

Feminist Development Alternatives

An overview

Many feminists based in the UK feel frustrated as we lurch from one political 'moment' to another. Our work is constrained by the parameters of organisational mandates, funding trends or political agendas; our time is spent convincing colleagues of the importance of gender equality rather than stepping out into the real world to build alliances. The Feminist Alternatives Project has come as a breath of fresh air, allowing us the space to consider what is really important, to listen deeply to the views of others and to accept invigorating challenges to the assumptions we hold. We hope you find the papers we have collected here as inspiring as we do.

1. Why do we need feminist alternatives?

Twenty years after the groundbreaking Beijing Platform for Action, gender inequality persists in every country in the world, and abuses of women's and girls' human rights are pandemic. While 'women and girls' may be high on the international development agenda, creating individual opportunities has been the primary focus. International institutions, governments, philanthropists and INGOs have failed to tackle the structural causes of gender inequality and its intersection with other inequalities, to acknowledge the role of current macroeconomic policies in perpetuating gender injustice, or to promote women's and girls' rights and enable them to shape their own lives. The need for feminist alternatives is clear.

2. The Feminist Development Alternatives project

The Gender & Development Network's (GADN) Feminist Alternatives Project was created in response to our members' desire to improve the effectiveness of their organisations in achieving gender equality and women's and girls' rights, and to understand better the alternatives that are promoted by feminists globally.

This project has evolved over a number of years and has encompassed an international online discussion and many internal debates and papers amongst GADN members, their southern partners and other allies. It became clear that a single paper, peppered with caveats, was not the way forward so we decided to produce a collection of papers allowing the project to encompass diverse perspectives. While the contributors were given unique briefs and varying amounts of time in which to produce

their papers, the daily rate for each has importantly been the same. We are also excited to include a paper set in the context of promoting feminist alternatives in our own country, the UK, in recognition of the fact that these debates are as relevant in our own backyard as they are elsewhere. These contributions are just the start; indeed, we do not pretend that they are anything more than a rather arbitrary collection of feminists whose work we admire. We hope that this modest beginning will inspire others to add their contributions.

3. The papers

All the papers in the collection stress the multiplicity of feminism, the importance of intersectionality – the different ways women experience power depending on their race, geography, class, disability and sexuality, and the need for collective solutions and collective action by women to dismantle structural inequalities. There is also optimism throughout the papers about resurgence and vitality of the feminist movement and its ability to achieve change. The papers, which are outlined briefly below, cover a variety of topics while sharing a few central themes and goals.

Aspiring to alternative feminist societies

This first paper is the culmination of the discussions within GADN and with our partners and allies. It draws out some common underlying values in different visions of alternative feminist societies, and goes on to imagine what elements of a feminist society might look like, based on the long-standing goals of feminist movements outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action's Areas of Critical Concern.

Other papers in the collection examine routes to achieve such alternative feminist societies, prompting development practitioners – and particularly those in the Global North – to reflect on our own roles and practices in current power structures, and to understand the redistribution of power not just from men to women, but also for example from North to South, as a key enabler of transformative change.

Building feminist alternatives for development

Authors Neelanjana Mukhia and Nancy Kachingwe, based in India and Zimbabwe respectively, explore the role of neoliberalism, built on global economic inequality and class, race and gender oppression, in perpetuating gender inequality and undermining women's rights from a southern feminist perspective. The paper highlights the intersectionality of discriminations and oppressions before ending with a note of hope for future, re-politicised, feminist projects.

Feminist alternatives on the streets, in the fields, in alliances

Tica Moreno's paper shares examples of three areas in which the Brazilian women's movement is putting feminist alternatives into practice and, in so doing, challenging dominant economic models and patriarchal structures. The paper provides concrete possibilities from Brazil to inspire and energise women's movements around the world.

A feminist strategy for a caring and sustainable UK economy

The UK Women's Budget Group is a feminist collective of economists, policy experts and activists. In their paper, the WBG's members demonstrate how to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Plan F, as they call it, details proposals that the UK government can and should implement in order to achieve an economy that improves wellbeing in ways that reduce inequalities today and in the future.

Feminist alternatives to the development paradigm

The paper by UK-based academics Tina Wallace and Fenella Porter looks at gender and development policy and practice in the UK in the context of prevailing development discourse and funding modalities. They outline principles for a feminist approach to programmes and evaluation, and finish with examples of feminist work that successfully addresses women's lack of voice, power and representation.

Funding equality: donor trends and women's rights organisations

Lumba Siyanga brings home the findings in Wallace and Porter's paper by describing the kind of work her organisation, Women for Change, could do in Zambia with the right kind of resources. Transformative change and empowerment require continuous planning and careful engagement, and this comes at a price.

Supporting change where it happens: the critical role of feminist movements

Finally, Zohra Moosa of the women's fund Mama Cash looks at the importance of feminist movements to achieving social change, and the role of women's funds as the fundraising arm of the women's movement, supporting those at the forefront of challenging, deep-rooted gender equality – often at great personal risk.

4. What next?

GADN is grateful to all those who have contributed, both to this collection of papers and to our previous discussions. For us, the next step is to debate these papers and their implications for our work – both that of the network and of our members. We warmly welcome comments and contributions to this discussion, which can be posted in an online forum, which can be accessed via the Feminist Development Alternatives section of the GADN website: <http://www.gadnetwork.org/development-alternatives>

We are also linking our website to AWID's Feminist Propositions for a Just Economy discussion. You can find the link here: <http://www.awid.org/feminist-propositions>

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Feminist Development Alternatives

This project bridges the gap between current policy, programmes and donor thinking and alternative visions for gender equality. Our objective is to promote alternative agendas for women's rights and gender equality, identify solutions to problems with women in the Global South and develop strategies to promote these alternatives.

Disclaimer

GADN produces a series of background briefings for use by our members and others. These are produced by the Secretariat in consultation with our Advisory Group and relevant Working Groups. They do not necessarily represent the views of all our members.