

**Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
8th Session Expert Mechanism of the Right To Development**

OHCHR Panel on Women’s Participation in Development: Promoting Gender Equality, Good Practices, Opportunities and Challenges

Mandate of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

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Panelist Statement: Carolyn Handschin, President NGO CSW Geneva, Director WFWPI UN Offices

On behalf of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in Geneva, and my own NGO, the Women’s Federation for World Peace, International, I thank you for this invitation, and for organizing this session.

Our network of NGOs spans the entire globe, all holding the status of General Consultative Relations with the UN. Engaging for the MDGs and SDGs has been a natural step that catapulted many of our local volunteers and their programs to a realization of the impact of local on the broader state of the world. With that comes greater incentive, unmatched creativity, youth engagement, and much more.

The “Right” to Development brings another dimension to local engagement. Those grassroots associations, not so grounded in what we call “a human rights approach” are learning to appreciate this new lens, coming in through another door. A right to development is not a demand for victims of weak development for a hand out, but a mutual commitment, an affirmation to take more responsibility to participate in and discover the benefits from developing together. It is very much linked to the UDHR article 29; which reminds us of the corollary of rights and duties, which finally, are even more so, for our own

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benefit. “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible”.

Development benefits so much more than financial resources. Development is prevention. It shapes a people’s self-worth and expectations. The future of leadership, our youth must connect to a vision and path that stimulates that existential desire to influence positive change and a dignified livelihood, or we will lose them. Only local actors can catch those symptoms: women especially.

The WFWPI has SDG- linked development programs in 128 countries, which are the Right to Development in practice. One of our development / environment grant programs gives a mere 2000 USD to 15 projects each year. Grassroots organizations learn to prepare grant proposals, promoting their projects, defending them and reporting their benefits and challenges over the next years, and what they do with that small financial support is remarkable, and new networks of stimulation generated between Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Malaysia, Haiti, Argentina, Bangladesh..

A series of Right to Development trainings have been held for our grass roots chapters. To what benefit? Greater confidence in communicating and collaborating with local governments, participation in reporting mechanisms, learning a language of diplomacy, commitment to civic education, and passing on the enthusiasm for development to youth.

Other committee members, SI, ICW, IAW, LDS Charities, FAWCO, Biovision, GWI, Zonta- the same. Remarkable, no astonishing, revivals of communities are being realized with minimal investment and the training of local women who are passionately committed and whose intimate local knowledge cannot be replaced by “expertise”. Women, and youth must be recognized as the linchpins to success in development, not just a token contributor.

Very recently agreed HRC recommendation on the centrality of care which some of our members, especially MMM have fought for decades, will encourage more such investment. Women’s volunteer grassroots development programs, also often labors of love, are not easily monetized, and consequently had not been properly analyzed and attributed the value they bring to prosperity and cohesion in the community. It is long overdue that this concept be dismantled, and credit be given where it is due.

Women’s meaningful participation in development processes means women being prepared for leadership and decision-making: education, training, and practical experience. The dignity of that work must be amplified.

I want to close with a thought about the global dimension of development cooperation: region to region, state to state. We all know how terminology can influence stereotypes, in both directions. It doesn't seem to me that our way of dividing the world in half; developing and developed, although decidedly better than 3rd World, is not serving its purpose. Such

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distinctions further divisions and mistrust, as if it is simply “those who need”, and “those who do not need”: those deserving to receive, and those with the responsibility /burden to give. It does not do justice to either side’s full range of capacities, nor does it incentivize toward the goals.

For most, at a person-to-person level, promoting development seems “common sense”. Cooperation, win-win, it is not just about handouts, but defined by its long-term, broad reaching outcome of shared, more just, peaceful, better educated, more generous populations. more cohesive and prosperous local communities. These families and communities then become the platform for a greater security, more freedom, more reconciled, cooperative regional and ultimately international relations. As we see right now, the spiral is going in the opposite direction in the Middle East and elsewhere. This is not just a peace and security issue, but these outbreaks, these recurring conflicts are rather rooted in a Development Issue.

Investing in women’s greater participation in decision-making in development processes, and valuing that “labor of love” as incentive in local “development” will bring sustainable solutions, not only to pressing problems, but to a myriad of positive impacts only yet to be discovered.