

FEMINIST DEVELOPMENT POLICY: A PATHWAY TOWARDS FEMINIST GLOBAL COLLABORATION

This brief contains recommendations for practitioners of the international development sector to shift the status quo of development and move towards feminist global collaboration.



WHY THIS BRIEF?

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In Germany and other countries, a debate is emerging around the concept of a Feminist Development Policy. Will it be enough to merely frame international development as feminist to make it less unjust? We don't think so!

Rather than viewing feminism as an add-on or another mainstreaming item and a requirement we set for "others", let us seize this opportunity to create a visionary, transformative re-definition of development. Let us learn new ways of working together that are based on solidarity, anti-oppression (with regard to race, gender, ability, class etc), honesty and critical self-reflection.

The recommendations are based on conversations with [Shrishtee Bajpai](#), a researcher from the environmental action group [KALPAVRIKSH](#); [Saranel Benjamin](#), Head of Partnerships at Oxfam Great Britain; and [Professor Dr. Aram Ziai](#) who leads the department of Development Policy and Postcolonial Studies at the University of Kassel. What becomes clear from these conversations is that feminist development is not something that is only or primarily necessary "over there" but which practitioners and institutions in the Global North need to use to self-reflect and grapple with how they perpetuate systemic injustices.

“The feminism that I saw emerging in these spaces in the Northern INGO space was white feminism. It was not Black feminism. It was white feminism that articulated gender parity. Having equal status with men across the board on everything. It did not centre race or even have an intersectional analysis to experiences and struggles. As a result of that, it actually perpetuated and kept in this space, the white gaze of development.”

Saranel Benjamin



WHY DO WE NEED

WHY DO WE NEED THIS TRANSFORMATION?

The way development is understood today has been subject to scholarly and grassroots activist critiques almost as early as it was introduced in the 1950s. It has been criticised for being rooted on a colonial narrative, perpetuating racism, and depending on a single understanding of ever-increasing economic growth based on global resource and labour extraction. Presently, however, with the compounded effects of economic, food, energy and climate crises, the notion of moving beyond this narrative is gaining momentum. These growing movements are urging the development sector to critically self-reflect the ways it upholds power asymmetries and to explore the actual root causes of inequality which are increasing throughout the world.

Feminist global collaboration policy needs:

- A vision of racial and social justice
- To overcome power asymmetries on the global level and within our own institutions
- To be a critical tool and analytical intersectional lens to question the current ways of the international development sector
- To change the way the current economic system is, to one based on principles of sharing, reciprocity, and care
- To embrace Feminist Leadership in organisational culture

“To talk about developed and less developed societies is already an exertion of power: defining a universal scale and defining your own society standing at the top of it.”

Prof. Dr. Aram Ziai



THIS TRANSFORMATION?

RECOMMENDATIONS

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First of all, we encourage you to embrace and reflect on any discomfort that may arise when you discuss and research topics such as sexism, racism, colonialism, and white privilege, and to work through that discomfort to ultimately understand the impact of certain actions, even when your intentions are benevolent.

Individual level

The most vital step is for the individual to ask themselves how they can be part of transformation. We can all start by questioning and critically reflecting upon structures, perspectives, actions and even good intentions, which we take for granted.

- Ask your organisations to organise intersectional feminist workshops or trainings on anti-racism and privilege. As Saranel Benjamin said we need an intersectional feminist approach that wants to achieve racial and social justice.
- Question what concepts like “development” imply and normalise. Look into how power is held in this sector and how injustices are reproduced. There is great literature available from all over the world on this topic (see below).
- Ask yourself whether the policies being implemented actually benefit people living outside of Germany? Prof. Dr. Aram Ziai points out that many policies or projects prioritise improving the German economy rather than creating dignified jobs in sustainable and care sectors in recipient countries.
- Find your starting point - maybe start talking about the changes you want to see or start to connect to existing global feminist networks.

Institutional level

Genuine global feminist collaboration cannot happen overnight, it requires an all-encompassing process that needs to begin with organisations, academia, media and other sectors in the Global North looking inwards and working on change from within. For this, Feminist Development Policy approaches should not be an add-on but should be taken as a critical tool and analytical lens to question the current ways we work and thus with that every concept, project implementation and agenda setting.

- Invite people from the Global South, including LGBTQI+ and anti-racist activists, people with disabilities, local farmer associations (e.g. [Via campesina](#)), climate & environmental justice movements & Indigenous nations/ communities to be part of a [collective and collaborative process](#) of creating alternative imaginaries of e.g. the current economic system and of course agenda and budget setting.
- Move away from focusing on economic growth as an indicator of progress. As Shristee Bajpai said there are many different ways of defining and measuring a community's or society's wellbeing.
- Instead of a siloed approach of working next to each other by various ministries, it would be good for ministries such as the foreign ministry and development ministries to work together. All ministries need to adapt a feminist perspective, it cannot only be those whose work affects external actors.

“What [feminism] might look in development policy is changing the way our economy is. You learn from the women here in central India that economy cannot be something that is just based on profits. Economy has to be based on economy of share and care, of localized economy, of respecting rights of nature, other species in the forest. So, in very concrete terms, I think that's what emerges from people struggles or women struggles [...] which can inform the development aid policy.”

Shrishtee Bajpai





Cultural level:

Our internal organisational cultures tend to go unscrutinised, as the work of [FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders](#) points out. Yet working cultures that embody our stated values and goals are vital to fulfilling the missions we set ourselves as institutions.

- Change in HR policy: Ensure all staff members receive training on topics like [intersectionality](#), [white privilege](#), [classism](#), [decolonialisation](#) and [cis/heteronormativity](#) - especially country representatives - on a recurring basis (Trainers should come from diverse communities).
- Embracing [Feminist Leadership](#) in your organisational culture. Feminist Leadership at its most basic is a commitment to creating alternatives to traditional, hierarchical leadership and organisational cultures. It offers a means to analyse internal organisational structures and power dynamics, and to reveal systemic shortcomings.
- Reflect upon the norms and values you are currently cultivating and what culture you would like to create. Then go for it!

The ideas and practices introduced here are based on the episode “Feminist Development Policy: An introduction (1/5) - a pathway towards feminist global cooperation” featuring on the podcast series “[Our Voices, Our choices](#)” from the [Heinrich Böll Foundation](#) in collaboration with [FAIR SHARE of women leaders](#) and the members of a new emerging feminist network on feminist development policy based in Berlin. We will be publishing up to 4 more podcasts and recommendations briefs on the topics of intersectionality, representation, funding, and knowledge hegemony in the following weeks.

If you have any questions or would like to get in touch with us. You can reach out to Lisa Tatu Hey, Project Manager at FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders e.V., at lisa@fairsharewl.org

LITERATURE & LINKS

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5. Jason Hickel “The Development Delusion: Foreign Aid and Inequality.” 2017.
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8. Rachel Cargle “[When Feminism Is White Supremacy in Heels](#)”. 2018
9. Saranel Benjamin “[We can’t just say we’re ‘doing decolonisation’ and think we’ve done a good job](#)”. 2020
10. [The Rethinking Development Podcast](#)
11. Uma Kothari “[Feminist and postcolonial challenges to development](#)”

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