

Berit Aasen

# **Aid for women's empowerment and gender equality**

- what do we know?

Title: **Aid for women's empowerment and gender equality – what do we know?**

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Abstract: Aid to women's empowerment and gender equality has existed for more than 30 years. This working paper discusses the current state of the art of such aid; what experiences that has been gained; and what new topics and challenges this work is faced with today.

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# Foreword

This report was commissioned by CARE, Norway, to assist them in their work on women's empowerment and gender equality.

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Marit Haug

Research Director

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# Summary

*Berit Aasen*

**Aid for women's empowerment and gender equality**

– what do we know?

Working Paper 2009:116

This paper is also published in a Norwegian version:

**Likestilling og kvinnerettet bistand – hva vet vi?**

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There has been a reviewed interest in aid for women's empowerment and gender equality globally, and also among NGOs. There has been a concern that women's situation has met with set backs in many countries; and that there is a need to reflect and refocus approaches and interventions, in order to achieve better results. This paper is commissioned by CARE, Norway, to contribute to a discussion on these issues.

The paper consists of four parts:

- The history and present situation of aid for women's empowerment and gender equality
- The arguments for such aid
- How organisations work with aid for women's empowerment and gender equality, and the risks and threats involved in such work.
- Women's empowerment and gender equality work in three policy areas:
  - Economic and political participation
  - Social development, including health and education
  - Emergencies and conflicts.

# 1 Empowerment of women – or social reform?

“We are proud of what we have done, but we are sure we can do better.”

Participant, Meta-Evaluation.

From CARE (2006a), *Meta-Evaluation : MMD (Mata Masu Dubara) Projects*. CARE-Niger.

## 1.1 Introduction

CARE Norway has asked for this paper to raise discussions and to communicate with the world outside CARE Norway. This paper will discuss what meaning the concept of aid for women’s empowerment may include; what new knowledge, rethinking and dilemmas are involved in this work; what demands will be put on how NGOs work in the field and in the headquarters (HQs); and what measures and documentations may be helpful.

The focus will be on NGOs and their work, but the discussion will be situated in the new aid agenda and new aid architecture with harmonisation between donors, country leadership and strong support to decentralisation strategies in partner countries.

Furthermore, the paper will be based on an understanding of gender as a relational concept, and gender equality as analysing differences and relationships between men and women. Being a relational concept requires that one analyses cultural and historical contexts, and social norms and institutions that govern gender-specific images and practices.

A relational concept also requires that one analyse the situation of both women and men, and the relationships between them, but also systematic inequalities. Social norms and institutions govern, and are influenced by, the behaviour of both women and men. Working with men is therefore also necessary when working with empowering women.

Gender inequality is also only one of several inequalities in society. The new concept of “intersectionality<sup>1</sup>” (coexistence and interaction) of the different inequalities, such

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<sup>1</sup> **Intersectionality** is a theory which seeks to examine the ways in which various socially and culturally constructed categories interact on multiple levels to manifest themselves as inequality in Working Paper 2009:116

as gender, age, minority, class, etc., raise special challenges for women's empowerment and gender equality (WE&GE). Studies using the concept and approach of intersectionality show that the different forms of exclusion or inequality do not necessarily just add on to each other, but create specific forms of inequalities, as well as responses to these inequalities. Including other dimensions of inequity also demonstrates that there are various groups of women with separate challenges and opportunities, and who encounter/experience different forms of social exclusion.

## 1.2 Background and concepts

(For a list of concepts see the last page of this paper which explains the concepts in the CARE Denmark's Guidelines for Gender Equality as a crosscutting issue. (2007)).

Women's situations differ tremendously across nations and people. History and tradition may explain some of the differences, as well as women's role(s) in production. Both material and socio-cultural factors influence the situation and the possibilities for change and improvement. It is important to note that change may well include a worsening situation for women, due to factors such as war and conflict, and environmental degradation such as desertification, and epidemics such as HIV/AIDS.

Women were only included on the development agenda with the advent of the discussion of participatory development and target group orientation in development aid in the 1970s and 1980s. However, as early as the late 1970s the approach to Women in Development (WID) was challenged, as researchers, policymakers and practitioners alike noticed that unless one also addressed gender relationships, WID could easily mean an added burden and workload for women, and gains achieved in one area might easily be levelled out with losses in another. Thus, Gender and Development (GAD) was born as a concept. With the GAD approach, the focus shifted from women-only projects to integrating the gender dimension and women's concerns into development programming and sector and project work.

In the 1990s, papers analysing the differences between women's *strategic* and *practical* needs were published. It was argued that the earlier WID approach had only addressed women's practical needs, while the GAD approach would emphasise women's strategic needs, i.e. changing power relations and women's situations in order to secure their rights.

Integration of gender analysis and of concern about women's access to project resources, as well as the impact on their social, economic and political situations was slow, but started to gain ground in the mid-1980s. This was also the time when both

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society. Intersectionality holds that the classical models of [oppression](#) within society, such as those based on [race/ethnicity](#), [gender](#), [religion](#), [nationality](#), [sexual orientation](#), [class](#), or [disability](#) do not act independently of one another; instead, these forms of oppression interrelate creating a system of oppression that reflects the "intersection" of multiple forms of [discrimination](#).  
From: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersectionality>

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NGOs and bi- and multilateral organisations developed guidelines, assessment tools and reporting systems that also included the women and gender dimension.

Four UN-organised global conferences on women and development have been held during this period, in Mexico in 1975, in Copenhagen in 1980, in Nairobi in 1985, and the Fourth International Conference on Women and Development in Beijing in 1995. Since 1995 no global conferences focussing on this issue have been organised. A number of expert meetings have been held however. The main reason for not organising global conferences is the danger that new conferences could represent a setback compared to the Beijing conference from the standpoint of the backlash against women's rights in many parts of the world; a major concern entails the protection of the advances made on reproductive health rights. However, it is also recognised that there is a general fatigue at global conferences, and disillusion about the results of these conferences when measured against all the work and resources put into them. This may also have contributed to the decision not to organise new global conferences on Women and Development.

In the aftermath of the Mexico conference in 1975 the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was formulated and adopted in 1979. Today 180 countries have ratified the convention, although several of the countries have done so with reservations.

During the Beijing Conference the double strategy of targeting women and of mainstreaming the gender dimension into all projects and programmes was confirmed. The message was that in order to improve the situation of women and achieve gender equality, it was necessary to mainstream W&GE concerns into all areas of development cooperation. The Beijing Plan of Action (BPoA) to guide countries' action and reporting was formulated, and countries report regularly to the UN on their progress.

Today there is a common global normative framework for international assistance to W&GE efforts in developing countries based on CEDAW, the work in the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and their work on scrutinising country reporting on the implementation of CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPoA).

To get mainstreaming to work, one has to have a clear vision of how to work with women's empowerment as a crosscutting issue. In mainstreaming work, which is still the most challenging part of good WE&GE efforts/work, women's empowerment needs to be reinstated as a goal, both up front in the programming, in reporting and in communication with the world outside the organisation.

Lately the concept of "gender justice" has been used, in addition or instead of gender equality. It is not an easy concept to define, but in this concept there is an acceptance that the concept of "gender equality" has limitations as a global concept. However, on the other hand most cultures have a perception and concepts relating to what is "just". By using the perception of justice and what is just, one is of the opinion that one may attain acceptance of women and their rights as part of a wider agenda for just causes, not necessarily on the grounds of men and women being equal. Martha Nussbaum, the well-known philosopher and women's rights scholar, writes about "capabilities", as abilities and skills that are to be accepted, and of which



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an agreement needs to be made in society concerning what is just and what is legitimate. Thus, it may be agreed that women may participate and have their rights acknowledged by the community which recognizes the women as citizens with rights to exercise their capabilities, to better their lives, and for the good of the greater community.

### 1.3 Women's empowerment and social reform

Work for women's empowerment has often been seen as aid targeting women. Income-generating projects or reproductive health projects focussing on maternal and child health have been two classic forms of women-oriented programming. This paper will not argue against such projects, but will broaden our understanding of women-oriented programming to "aid for social change that improves the situation for women". Improving women's position entails changing the society, and aid should produce results that can be measured in improved conditions for women. By empowering women, their resources and abilities will be put to better use. A gender focus needs both to fight for women's rights, and also to be argued for on the ground of its instrumentality.

Aid to empowerment of women is about contributing to social change that brings about better development, i.e. social reform and social justice. To empower women is to support social change that impacts both women and men, and where behaviour of both women and men needs to be addressed. Working on women's empowerment is therefore not only about working with women, but with all partners in society; both those who are champions for women's rights, and those who are barriers for women's rights, whether they are women or men.

This paper is about aid that has a goal to improve women's economic, social, cultural and political positions. CARE Norway calls this "kvinnerettet bistand" in Norwegian, literally translated *women-directed aid*, i.e. aid that is directed towards women. This however suggests interpretations: Does it imply that aid is targeting women through its input, i.e. women as target groups; or is it directed towards achieving results in the form of improved women's situation; or both? To find good concepts that communicate well is important, but also present a challenge. International development cooperation has made use of the term aid for "women's empowerment and gender equality" (WE&GE).

The concept of "women's empowerment" has been especially difficult to translate into Norwegian, but it has generally been understood as strengthening women's ability to control and master their own lives and situation; increased decision-making power, etc. The important point here is that the concept is about strengthening women and their ability to organise, and of their power and influence over their own life situations and that of their societies.

We will argue that today the main focus should be on aid that results in improved empowerment of women, improving their ability to take action and overcome barriers. Having a result-oriented management helps one to discuss the efficiency of an intervention. When the results hoped for are not achieved, one has to debate and

reconsider the interventions and approaches to better suit the political and social reality where an impact and change is desired. This is an ambitious agenda.

## 1.4 Recent evaluations of strategies for gender and development

Most aid agencies developed new gender strategies for supporting women's empowerment and gender equality (WE&GE) in the years after the Beijing conference. Recently these strategies have been evaluated (Sida 2007, Norad 2005). A review of several evaluations and new think-pieces on this topic concludes that national and international strategies, policies and institutions are now in place, but this has not been translated into practical work on the ground to the extent expected (Norad 2006). The focus on improving women's situations appears to evaporate when goals are to be operationalised and implemented. The findings also show that the energy and urgency of the process leading up to the Beijing conference disappeared in the years following the conference.

Gender mainstreaming as practiced often resulted in sidelining gender work, unclear goals and little analytical work. The challenge thus remains to put women's empowerment high on the aid agenda and make it visible throughout the programme cycle. It is also a challenge to document how empowering women contributes to social change and gives better results from the aid.

When the evaluations ten years later document that mainstreaming has not succeeded in delivering on its promises, and that the focus and energy on women's empowerment has been sidelined in the organisations and their programming, one has to ask what explanations and recommendations for future work are given. Should we just continue with more of the same, or should we do things differently? The answer is probably both. This might sound unconvincing. However, one should recognise that much has been done, and that results have been achieved in certain areas. What works well should be continued and improved upon by more systematic work and learning exercises. However, some things also have to be done differently, where one has not achieved the results one planned for. Having a result focus may actually help as a guide along the way, and will assist in showing when a change in practices is needed.

It should, however, be noted that WE&GE is much more accepted in development cooperation today than in earlier decades, and that substantial work has taken place. The problem is that this work is not systematic enough. Important opportunities are missed, and good learning foregone. Evaluations have also found substantial underreporting of good work actually carried out regarding WE&GE, indicating that work on WE&GE still does not generate/engender status and does not promote careers.

NGOs have always played an important part in raising the issue about improving women's situations. However, the language of women's empowerment and gender equality has not necessarily come from the NGO sector, but just as much, or more, from the UN and bilateral aid, where donors have build on their own national experience of WE&GE. When discussing NGOs' contributions to gender equality,

one needs to distinguish between advocacy groups for women's rights and development NGOs with a focus on aid and poverty reduction. While the former advocacy NGOs have been actively promoting gender equality, the latter NGOs have often been ambivalent to the language of gender equality and focussed on changing practices on the ground, in a situation where one has to adapt to, and work with, cultural traditions different from the ones in the donor countries.

## 2 Why aid to women's empowerment

Supporting women's rights and an inclusive citizenship is a goal in itself, but also instrumental in providing more effective aid.

In many countries women have not attained their proper citizenship, but are defined and restricted through their marriages, kinship relations, and community rules. During the last 20 years much progress has been achieved in the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and in national plans according to the Beijing Plan of Action (BPoA) for women and development, on which most countries report to the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), at UN/ECOSOC at regular intervals. Institutions, gender secretariats, have been established at the governmental level, and women's NGOs have been strengthened.

There is, however, still a large gap between these established institutions and realities on the ground, and rural areas are less affected than urban areas by these new institutions and legal frameworks. Civil society and organised women's groups need to reach further out into the rural areas; social institutions such as marriage laws and traditions, inheritance laws, etc. need to be addressed to improve the women's situations.

Women are also vulnerable in urban areas, as migrants and without the support provided by a wider network which they often have in rural areas. However, urban life for women both provides new opportunities and new challenges, and the urban lifestyle also illustrates how different life may be for different groups of women. Women's situations are also easily misinterpreted, based on prejudices. For example, it is commonly believed that women have little access to property in urban areas, and are dependent on their relationships to men. A study in Botswana found that more women than men were landlords and rented out housing. This calls for an empirical approach, and shows the need to analyse what the specific situation is, and how women relate not only to men, but also to their female landlords.

Women's movements are fragmented in many countries, and donor funds seem to contribute to a continued fragmentation. There has also been concern that donor fatigue seems to have resulted in declining funding of women's movements and organisations in the South during the last five to ten years (AWID 2006, 2007).

Given this situation the arguments for support to women's empowerment are twofold:

- *Rights-based approach*, women have the same right as men to have a voice, to participate, and to have access to resources.
- *Instrumentalist approach*, including women and empowering them will make development aid more effective. Women are important contributors to development, and have therefore to be included. Societies lose important resources by not including the women in development.

Both approaches are valid, and are strongest if both are used. Together they give the message that aid directed towards making women stronger will be more effective in reaching its goals, by ensuring that the individual woman can exercise the rights she is entitled to as a member of the human community.

There are concerns voiced about using only the instrumental approach however. If the focus is only what can be achieved by including women and empowering them, then there might be other ways to achieve a similar output, the critics state. Their concern is that an instrumental approach may only undermine the rights-based approach, and deny the women their rights. Giving support to women to fight oppressive gender norms, they claim, should be included in all good development aid, even if this is challenging and has to be done in a situation of contextualisation and cultural sensitivity. Both approaches also need to be grounded in an understanding of women as part of the community and situated in relation to other community members.

## 2.1 Women's empowerment, women's rights, and rights-based approach in development cooperation

Women's empowerment is about overcoming constraints to action, and improving access to decisions and resources.

CARE's own Strategic Impact Inquiry on Women's Empowerment has grouped the various dimensions of women's empowerment in three categories (Mosedale 2005):

- *Agency*: action and choice, and the resources that women draw upon for action
- *Structure*: the wider environment, such as marriage and kinship rules, access to markets and political representation.
- *Relational*: norms that guide what is legitimate behaviour

In another paper Sarah Mosedale (2004) makes reference to Naila Kabeers' (2005) work and defines women's empowerment as "the process by which women redefine and extend what is possible for them to be and to do in situations where they have been restricted, compared to men, from being and doing".

Working with women's empowerment therefore implies analysing "constraints to action", and developing women's agency, i.e. action and choice, and understanding how women's agency changes constraints to action. Field officers often point to women's empowerment as a process whereby the women take their place in society as citizens. Implied in this is the understanding that the woman has rights and duties as an individual, not only through her husband or other kinship relations.

Measuring women's empowerment is therefore about measuring how women overcome the constraints to action, how they behave in new ways, and that norms change to legitimate changing behaviour. CARE's own SII exercise summed up after one year's work was that the CARE supported interventions put much emphasis on the individuals' agency, "but relative little understanding of, and engagement with, the structural forces which constrain women" (Mosedal 2005:1).

This is a pattern common in many development projects; women are targeted and given training and credit, etc., but the more difficult issues about structural constraints, about power and norms are not addressed. Moreover these aspects will not be addressed unless the aid organisations are willing to work actively with this area, and invest time and resources in it. At the same time changing norms and rules cannot be done from the outside; it has to come from within. External partners have to work with change agents, and such work has to be context-specific, and implemented in a culturally sensitive manner. It has to come from within, but should be assisted by the work of aid organisations, and reflected in their planning, resource allocation, reporting, and training at both the country office and field levels.

The NGOs have different ways of implementing a rights-based approach. A study of several organisations' rights-based approach shows the differences between ActionAid and Care's work. While ActionAid has advocacy as a separate work area, and organises politically oriented campaigns, CARE has as a principle that their advocacy work be limited to what can be based on the programmes they are implementing. In the Norad organisational performance review of CARE (Norad 2007), the review team asks the question about whether CARE Uganda could not be more courageous, and make more visible the competence they have built up in their strategic activities. For the organisations to work more on strategic issues, it is necessary that they make a choice to do so, and invest time and resources in such work.

## 2.2 Rights-based approach for marginal and excluded groups

Rights-based approaches have focussed specifically on how to bring full citizenship to excluded and marginalised groups. This work has been concerned with identifying the "right holders", i.e. those who are excluded and by gaining citizenship have rights, and the "duty bearers", i.e. those who have the duties to act so that rights will be met; this is often the state or the public sector. In countries where women are excluded or marginalised, many other groups are often also facing a similar marginalised situation. This has made many organisations include work on gender equality into their overall work on fighting social exclusion and working on a rights-based approach in the interventions and programming. DFID, for example, for a period placed their gender work within their policy department to work on social development and exclusion.

Many researchers and practitioners have been concerned that although the rights-based approach is a good entry point for working with women's rights, there also need for a special focus on women and their specific forms of exclusion and rights. If not, the focus on women's specific situations easily disappears.

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These are real dilemmas that need to be approached in a sensitive manner. There is no easy solution for this, but contextual knowledge and dialogue with partners can at least avoid grave mistakes. Andrea Cornwall points to how gender is a relational concept, but that this is too easily forgotten, and the focus is only on women, and their situations. When looking at how women relate to other people in society, it is clear that she not only relates to her husband, but also to other relatives, both men and women.

### 2.3 Including men and working with men for women's empowerment

Women's empowerment projects should focus on changing structures of subordination and repression, and strengthen equality and rights. Women's organisations are not the only ones working on this; governments, professionals groups and broad social movements are also important as partners. Working with men to change men's perceptions and restrictions towards women has been identified as important elements of improving women's situations. This is an area where much remains to be done.

When Gender and Development (GAD) replaced Women in Development (WID) in the development practitioners' vocabulary, the expectations were high that gender differences and power relationships would be addressed. Both experiences and analysis document that this often does not happen, and that even if gender analysis is carried out up front, when interventions are planned and implemented, one too easily returns to traditional women's projects.

Experience has also shown, however, that in order to change traditions and perceptions embedded in social norms and institutions, interventions and programmes have to include men and address men's practices. There is, however, much confusion as to how one should and can involve men in programming for women's rights, and there is little systematic and comparative research on this. One has illustrative evidence that shows that involving men increases the legitimacy and decreases risks for women, both for the group of women engaged in programme activities, but it also reduces risks for opposition to the programmes from men and increases programme legitimacy in the community.

In Central and Latin America there has been a tendency for organisations fighting for women's rights to engage in a wider fight against social exclusion, and involving youth and marginal men in their target groups. In some organisations, working with women's rights, this has also led to a practice of including men in the management of the organisations. As these organisations are also looked upon as places for development of women's capabilities as leaders and managers, men have been recruited as staff and desk officers while women have kept the position as leaders.

### 2.4 Perceptions of women and the feminine

What a woman is – or what the perceptions from society are of what constitutes women and men – has considerable influence on the behaviour of both women and

men. Women, especially older women, are often the guardians of tradition, and thereby take on/assume the role as controller of behaviour of younger women.

The work of organising women often implies a focus on influencing the female arena, not the larger society. One example is the women's organisations in the church. In connection with the latest election in the Lutheran Church in Cameroon, it was discovered that there was no female candidate that stood for election, despite several decades of support to the women's organisation "Women for Christ". This experience changed the training programme, to develop leadership beyond leading the women's organisations, to be able to stand for election and take part in the leadership positions in the Church.

Women are linked to men as wives, but also as daughters, sisters and relatives. Women also relate to other women, and women are often seen as guardians of tradition. To change women's positions, one usually also needs to work with those women who oppose this; an example is FGM and traditional harmful practices.

Marriages are arenas for negotiations between the sexes, but research has also documented that marriages may provide more access to resources and security than has been acknowledged even in countries with high gender inequality.



### 3 How does one work with aid for women's empowerment?

If one accepts that working for women's empowerment entails working for social change, where women's situations improve, their rights increase, and that this contributes to more effective aid and a better society, this raises certain issues about how one should work. Firstly, it requires the organisations to be explicit on how to work on social change, how to work as change agents, and how to identify change agents as partners. Next, it also requires the courage to analyse problems and barriers, to identify these barriers, and raise them in the community and with local leaders, to "put the problems on the table" for discussion. However, it also requires sensitivity to the local situation and national context. Much may be learned from the analytical work done by the "drivers of change" studies <http://www.gsdr.org/go/topic-guides/drivers-of-change>, but it should be noted that these studies have lacked a proper gender focus, and have not discussed motivating factors/driving forces of change in relations to empowering women.

#### 3.1 Leadership and decentralised structures

To work effectively with women's empowerment and gender equality one has to address this at the headquarters (HQ) level, at the country office, and at the practical level on the ground.

The evaluations of bi- and multilateral aid have pointed to the need for the leadership and management at HQ to take a strong position on, and responsibility for, WE&GE, and that structures of accountability be built to hold the management responsible for this work. Proper reporting systems and management guidelines also need to be in place to avoid evaporation of policy goals in programming, practical implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Decentralised structures, both of devolving policy decisions to embassies or to country offices of Northern NGOs (NNGOs), might actually hamper strong focus on WE&GE.

Systematic analysis of how NGOs work on WE&GE are surprisingly few. Many of the articles on NGO experiences presented during the last few years are personal testimonies, and point to the difficulties expressed by the people involved in promoting WE&GE in their organisation. A common topic is the feeling of working on the margins, of difficulties in achieving a proper and central place for the work on women in their organisations; but also of unrealistic idealism and lack of ability to work with the organisational structures, instead of working against them (Oxfam et al. 2000, Rao et al. 2000, Raji 2000, Hernandez and Campanile 2000, Oxfam 2005).

The Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII) project of CARE (CARE 2006b) gives valuable insights into the difficulties involved in working with WE&GE in the various country contexts. It does however only to a limited degree link organisational structure and practices to impact analysis. However, it does point to the need for the individual organisation to develop a culture of critical inquiry (Mosedale 2005:3).

The practical level on the ground calls for sensitization to local context. Increasingly some NGOs are working with identifying problems and addressing them with the participation of relevant stakeholders. Both CARE Burundi (CARE 2006c) and CARE Tanzania have been working with the country office staff to be more daring in identifying and addressing the problems faced in the field of operations, such as early marriages in reproductive health programmes, and women's rights to access to land in natural resources management. Field staff are frontline people who are facing new opportunities for addressing new and difficult fields. In order not to shy away from addressing difficult rights-based issues related to gender and social inequality, they need to be properly trained, and to be supported by the organisation. Going outside the usual way of doing things requires courage and a culture where such behaviour is nurtured and supported by the organisation.

Partnership is an ideal that is much heralded; however, studies show that in practice a partnership is often shallow and limited, and that the NNGO is the strong partner in control of the funds and also dominates the programming (Lister 1999, 2001). While consultations with partners in the South are done to inform the NNGO on local context and thereby improve the relevance of programming, consultations often have the character of mere information. Some also raise the question of to what extent the local partner, if they are intermediary organisations for channelling funds down to community-based organisations, really are useful for providing access to information needed for proper needs assessments, themselves being removed from the local population. The question of what the NGOs/CSOs represent, and how they represent women and which women are still important questions to ask.

There is obviously a dilemma or tension here; local organisations restrict how much an NNGO may achieve or what issues it may raise (Norad 2007). Many NNGOs are programmed for social change, and it is exactly because they are not restricted by the community norms and rules that they may programme innovative and path-breaking work. At the same time NNGOs are dependent on local partners as change agents (Norad 2005). It is important to keep in mind that it is the local CSOs and their people who remain in the field when the aid intervention is phased out.

### 3.2 Risk and threats in the work for women's empowerment

There are two types of risks in the work with women's empowerment. The first is related to organisational sustainability and dependency; the other is related to threats received in the work that challenges existing social norms and practices.

Risk is closely related to the issue of sustainability, and exit strategies and phasing out of support to the organisations in the South. Support may always include some danger of dependency, which may undermine the organisation, rather than contribute to a capacity-building that leaves the organisations stronger after a

phasing-out period. Similarly external dependency may weaken the capacity of the organisations to get funding from other sources, and their very existence may be under threat if the activities they carry out meet too much resistance from society. In strengthening women's organisations and organisations working on women's right Northern NGOs (NNGOs) should work much harder on organisational strengthening and on stronger sustainability of the organisations.

Working on women's rights, women's reproductive health and empowerment of women in itself entails taking risks. This work will in many cases be met with heavy resistance from those parts of the population and their organisations that fight against social change and improved human rights. Engaging in WE&GE work may present risks for the people involved, and also for those people who are supposed to be beneficiaries of the projects. Risk assessments are therefore necessary, and should be followed up with risk mitigation strategies: how the project may be reoriented to deal with the risks, and especially how to build strong coalitions and partnerships that may mitigate risks, and protect people and interventions against risks. Guidelines for how to handle threats and negative sanctions should be developed.

One should keep in mind that gender equality and women's empowerment entail social change, and thereby challenges to the existing social order and possible increases in tensions and conflict. One should also have in mind that the local people involved are the ones who carry the burden of risks and threats, one should therefore always consult partner organisations in the South, and make actions dependent on decisions taken by those close to the burden. On the other hand, NNGOs may have an important role as "witnesses" and "protection" in situations of threats.

### 3.3 How do we see results?

Today development cooperation asks for documentation of results, and that planning should be results-based. NGOs are expected to work on indicators for success and achievements, but also take into account risks and threats in their planning of interventions. At the same time, it is recognised that it is difficult to measure impact on the ground of the new aid architecture with its harmonisation, joint financing and budget support. There are two areas of results reporting that are of special relevance: (i) country level monitoring; (ii) programme and project monitoring.

*Country level monitoring* is about monitoring how women's situations are improving or worsening at the national level, but should include a differentiation between different groups of women, in different geographical areas as well. One should keep in mind that some women's situations may deteriorate due to emergencies, conflicts, HIV/AIDS and entrenched poverty and social inequalities. Results reporting at the country level will include the effects of all interventions, both from the country itself and from donors. Country-level results reporting should, to the extent possible, be the work of institutions in the countries themselves, often with the assistance of bi- and multi-lateral aid agencies. However, NGOs may also play an important role in providing analytical case studies that support national monitoring. Country-level monitoring may assist in improved programming to better target topical or geographical areas. On the other hand, NGOs usually cover minor areas in a country, both thematically and geographically; what is needed therefore, is also more

collaboration and consultation between NNGOs and with their partners at the country level to be effective.

*Programme and project monitoring* is about monitoring the results from the programme implementation. This is difficult, as the SII exercise has shown (CARE 2006b). In the evaluation literature one distinguishes between *attribution*, when you can say that there is a causal link between your intervention and the results; and *contribution*, when one's intervention contributes to the results, but where it is difficult to document the result of the specific intervention alone.

To work on documenting results is important as part of the organisation's learning exercise, and is also important for reformulation of programmes to better reach their goals. Equally important as conducting results reporting is the management system built up around this, which may contribute to critical inquiry and effective learning.

Programmes need to know that they are contributing to results, that their programmes make sense to the problems they are addressing. There is a growing understanding that such programme monitoring has to include field staff, and the competence and capacity building of these. Monitoring has to relate to specific levels of decision-making, so that the programme and the organisation behind it develop adaptive planning that reframes and changes activities and direction of programmes and subcomponents when monitoring and evaluation show that results are not (forth)coming. Good programme monitoring on women's empowerment is important as a tool to keep the topic alive in the individual organisation. Good monitoring also assists in keeping a focus on results in this area, which may help programme implementation discussions to focus on results and to move beyond an activity-oriented focus.

Many organisations have poor knowledge about how they invest in women's empowerment. Today there is much focus on results reporting, but it may also be useful to know how much, and in what form, to direct interventions for empowering women and improving women's situation. One actually needs to know how to organise the targeting of women, with systematic use of gendered statistics, and how financing contributes to strengthening women's situation.

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## 4 Women's right and empowerment in some policy areas

### 4.1 Women's economic and political participation

The interventions for women's economic participation and improving their livelihood have been at the centre of much of the work to empower women, but the emphasis has shifted over time. Income-generating activities and microcredit have been important components. In the eagerness to give women improved access to economic resources, several major mistakes have been made in the past. Proper analyses of women's existing workloads have been missing, so that many programmes did result in a heavier workload for women. Good analyses of existing markets and opportunities have also been missing, and income-generating activities in many cases did take women away from valuable work, instead engaged them in "women-oriented production", home economics and tailoring, where there often was a limited market.

Generally, programming in this area has improved, and the savings and credit groups supported by CARE in Niger is a good example of how women in marginal and vulnerable areas can increase their share of the total value of their own production through these saving groups, by having more market control by relying on savings in difficult times (CARE 2006a). However, challenges for savings and credit groups still remain: how to make them sustainable, how to reform them into viable local financial institutions, and how to make a better impact on economic empowerment of women. Today the strongest value of the savings and credit groups in many countries is as an extended safety net, and not as a basis for increased productive activity and economic development.

Recent work in the livelihood field has also pointed to the need to see women's access to resources as a whole: to land, input, labour, credit and trust in a community. A women's position in the productive sphere is not only influenced by her relationship to the husband, but also to other family relations, such as siblings and other family relatives.

Initially one had great hopes that women's economic participation would translate into participation in decision-making. Today there is agreement that, although there often is a relation between these two, there is no direct correspondence. One has to actively support women's access to decision-making forums/fora. However, these have to be real decision-making forums/fora. There are several reports pointing out that women are tired of attending endless training sessions for empowerment.

Seminars and workshops of awareness-raising take them away from valuable time for productive activities, and are counterproductive if the women are not able to get into new arenas with their new skills. Empowerment projects therefore are often requested to include activities that may improve the livelihood situation of the women. For women the boundaries between strategic needs and practical needs are blurred.

Much progress has been achieved in the area of women's political participation; women now take part in party politics to a greater extent than before, and are better represented in local and national government. However, there are still few studies of the relationship between women's representation in politics and a gender-sensitive politics improving women's situation (Goetz and Hassim 2003).

Decentralisation reforms are taking place in many countries, opening up new political space closer to the ground. The implication of this is that NGOs have to work much closer with local government, and with the local governance systems that do include NGOs and CSOs, to raise the issues of women's empowerment, and to secure long-term sustainability of programmes and interventions.

Local government reforms also allow political arena for women from the NGOs to run for office, by making use of their organisational capacity. This is not unproblematic, but one should not shy away from this. The history of the Nordic countries shows a close relationship between the social movement and party politics, and that leaders moved from one arena to the other.

## 4.2 Women and social development

Social development, and access to education and health are seen as both important in themselves as rights, but also as instruments for improving economic development and political participation.

Social development is a broad area, and includes women's access to health and education and social services. In both bi- and multilateral aid there has been a strong focus on girls' access to education the last 10-15 years. NGOs have been used actively for piloting and innovation, to develop models whereby marginal and excluded groups of children, including female/girl children, may have access to schooling -- models that the government, at least to some extent, is supposed to build into the country's educational plans. The work of the NGOs has included service delivery and advocacy and lobbying activities.

In a time of public sector resource scarcity, NGOs also become important providers of social services. Education is, however, still overall a public responsibility, while health services are often provided by private facilities, faith-based organisations (FBO) or NGOs. NGO have played an important part in child and maternal health, including lobbying and advocacy and information campaigns. The NGOs also play an important role in mobilisation and information campaigns and "referral services" within reproductive health, family planning, child health and HIV/AIDS. The challenge is not to remain as only a service provider, but to move at the same time in the direction of working with advocacy and lobbying to secure women's rights and social change, including changing attitudes.

### 4.3 Women, emergencies and conflict

If women do not have enough protection in conflicts and war, this will have a negative impact on their economic and political participation. War, conflict and emergency situations weaken women's position. A gender approach with a strong focus on women's empowerment, participation and protection should be included into programming, both to understand the special situation of women, but also to more effectively target women and report the effects on women.

Situations of war and emergencies highlight intersectionality, i.e. how gender inequalities interact with other social exclusion and inequality dimensions. Not all women are equally vulnerable; one must therefore analyse the different groups' vulnerability and risk situation, and how women are especially vulnerable. This requires local context knowledge and local presence. In the work of integrating a gender perspective in situation and need assessments, it seems useful to extend the assessments to capture different vulnerable groups both in relation to gender, but also age, ethnic minorities, immigrants and other dimensions of difference and exclusions.

A separate area with many similarities to war and conflict is/entails natural disasters and catastrophes, and human emergencies in their aftermath. Humanitarian emergencies make women vulnerable, and experience has shown that women and men have different priorities and expressed needs in rehabilitation after emergencies. This has led to an increase in a gender approach to reconstruction and rehabilitation work.

Active work on violence against women is more recent. This includes several areas, including domestic violence, but is to a large extent linked to the global work on strengthening women's situations in war, conflicts and post-conflict situations. In addition, work on FGM and harmful traditional practices are classified as work on violence against women. Women's vulnerability to violence in conflict and emergency situations has come into focus in recent years, also as a result of the gender-based violence exercised by those who are supposed to bring peace, i.e. peace-keeping forces. Women are not only victims of war, and in need of protection. They are also active participants, as participants in peace negotiations and taking part in reconstruction and rehabilitation processes. However, they are severely underrepresented in peace negotiations and reconstruction. This is an area where both bi- and multilateral aid, as well as NGOs, have to make more efforts in securing the representation of women.

Women are also active participants in conflicts, both as leaders and soldiers. One estimate is that 40% of child soldiers in Congo are girl soldiers. This group has been severely disregarded in the work of governments, donors and NGOs alike in demobilisation and rehabilitation, which usually only have very few girls included in their programmes. An exception is the Pentecostal Church in East Congo, which has a 40% presence of girl soldiers in their demobilisation and rehabilitations programmes, and who are developing targeted and adapted programmes to rehabilitate girl soldiers.

The demand for more participation of women at peace negotiations, in planning for reconstruction and in rehabilitation programmes has met much resistance, often with the argument for the need for sequencing. It is argued that first the systems have to be in place, then one may start discussing the situation of women. There is a need to turn this argument around, and to improve on arguments for why women need to be included from the very beginning. The arguments for increased effectiveness and sustainability of programmes when women are involved need to be substantiated and argued for. The relationship between the arguments for protection and those for participation and empowerment need likewise to be explored. It is often easier to get the parties of a conflict to agree on the need for protection. Protection should then be used as an entry gate for a stronger women's presence and a stronger role in peace negotiations and post-conflict programming.

Integration of the gender perspective has been on the agenda for years, but has been difficult to implement in practice. This was the reason for the joint effort to produce the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000.

Violence against women has received a more prominent place in the gender-oriented work recently; this is a result of increased awareness of how vulnerable women are in these situations. It is also related to the situation of an increasing number of conflicts and emergencies, and documentation of these since the 1980s, when it became evident that one could not provide efficient humanitarian assistance without addressing women's vulnerability.



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## Annex 1: Terminology

(Taken from: Care Denmark (2007), *Guidelines for gender equality as a crosscutting issue*. Draft.)

With the aim of establishing common ground for the discussions of gender equality, the key terms used in these guidelines will be presented here.

*Gender* refers to the roles and characteristics that society ascribes to men and women respectively and, not least, the relationship between them. Gender must be differentiated from biological *sex*, which obviously creates differences between men and women, such as women's ability to give birth. Contrary to sex, gender is not a given from nature and is changeable over time according to changing social conventions. Such change in gender relations is affected by many factors, including women's struggles for women's rights.

*Gender equality* is the condition in which women and men have equal rights, equal access to resources, and equal influence on decision-making. Gender equality is not a condition of mechanistic sameness of women and men, but a condition that offers the same opportunities and conditions for both sexes to participate and contribute to and benefit from society.

*Gender equity* is a measure of "fairness" in addressing unequal gender relations. Gender equity measures are a means to achieving greater equality in the longer term. CARE supports and empowers women specifically to compensate for ingrained disadvantages for women. A widely used gender equity measure is to set quotas for women's participation, which must often be followed up with special support for women to enable them to participate fully.

*Practical gender needs* are the immediately perceived different needs of women and men for short-term changes that may improve their lives. In CARE's work, projects typically address women's practical needs for increased income through skills training, microfinance activities, etc.

*Strategic gender interests* are the longer-term interests of women and men for in-depth changes that will alter some basic conditions under which they live. Such interests are rarely formulated easily or expressed openly. Perceptions of strategic gender interests may differ between stakeholders and are sometimes in conflict with each other, requiring mediation and facilitation by CARE.

*Gender mainstreaming* can be defined as considering both men's and women's wishes, needs and experience in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and efforts. At all levels, an assessment of men's and women's rights, access

to resources and decision-making can provide guidance for mainstreaming efforts (from Danida's *Gender Equality in Danish Development Cooperation*, 2004).

*Targeted interventions* are those development interventions that have as their primary purpose to bring about “structural” changes in institutions, policies, practices, and relationships to promote gender eq