstone to achieving a more equal development process for women and men globally.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See below for a full list of abbreviations.
- <sup>2</sup> [www.irishaid.gov.ie/whitepaper/assets/White%20Paper%20English.pdf](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/whitepaper/assets/White%20Paper%20English.pdf), p. 62.
- <sup>3</sup> The European Consensus on Development, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/development/body/development\\_policy\\_statement/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/development/body/development_policy_statement/index_en.htm)
- <sup>4</sup> Mary Robinson (2004), see [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/maryrobinson\\_presentation\\_hr\\_and\\_genderbasedviolence.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/maryrobinson_presentation_hr_and_genderbasedviolence.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> Sen, Amartya (1999), *Development as Freedom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.103
- <sup>6</sup> View the indicators at <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=Indicators/OfficialList.htm>
- <sup>7</sup> *Millennium Project Task Force on Gender Equality and Empowering Women Report 2005*
- <sup>8</sup> [www.wedo.org](http://www.wedo.org)
- <sup>9</sup> [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)
- <sup>10</sup> [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm), September 2006
- <sup>11</sup> *Briefing Note: Reforming the UN Gender Equality Architecture*, September 2006, prepared by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership and Women's Environment and Development Organization. Note: In November 2006, the UN Panel's recommendations included a call that "A dynamic UN entity focused on gender equality and women's empowerment should be established... It will have a stronger normative and advocacy role, combined with a targeted programming role. The gender entity will be fully and ambitiously funded..." ([www.un.org/events/panel/resources/pdfs/coh\\_10\\_waysE.pdf](http://www.un.org/events/panel/resources/pdfs/coh_10_waysE.pdf)).
- <sup>12</sup> [www.un.org/rights/dpi1772e.htm](http://www.un.org/rights/dpi1772e.htm)
- <sup>13</sup> [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/beijingdeclaration.html](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/beijingdeclaration.html)
- <sup>14</sup> [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/violence.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/violence.htm)
- <sup>15</sup> Available at [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/violenceagainstwomestudydoc.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/violenceagainstwomestudydoc.pdf)
- <sup>16</sup> [www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/kit06/rheme.html](http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/kit06/rheme.html)

- <sup>17</sup> [www.wecanendvaw.org](http://www.wecanendvaw.org)
- <sup>18</sup> Communication with Joanna Kerr, AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development)
- <sup>19</sup> Available at [www.gbv.ie/gender\\_based\\_violence\\_study.pdf](http://www.gbv.ie/gender_based_violence_study.pdf)
- <sup>20</sup> Information about the review can be accessed at [www.gbv.ie/press\\_3.htm](http://www.gbv.ie/press_3.htm). The meeting took place in Iveagh House, Dublin on 27 November 2006 when Consortium members reported to Special Advisor, Mary Robinson, on progress made over the past year; see [www.irishaid.gov.ie/latest\\_news.asp?article=887](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/latest_news.asp?article=887)
- <sup>21</sup> Presentation by Carolyn Hannan, Director of UNDAW, 24 October 2004, available at [www.nn.org/womenwatch/daw/news/speech2004/CH-Texas24Oct2004.pdf](http://www.nn.org/womenwatch/daw/news/speech2004/CH-Texas24Oct2004.pdf)
- <sup>22</sup> UNSCR 1325; [www.womenwarpeace.org/toolbox/Annotated\\_1325.pdf](http://www.womenwarpeace.org/toolbox/Annotated_1325.pdf)
- <sup>23</sup> The aspects were: increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict adopting a gender perspective when negotiating and implementing peace agreements.
- <sup>24</sup> [www.irishaid.gov.ie/whitepaper/assets/White%20Paper%20English.pdf](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/whitepaper/assets/White%20Paper%20English.pdf)
- <sup>25</sup> <http://www.peacewomen.org/news/1325News/Issue80.htm>
- <sup>26</sup> [www.amnesty.org/resources/flash/svaw/womenunderfire/eng/](http://www.amnesty.org/resources/flash/svaw/womenunderfire/eng/)
- <sup>27</sup> The report is available at [www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org).
- <sup>28</sup> [www.awid.org/moneyandmovements/](http://www.awid.org/moneyandmovements/)
- <sup>29</sup> The report of this meeting can be accessed at [www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org).
- <sup>30</sup> The report is available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac>.
- <sup>31</sup> [www.icrw.org/docs/2005\\_info\\_genderequality.pdf](http://www.icrw.org/docs/2005_info_genderequality.pdf)
- <sup>32</sup> Irish Aid commissioned DAC Network on Gender Equality document, *The Paris Declaration and Implications for Gender Equality* (June 2006) highlights this.
- <sup>33</sup> The 2006 report, *Beijing Plus 10: An Ambivalent Record on Gender Justice*, is available at [www.unrisd.org/unrisd/websire/document.nsf/\(httpPublications\)/4EE168779E57E924C12571CA003C2295?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/websire/document.nsf/(httpPublications)/4EE168779E57E924C12571CA003C2295?OpenDocument)
- <sup>34</sup> Published by the American Bar Association and the Central and East European Law Initiative, available at [www.rightsconsortium.org/resources/assessment/CEDAWtool.pdf](http://www.rightsconsortium.org/resources/assessment/CEDAWtool.pdf)
- <sup>35</sup> The report, *Summary Report of the Joint Meeting of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and the OECD-DAC Network on Gender Equality* (January 2006) can be accessed at <http://www.oecd.org>.
- <sup>36</sup> See the 2005 issue of *Trocaire Development Review: Challenges in Meeting the Millennium Goals*
- <sup>37</sup> Banúlachr submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs in advance of the Millennium Summit 2005
- <sup>38</sup> *Pathway to Gender Equality*, UNIFEM, 2005

## Abbreviations

AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CWGL	Centre for Women's Global Leadership
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of OECD)

GBV	Gender based violence
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
IANWGE	Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
PRS	Poverty reduction strategy
UN	United Nations
UNDAW	United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
WEDO	Women's Environment and Development Organization
WHO	World Health Organization