

**POVERTY HAS A FEMININE FACE.**

It is estimated that women and girls comprise 70 percent of the people living in poverty around the world. Women own less than 10 percent of the property in the developed world and only 2 percent in the developing world.

In line with Finland's rights based approach to development, gender equality is a goal in itself. Furthermore, an understanding of gender roles and the norms that guide actions of women and men, allows the reshaping of policy and interventions so as to achieve the desired development outcomes: economic well-being and social justice.

# ***Women and Gender Equality in Finnish Development Cooperation***



Nora Hemonen

**The aim of Finnish development policy and cooperation is to eradicate poverty and empower ordinary people – women and men, girls and boys – to strive towards economically, socially and ecologically sustainable societies. In light of Finland’s own experience, gender equality and equality between different socio-economic groups are seen as critical building blocks for development and in fighting poverty.**

## Gender equality and the Finnish context

The link between development – which provides benefits for all men, women and children in impoverished societies – and women’s empowerment is explicitly made in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG), adopted by all UN member states in 2000. Goal number three aims to promote gender equality and empower women, but due to the feminization of poverty, *investing in women and girls is a necessary strategy to achieve all of the MDGs.*

Finland was the first country in the world to extend universal suffrage and the right to stand for elections to all women and men – it did so in 1906. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, women and men secured equal rights to education, private ownership and inheritance. This led to transformations in the social structures and today *the egalitarian nature of Finnish society is widely heralded as the bedrock of Finland’s well-being and economic success.* Thus gender equality is a core Finnish value. It is enshrined in the Constitution of Finland<sup>1</sup> and, more specifically, in the Act on Equality between Women and Men (Equality Act)<sup>2</sup>, which makes it the duty of every government official to uphold and implement gender equality.

<sup>1</sup> Suomen perustuslaki 731/199

<sup>2</sup> Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta 609/1986

This core value of gender equality is also integrated into Finland’s development policy and cooperation. The promotion of the rights and the status of women and girls and the promotion of gender and social equality are cross-cutting objectives in Finnish development policy and cooperation. *Gender equality is promoted through mainstreaming, targeted actions and political dialogue.* Mainstreaming is conducted throughout all policy and organizational objectives, projects and operational plans, as well as implementation, monitoring and evaluation. An important aim of political dialogue is partner country ownership of gender equality and development. In this the multilateral system, the role of which has now been consolidated through the establishment of UN WOMEN, is also important. Furthermore, the EU and OECD are essential platforms for Finland for promoting gender equality.

## The impact of equal education

Getting girls to go to, and stay in, school has a strong positive impact on development. Educated girls are likely to marry later and have fewer children, who in turn will be more likely to survive and be better nourished and educated. *Education expands the horizon of possibilities for girls and women.* As a result they can better support and protect themselves and get more opportunities to contribute to the social and economic well-being of their families and societies.



Matti Reimes

# Solutions to poverty can have a feminine face

## Economic empowerment

Women are important stakeholders in society and the economy, as *decision-makers, entrepreneurs and consumers*, in working life as well as in households. *Gender equality in the economic arena is paramount to economic well-being and development*. The full potential of women's capabilities remains largely untapped. This is inefficient as increased earnings and economic participation are connected to reduced poverty and faster growth. Society as a whole, children, men and women, will benefit from the economic empowerment of women:

- Women's economic participation and their *ownership and control over productive assets speeds up development*, helps overcome poverty and reduce inequalities, and improves children's nutrition, health and school attendance.
- Women usually invest a higher proportion of their earnings in their families and communities.
- In order to achieve development goals and fully develop their productive assets, women need to be *given access to the full range of credit, banking and financial services and facilities*.

## The digital divide

*The potential for ICT to break down barriers to knowledge, political participation and economic opportunity is vast*. People given access to these tools are empowered. The rapid technological transformation has already created a gap, a digital divide, between those with ICT capacity and access, and those without. Therefore it is clear that ICT is not gender, income, status or age neutral. It impacts men and women differently and in almost all cases women have less access to, and use of, the new opportunities provided by it. *Development interventions can help overcome the digital divide by empowering women and men who have previously been excluded or marginalized in society*. Finland strives to ensure that this potential is exploited in all planning and execution of projects and programmes related to ICT.



## Natural resources, climate change and gender

It has been estimated that 70–80 percent of all food in Africa is produced by women. Women are responsible for much of the food producing agriculture on the other continents too. Men also have their gender-specific tasks in each society. Traditionally men have the ownership of land and they make decisions on investments. Women's right to own, control and inherit land and other assets is one of the key questions in sustainable use of land and natural resources.

Finland considers important to build gender equality, as an objective as well as a tool, into programmes aimed at improving livelihoods and agricultural production, better forest management or more efficient energy sources.

## Trade at Hand – business opportunities on your cell phone, Liberia<sup>3</sup>

As part of the *Aid for Trade* activities of Finland the "Trade at Hand – business opportunities on your cell phone" project aimed at enhancing the market access of female entrepreneurs through the use of mobile phones. *The main Liberian food suppliers, market women and smallholder female farmers, are connected through mobile phone services so that supply and demand can coincide*. Sales offers regarding staple crops of rice, cassava, plantain and palm nut etc. are now made via SMS. The project improved the income of farmers and market women and inspired them to explore other ways to utilize these innovative methods.

<sup>3</sup> This project was done in cooperation with the Liberian Ministry of Commerce & Industry and the International Trade Centre (ITC).





## The hand that sows the seeds...

*Gender inequalities limit agricultural productivity and efficiency and affect the distribution of resources between men and women.* The 2010 “Development Policy Guidelines on Agriculture and Food Security”<sup>8</sup> emphasizes the need to pay particular attention to women’s role in agriculture and ensure that women and girls gain access to education as well as training and advice in domestic science and agriculture. *Concerted efforts should be increased to enable women to move beyond production for subsistence and into higher-value, market-oriented production.*

## ...collects the wood...

Forests are important for rural families. Women use the forests for fuel wood and for medicinal plants, nuts and fibres as well as other non-timber forest products. *Any activity related to a forest is likely to have an impact on women and their families’ lives.* The 2009 “Development Policy Guidelines on Forestry”<sup>4</sup> underlines the importance of the *rights of women to own land and participate in all decision-making with regards to forests.* In forest programmes that Finland has recently initiated jointly with the governments of Kenya and Nepal, the aim is to integrate gender equality aspects widely into forest management and facilitate the voice of women being heard in those processes.

## ...manages the water.

Women look after the water needs of their families in many societies. *Finnish water and sanitation programmes actively promote local ownership by engaging women and men to participate in the planning of local projects.* The aim is to

<sup>4</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

take cultural factors into consideration in the project planning, management and maintenance. Democratic decision-making at the village level is encouraged: women and easily marginalized groups are given special attention in the implementation of the projects. Communities are encouraged to create their own development plan. *This democratic approach facilitates work in conflict areas through forging trust, which is also the base sustainable outcomes can be built on.* Good examples of this approach are the projects jointly conducted by the governments of Finland and Nepal in Mid and Far Western areas of the country.

## Gender and climate change

Women, as those responsible for nutrition, providers of energy and water, have firsthand knowledge on the impacts of climate change in their surroundings. They have knowledge on ways to cope with these impacts too. Women are powerful agents of change in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Women’s voice is important in climate related decision-making at the local as well as at the international level. Finland has made it a climate policy priority to promote the issue of gender and climate change. This work takes place through the international climate negotiations process (including UNFCCC<sup>5</sup>) as well as in the Finnish bilateral cooperation with partner countries in the areas of agriculture, forestry, water, energy, environment and other natural resource related activities.

Finland has been actively promoting and supporting the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA). The goal of the GGCA is to ensure that climate change policies, decision-making and initiatives at the global, regional and national levels are gender responsive. Finland has supported the establishment of a women delegates fund (WDF). It finances women delegates from the poorest countries to participate in the climate negotiations. Activities at country level are also supported to ensure that gender aspects and women’s participation are taken into account in National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

<sup>6</sup> The FOMEVIDAS-programme is done in cooperation with the Rural Development Institute of Nicaragua.

## FOMEVIDAS – rural development project in Nicaragua<sup>6</sup>

The FOMEVIDAS-programme in Nicaragua aims at improving the income level of poor rural families and the situation of local families through increasing and diversifying the production and marketing of agricultural products, beekeeping and fruits. Women and men get training and education that enables them to participate in these activities. Some women have started their own co-operatives which gives them a possibility to receive funding from the banks and in the future sell their products directly to consumers. Through local ownership and empowerment FOMEVIDAS has created the conditions for the sustainability of the programme.

## Twinning: Kenya's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325

In June 2009 the Governments of Kenya and Finland entered into a twinning process on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. The twinning process aims to develop Kenya's national action plan on UNSCR 1325 as well as to facilitate Finland's 1325-related activities to be more efficient and focused. The process is mutually beneficial.

### Women, peace and security

Finland's development policy stresses a wider security concept which is based on the links between security, development and human rights. *Peace is a precondition for development and egalitarian development is a precondition for sustained peace.*

UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 "Women, Peace and Security" was passed in 2000 reaffirming the need to empower and protect women through enhancing their role and decision-making capacities with regard to conflict prevention, resolution and peace building, and to significantly improve factors that directly influence women's security.

In 2008 Finland's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 was launched. Finland recognises that stable societies can only be achieved when inequalities are reduced and women can join the efforts for peace on an equal footing.



Nora Heinonen

### Sexual and reproductive health and rights

The realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights means that everyone has the right to health and to make decisions on matters pertaining to their sexuality. Furthermore, everyone has the right to decide whether or not to have children, and if so, how and when. *Unplanned pregnancy and childbirth are the biggest causes of death among adolescent girls in many countries. Only healthy women and men can contribute to economic development.*

- Finland emphasizes the right of adolescents and young people to services and information on sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Sexual and reproductive health should be included in every country's primary health care services.
- Highlighting men's responsibility in matters pertaining to sexual and reproductive health and rights and participation make the results even more effective.

Finland supports the Family Federation of Finland which, together with IPPF and the Nepalese family planning organization FPAN, works to improve sexual and reproductive services in the Nepalese countryside. Special attention is paid to the needs of young women and girls. The main goal is to change the attitudes of village communities towards positive norms to sexual health and gender equality. Trained young volunteers spread information in their villages and provide health services. They also arrange street theatre, song contests and discussion groups which cover issues related to sexual health.



YWCA



In 2009 President Tarja Halonen of Finland and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia hosted the Colloquium for Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security in Monrovia, Liberia. The Conference sought to create an environment for women leaders around the world to discuss, learn, demonstrate and act on the benefits and lessons learned from one another.

## Political leadership

Women's participation as equals in society, including the political process and decision-making, is an inherent requirement of democracy.

### Women in parliaments

In 1997 12.0 percent<sup>7</sup> of all parliamentarians in the world were women; in 2010 the proportion of women in legislatures has grown to 19.2 percent<sup>8</sup>. The introduction of *gender quotas in party lists and parliamentary seats, the determined efforts of the international women's movement, multilateral conventions and institutions as well as the growing economic empowerment of women have been among the factors leading to this positive development*. More attention has to be paid to how women can be included in the local decision-making structures.

<sup>7</sup> source: IPU, Jan 1997

<sup>8</sup> source: IPU, Nov 2010

## Women as decision-makers in Finland

In Finland the president, prime minister and 11 of the 20 ministers are women<sup>9</sup>. 43 percent of Finnish parliamentarians are women. The Finnish Act on Equality between Women and Men contains a gender quota provision of 40 percent in the nomination of State committees, advisory boards and other corresponding bodies as well as municipal bodies with the exception of municipal councils. Finland as a nation continues to strive towards greater equality.

In development cooperation, Finland supports women's participation in political dialogue, for example, through training of female parliamentarians in Afghanistan and the Gender and Governance Programme in Kenya.

<sup>9</sup> source: Online archive of the Finnish Government, Feb 2011 (<http://www.valtioneuvosto.fi/hallitus/jasenet/en.jsp>)

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