



**NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS WITH  
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS  
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

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**EIGHT WORKING THESES DEVELOPED BY THE  
LATIN AMERICAN FEMINIST AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT  
FOR THE DEBATE ON DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS**

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As a result of the debate on the contributions by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to development, advanced in the framework of the *National Consultations with Civil Society Organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean*, it was agreed that a specific text would be prepared on the particular challenges confronting women as central actors in CSOs, for their inclusion in the benefits from such development. In general there is a very well-developed discourse on the deficiencies, from a feminist and gender perspective, of public policies and of cooperation for development. However, there is little debate set forth on the difficulties and deficiencies confronted within CSOs when efforts are made to include women and to empower them to demand their rights and realize their potential.

The following eight working theses are proposed, taken from the synthesis of the national consultations, to promote debate on women's place and the conditions in which they function in the search for development effectiveness. This is not a finished text, nor does it pretend to be exhaustive. Rather, it is a contribution to the discussion to be re-addressed in the spaces offered by the Open Forum:

1. Women's rights and gender equality: a superior objective of development
2. Women: key actors in democratization and development processes
3. Feminism: an avant-garde cultural proposal
4. Feminist and women's movement: important national and international actor, however not always present at the local level
5. Reproduction of patriarchal practices: a challenge within CSOs
6. Strengthening women's organizations: a criterion for development effectiveness
7. Public policies for women's equality and empowerment: a pending task
8. An effectiveness and efficiency criterion for International Cooperation for Development (ICD): the inclusion of indicators for strengthening the role of women as citizens and the work of women's movements and organizations within a citizen framework

### **1. Women's rights and gender equality: a superior objective of development:**

The women's and feminist movement has been able to establish women's equality and respect for their human rights as a central component in democracy and development. A number of international instruments establish these rights and urge governments and societies to guarantee respect for them. The development effectiveness agenda cannot be distanced from these commitments.

Colombia<sup>1</sup> clearly expresses this concern in its conclusions: "the starting point for consensus is the need to recognize that the focus of the work of any social organization must consider the challenges of equality between men and women, if the objective is truly to advance toward more sustainable development and more democratic societies. Development, democracy and overcoming poverty are not possible without achieving equality between men and women. Working 'with' women is not enough, if women's 'empowerment' is not guaranteed."

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<sup>1</sup> When a country is mentioned in this text as responsible for a textual quotation, reference is being made to the contents of the respective report from the *National Consultation on the Effectiveness of Civil Society Organizations in Promoting Development*.

In order to assure that women's rights are respected, so that women can experience and demand their rights, it is fundamental to create the conditions for women's genuine economic, physical and political autonomy. As defined in the *Observatorio de la Igualdad de Género de América Latina y el Caribe*: "Women's autonomy in private and public life is fundamental for guaranteeing the exercise of their human rights. The ability to generate their own income and to control assets and resources (economic autonomy), to have control over their bodies (physical autonomy), and their full participation in the decisions affecting their lives and women overall (autonomy in decision-making) are three pillars of gender equality and joint citizenship."

Only to the extent that there is recognition, as expressed by Argentina, that "no project is neutral in terms of gender—it is mentioned or it is not mentioned as an objective," will it be possible to analyze and measure the impacts on women's rights and gender equality. In fact, Chile expressed the following: "women continue to be the most disadvantaged in terms of development; gender inequality has not been eradicated, not even in the most developed countries."

Colombia calls attention to the fact that "using the discourse of 'effectiveness' in an environment in which the topic of gender equality has not been established can lead to intensifying discrimination instead of eradicating it."

## **2. Women: key actors in democratization and development processes**

Women have played an outstanding role in the struggles against dictatorships and in the subsequent democratization processes, participating in both women's and human rights organizations, and in promoting a culture of rights. In the case of Chile, for example, "it is recognized that the women's agenda influenced the political cycle of 20 years of governments of *Concertación*." In this regard Silvia Camurca stated in the *Diálogos Consonantes 2008* meeting that the women's movement "contributes to the renovation of our political culture with new forms of organization, new expressions of struggle, new forms of producing critical knowledge regarding society."

According to the Declaration from the Forum of Feminist Organizations in relation to ECLAC's 11<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference on Women in 2010, women's organizations still need to confront and overcome enormous challenges in the region, in order to reduce the social, economic, political and cultural gaps faced by women. Taking into consideration the regional panorama, it is impossible to accept the militarization of citizen security and the increment in military budgets to the detriment of public spending dedicated to the well-being of persons—sounding an alarm in relation to the increasing criminalization of the struggles waged by social movements as they defend rights and exercise political opposition. The women's movement identifies violations of the separation between the State and religion—which impede women's autonomy over their bodies and lead to women's limited political participation and limited access to positions of power.

At the same time, in each country, in grassroots and community organizations and in social movements, women have served as a pillar of development processes. They do so through numerous roles: as those directly carrying out these processes, as participants in formulating public policies, as those channeling resources in favor of the poorest, and through many other roles. Numerous studies agree that the resources administered by women tend to be more effective and efficient in achieving results.

The current hegemonic development model, particularly in relation to the environment, reveals a predatory, patriarchal, racist logic based on commercialism. This model promotes agribusinesses and monocultures, thus violating the rights of indigenous peoples and communities, African descendants, rural and *campesino* populations to their lands and territories. And within these populations, women are the most vulnerable. Natural disasters, such as the earthquake in Haiti, reveal the profound social and gender inequalities in this hegemonic patriarchal model (Declaration from the Forum of Feminist Organizations, ECLAC).

Even in the especially adverse situations in which CSOs are involved, the central role played by women is acknowledged. Honduras states: “women’s organizations that continue to fight for the decriminalization of abortion are also among those most severely questioned and threatened. Nevertheless, it is notorious that the main voices and leaderships in autonomous civil society are women.”

Uruguay states that the current context places women’s CSOs as primarily organizations that are carrying out programs and policies formulated exclusively by the government, without participation and reflection by the rest of the actors involved. This role of carrying out policies has limited and weakened the current role of women’s CSOs, and has significantly limited their innovative capacities and their autonomy in actively promoting the inclusion of new issues that would make it possible to expand the perspective on development as a matter of rights. At the same time, this limits the role of CSOs in monitoring public policies.

### **3. Feminism: an avant-garde cultural proposal**

The Feminist Movement has been a central cultural actor in the struggles against authoritarianism and a patriarchal culture, and in the struggle for equal, constructive relationships among people. This is a value that is generally acknowledged as one of the major contributions to the advancement of humanity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the conclusions from the Open Forum in Venezuela, it is pointed out that “the gender perspective also helps to organize thought and action on the consequences that a policy has on diversity and the needs expressed in this diversity.”

In the framework of the *Diálogos Consonantes* meeting, Lilian Celiberti states: “feminism contributes a perspective that does not separate repercussions for people in relation to economic and cultural elements and freedom.” Along the same lines, the following is expressed in the Declaration from the Forum of Feminist Organizations in relation to ECLAC’s 11<sup>th</sup> Conference on Women in 2010: “The actions of women’s and feminist movements have been crucial for bringing to public debate the oppression and discrimination resulting from societies that are anti-democratic, sexist, racist, classist, lesbophobic and homophobic.”

Women’s agenda, Chile states, has permeated men’s agenda, and has opened up a debate on the contents of the agenda based on equality and recognition of rights, conciliation between family and work, co-responsibility, children’s rights, the use of time, due recognition of time dedicated to tasks of caretaking, and other areas.

As Argentina recalls: “Patriarchy is present in our culture, and as both men and women, we must fight it. We have to change the overall system. In this sense ‘gender equality’ and ‘development effectiveness’ are at the same level, and provide mutual feedback. This is why we talk about a feminist agenda, not a women’s agenda, because feminism is a political project.”

#### **4. Women’s and feminist movement: important national and international actor, however not always present at the local level**

In our current world, if we want to orient ourselves toward peace, fairness, sustainability, and democracy—at the level of each individual country and also globally—the presence of women as social, cultural and political actors is urgent. It is necessary that the women’s movement in general and feminist movements in particular fulfill roles as significant actors, not only at the global level, but also at national and sub-national levels. And in order for this to take place, it is necessary to develop conditions and environments that are much more favorable than those currently present.

The conclusions from Argentina state: “The women’s movement is among those that have achieved greater crosscutting among social movements at the international level and in general. However, their proclamations and demands are not reflected in concrete practice and in concrete exercise of women’s rights at the local level.” The international legal framework is very strong, and is “brought down” to national legislation in each country, but this legislation is not really “owned” or even known by women, and even less so, by overall society, and is not frequently implemented.

One of the most notable characteristics in women’s movements and in feminist movements is the enormous wealth of cultural diversity. It is important that this diversity be preserved and promoted. According to the report from Columbia: “it is also important to recognize that women are also diverse and have enormous diversity as a group of human beings. The differentiated perspectives for working with women are also an ethical and methodological necessity.”

It is necessary that both those providing International Cooperation and governments promote the innovative and creative capacities of organizations. It is necessary to have economic continuity in strengthening processes, and not only isolated products, in order for organizations to advance. To this end it is also necessary to review CSO practices, in order to revitalize pure activism.

#### **5. Reproduction of patriarchal practices: a challenge within CSOs**

One of the most important challenges to confront is the reproduction of relations of discrimination and subordination between men and women—inside civil society organizations. Currently, the “strengthening of CSOs” must necessarily pass through an analysis and visualization of this situation. Argentina states emphatically that it is important to avoid reproducing within CSOs the discrimination, subordination and exclusion of women present in patriarchal society.

While in their discourse, CSOs state their commitment to “the consolidation of equality in terms of gender, sexual option, age, ethnic groups, indigenous peoples and religions,” in practice these principles are particularly directed at actions toward the outside, and are demanded in relation to other social actors and particularly the State, but they are not necessarily used as a criterion for evaluating the coherence of the actions within these organizations and in their own projects. A number of countries, during their deliberations in the framework of the Open Forum, affirm the need to establish in the CSO agenda a discussion on their daily responsibility in the reproduction of patriarchal relations, and preventing this responsibility from falling exclusively on women’s organizations, but rather respecting and strengthening women’s organizations as strategic allies for understanding and promoting this responsibility.

In order for cooperation for development to be effective, Ecuador proposes re-thinking the issue of gender at the level of grassroots organizations and not only in public policies and international cooperation. Venezuela delves more deeply into this matter and concludes: “the gender perspective, as a daily action of CSOs, is a challenge for actions and a guarantee of equality in development, making intervention more effective, with diversity as a key reference point for development.”

Venezuela proposes: “in order to have certainty that a policy or project includes the gender perspective, the following guidelines should be considered:

- That it promotes, in an ongoing manner, equality of opportunities, taking into consideration an express definition of diversity. This must be obligatory in CSO agendas.
- That budgets be designed with a gender perspective, in order to provide resources to diverse actions that guarantee equality of opportunities.
- That information and discrimination due to sex be recorded.
- That CSOs recognize those organizations that specifically address women’s rights.
- That the various CSOs coordinate efforts with those organizations. That action networks are created to guarantee that this perspective is present in all organizations.”

## **6. Strengthening women’s organizations: a criterion for development effectiveness**

Women’s and feminist organizations have played a crucial role in strengthening the voice and representation of groups with lesser levels of organization in the public arena, with the objective of achieving respect for women’s rights and gender equality. Thus, one of the criteria for the effectiveness of a development process advanced by any actor must be: “to what degree have women’s organizations in the territory where such a process is being implemented been strengthened.”

As Chile explains, there are critical issues in the public agenda and in public policies for effective development, such as advances in the area of sexual and reproductive health, the increase in gender violence, the effective political participation of women, and the levels of focalization of poverty in relation to gender. All of these issues must be monitored by women’s organizations, from their perspective and using their methodologies, in order to guarantee that the achievements made thus far are not reversed, and in order to identify and demonstrate what still must be achieved.

“Women’s participation *per se* does not guarantee that women’s interests and needs are proposed or defended,” Argentina states in its conclusions. For this reason opportunities for women and

women's organizations are absolutely indispensable in continuing to construct this area and move it forward. This is even clearer when one takes into account that while considerably more than half of the persons participating in the national consultations convoked by the Open Forum were women leaders working within the CSO sector, any serious discussion on the importance and characteristics of working with women and focusing on gender equality as part of development led to only precarious conclusions, and in some countries, there were essentially no conclusions at all.

The priority given to strengthening women's organizations does not mean it is not also necessary to develop a crosscutting focus on gender equality in all policies, programs and projects. Chile states: "the specific work addressing women achieves greater knowledge, seriousness and effectiveness in interventions that seek to modify the inequality gap and recognize the difference in the conditions experienced by women, as well as in interventions that link these conditions to the diversity in socioeconomic (related to class) and racial (related to ethnic group) situations."

In addition, as explained by Venezuela: "the two perspectives, the specific projects addressing women and the crosscutting of the gender perspective, do not exclude each other, and both are important at this time. Working on the crosscutting application of the gender perspective in projects is also important, because it makes it possible to enrich research and expand fields of action. In this way the inequalities and discrimination of both are evident. The crosscutting focus allows for a richer analysis and a search for differentiated solutions. In terms of public policies, crosscutting is important, because it prevents excluding a significant part of the population (women) and increases effectiveness in incorporating women as subjects of development." It is evident that when it comes to public policies overall, the gender perspective should be a part of all of them, and it is the obligation of CSOs and women's organizations to provide adequate follow-up on this matter, as emphasized by Chile.

At any rate, it is important to note that the specific funds for women are important sources of assistance, in both financial and general terms, permitting organizations dedicated to working for women's rights and gender equality to maintain their presence, become stronger and have an impact on development. These women's organizations are characterized by being very proactive and creative in assuming a strategic role together with women's movements in general. They have been implementing innovative strategies, both for raising more funds and for supporting the organizational development of their beneficiary groups. Along these lines Uruguay insists on the need for the State to more consistently assume its responsibilities with established policies and to substantially increase the public budgetary resources available for working with and in favor of women.

## **7. Public policies for women's equality and empowerment: a pending task**

International Cooperation for Development (ICD) is an important instrument for overcoming poverty and inequalities, but it cannot nor should it be used to substitute the primary tool possessed by contemporary societies—which consists of State resources. The use of these resources is stipulated in public policies that must promote equality between genders.

Even after so many years, it is evident that there is resistance in the public policies established by individual countries and those supported by ICD, to acknowledging and seriously confronting the inequalities in relations between genders based on subordination and its consequences. Consequently, these public policies are not contributing to overcoming gender inequality as they could and should, and in some cases they are actually causing an intensification of this inequality.

The challenge is clear, and we will present two critical examples here to demonstrate it:

- a. The recent ECLAC report entitled “What kind of State? What kind of equality?” acknowledges that in order to achieve gender equality (in this case, with emphasis on access to employment), it is necessary to attain women’s economic, physical and political autonomy, and this implies policies, practices and services that lift the burden of taking care of others that weighs upon women, thereby allowing women to enter the labor market. According to ECLAC, women’s access to labor markets continues to be “a blind spot of public policy in Latin America and the Caribbean,” despite some advances in areas that contribute to gender equality. Therefore, to correct this situation, ECLAC proposes that the State fulfills the role “as a guarantor of effective entitlement to rights,” equality between the public and private sectors, and a complete redistribution of work between men and women with the aim of promoting gender equality.<sup>2</sup>
- b. From the viewpoint of citizen security policies, so much in vogue in Latin America, the lack of recognition for the specificity of violence against women makes these policies nothing more than palliatives that fail to address the cultural transformations needed for effective development.

It is urgently necessary to prioritize the head-on battle against all forms of violence against women within the overall agenda. This includes the violence experienced on a daily basis within families, as well as the horrible particularity of violence against women occurring in Latin America known as **femicide** (defined as the violent death of women—through murder, homicide or parricide—due to the simple fact that they are women), constituting the most severe violation of women’s rights, beyond the violation of the right to life, as stated by the *Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos*,<sup>2</sup> and also including the more subtle but not less serious violence of which women are victims in social and political life and in their workplaces, whether more or less formal.<sup>3</sup>

Public policies that seek to make one or various fundamental rights a reality must guarantee, from the very construction and definition of these policies, a prior reading of the way in which women are being ignored or displaced from these rights, and consequently, must propose explicit ways to remedy and thereby overcome the situation. Argentina proposes this in its conclusions: in order to verify that women are effectively being involved and are actors in development, it is necessary to verify that all policies, programs and projects are effectively aimed at guaranteeing women: (i) control over their own bodies and fertility; (ii) economic autonomy and administration of resources; and (iii) political participation (at macro, medium and micro levels) from the perspective of their own interests and options.

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<sup>2</sup> Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos. *Femicidio: más allá de la violación del derecho a la vida. Análisis de los derechos violados y las responsabilidades estatales en los casos de femicidio de Ciudad Juárez*/Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos (IIDH), San José, Costa Rica, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, Jill Radford and Diana Russell (2007), cited in IIDH 2008, propose that femicide is at the most extreme point of the continuum of terror against women, which includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuses, such as rape, torture, sexual slavery (particularly prostitution), incest and sexual abuse of children outside the family, psychological aggression, sexual harassment (on the phone, in the streets, at the office and in the classroom), genital mutilation (clitoridectomy, excision and infibulation), unnecessary gynecological operations (unnecessary hysterectomies), forced heterosexuality, forced sterilization, forced maternity (by criminalizing birth control and abortion), psycho-surgery, denying food to women in some cultures, cosmetic surgery and other mutilations in the name of beauty. When these forms of terrorism result in death, these authors consider them to also constitute femicide.

**8. An effectiveness and efficiency criterion for International Cooperation for Development (ICD): the inclusion of indicators for strengthening the role of women as citizens and the work of women's movements and organizations within a citizen framework**

Despite women's contributions to development and democracy, and despite the visibility that women have given to gender violence against women and the disproportionate effects of fundamentalism, militarization and war in their lives, it is notorious that the interest on the part of International Cooperation and donor governments in supporting women's rights and gender equality has diminished in recent years.

Venezuela proposes that entities providing international cooperation consider within their top priority objectives sufficient investment aimed at:

- Promoting knowledge of the legal framework that defends the rights of women in each country.
- Strengthening the structures for applying the laws that promote an end to violence against women.
- Creating entities for observing the implementation of these laws and associated institutional entities.
- Financing and providing technical assistance to the CSOs dedicated to helping people take ownership in these laws, making people aware of these laws and demanding their fulfillment.
- Demanding that donors require the CSOs with whom they are working to explicitly stipulate how they will assume their commitment to gender equality and that they explicitly define their interaction with these already established entities in the specific work of defending women's rights, in order to have a significant impact in this area.

Along these lines Chile suggests that in order to guarantee the effectiveness of actions, ICD entities must demand and finance interdisciplinary teams in intervention and research projects that incorporate a gender perspective and variables such as class and ethnic group. As well, Chile suggests that projects incorporate compliance with the social clauses in agreements signed by States as well as demands for ratification of CEDAW.

From Colombia's point of view, it is especially noteworthy that national governments, International Cooperation and donor governments are all failing to assure that inequalities against women are being overcome—as a central element for guaranteeing development effectiveness. For example, according to the *Observatorio de la Cooperación de La Alianza*, only 1.42% of official cooperation for development in Colombia is specifically concerned with women's empowerment. It is therefore urgently necessary to assure that International Cooperation for Development operates in a manner that is in line with a gender equality focus, investing the necessary resources to this end and effectively guaranteeing that every peso invested in development also contributes to overcoming inequality and empowering women. This situation has revealed the importance of assuring an increase in CSO effectiveness in achieving these aims.

It is important that women's and feminist organizations become familiar with the complexity of the new instruments and new modalities of assistance, and that they gain experiences in adapting to the new international context. To this end, it becomes necessary to establish training for the new procedures to be followed. In addition, women's and feminist organizations have established that the majority of funding to which they have access is for projects and not for

institutional financing. This means that it is often difficult to strengthen their organizations, develop new proposals and test them, and especially to react to the demands arising in the current situation, and in fact they frequently cannot establish their own priorities. It is necessary that donors further develop practices of institutional financing and improve the conditions and requirements for assisting women's organizations, and at the same time that they recognize the important role played by these organizations in advancements in development and the deepening of democratization.