



awid women's rights

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Years



SID

Society for International Development

SID and the Association for Women's Rights in Development

Launch Development Vol. 55 'Gender and Economic Justice'

*On Thursday November 22nd 2012, the Society for International Development (SID) and the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) hosted the official Dutch launch of the special Development issue on gender and economic justice. Guest speakers **Lydia Alpízar Durán** (AWID executive director), **Ireen Dubel** (senior advisor Women's Rights. Hivos), **Han Deggeller** (Former Women Representative- Netherlands and member of WILPF) and **Wendy Harcourt** (Editor of Development) discussed gender and economic justice issues in the context of the post 2015 development agenda.*

Summary

After a short introductory film (a collage of images showcasing feminist movements, their protests and the plight of women in the developing world) Wendy Harcourt opened the launch thanking AWID and SID for their efforts and immediately raised the point that gender justice rights are not solely an issue in the developing world. Rather that the effort to develop/support/promote feminist approaches to gender and economic justice are also of vital importance in developed nations like the Netherlands. She continued that the discussion would cover the results and conclusions that were drawn from the AWID forum 2012.



The first speaker Lydia Alpízar Durán began by reciting a poem entitled 'A Revolutionary Woman' by Egyptian feminist Marwa Sharafeldin. Inspired by the Arab Spring movement, it highlighted the impact the global financial crisis has on daily life, the failure of financial institutions and the struggle many women face as a result. The message: Women are not adequately represented in the decision making process and economic marginalisation continues to affect the

progress of gender rights, equality and economic justice. Durán explains that the intention of the 12th international AIWD Forum was to 'explore how economic power is impacting women and the planet, and facilitate connections among diverse groups to contribute to stronger, more effective strategies to advance women's rights and justice'. Some of the aspirations that were named included: rebuilding a global feminist movement, recognizing social provisions as critical to economic systems, implementing an intercultural approach (reconnect with non-market based economics) and increase connections between feminist scholars, economists and activists. The focus on 'Transforming Economic Power' was chosen because women's rights groups do not deal with economic issues 'head on', and according to Durán this lies not for a lack of want, but with the inadequacy of the current economic system and the neo liberal theoretical framework through which it operates. Durán stresses that the most difficult factor is offering an alternative, and that only by facilitating change from all levels (grass root to national) and building a unified global feminist movement, real progress can be achieved.

Ireen Dubel structured her speech by giving her personal insights on the 12th AWID Forum first and then discussing the journal. Sticking to a similar line as

Durán, she called for rebuilding a global feminist movement stating “Feminism was about mobilizing women to reform power relationships between women and men”. She notes however, that the focus on formal equality has come at the expense of a unified transformative vision. The forum according to Dubel is a valuable means of expanding and ‘defactionalising’ the international feminist movement. In response to the journal, Dubel praises the in depth contributions, particularly because they also include self-critique. She highlights the disconnect between academia and what is happening on the ground. Concluding that the lack of an alternative to the hegemony of capitalism ultimately showcases the dilemma feminists have in influencing the post 2015 development framework.

As a member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Han Deggeler focused primarily on the role of women’s gender justice rights in terms of peace and security. She opened her speech by highlighting that, despite its economic fragilities, Greece still refuses to take cuts in its military budget. Instead, the government continues cutting into social budgets while nations such as Germany and France continue their role as major suppliers of arms. This cycle of supply and demand is according to Deggeler, a perfect example of the short comings of the neo-liberal capitalist system. She also argued that women are not adequately involved in the decision making processes of international security bodies such as the United Nations Security Council, particularly regarding matters such as preventing war, managing peace and building society post conflict. Deggeler reiterated the importance of formulating a unified feminist approach, and concluded that this would be the best way to increase the role of women in determining the discourse of gender and economic justice.

Following the discussion Wendy Harcourt summarized the main points of all three speakers; 1) the need to build a unified feminist movement at a global level 2) Using human rights approach as an ethical lens to judge economic policy and 3) increase connections between feminist scholars, economists and activists; to bridge the gap between abstract concepts and practical tools. The floor was then opened for the audience to ask questions.

One member of the audience posed the question how a (proposed) global feminist movement could pursue its agenda and position itself within broader civil

society without alienating other social rights movements? Durán responded that the relationship with international organisations such as the United Nations is difficult, as more often than not feminist movements are busy defending their interests instead of booking progress. Due to the lack of a unified agenda, engagements with other social rights movements remain convoluted and a lack of funding makes mobilization efforts difficult. Until a clear strategy is adopted, formulating a cooperative discourse remains complicated.

Another member of the audience added that the established patriarchal system negatively influences this discourse, highlighting that women’s rights groups are always expected to be the first to engage in broader social movements; confirming the unbalanced nature of the current cooperative framework. Instead of focusing on gender issues alone, feminist movements should engage in re - structuring the entire development framework.

In conclusion, Wendy Harcourt stated that in light of the 12th AWID forum, it has become clear that the formulation of a global feminist movement still faces any challenges. She added however that the issue of gender and economic justice is not a feminist responsibility alone, that cooperation with other social movements is also vitally important. By advocating for an alternative discourse that embodies an inclusive and cooperative framework, addressing issues of gender and economic justice could be realized. Solidarity is key.

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