POWER, AUTHORITY AND FEMINIST REPUBLIC

Cooperation and gender equality: two fundamental commitments, 25 years on

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2020 marks the 25th anniversary of two significant pledges. The first was a commitment to dedicate 0.7% of the state budget to international development cooperation. The second was the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action conceived at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women; a set of agreements aimed at improving equality between men and women. What has changed in the years since those commitments were made? Where are we now? Are those proposals still valid today? These are some of the essential questions we should be asking right now.

Do we still need international cooperation for development? Personally, I think it's more important than ever. Over the last twenty-five years, not only have we not advanced equality between countries, but we have continued with our disequilibration of the world, creating some incredibly hard-to-solve issues that threaten the very survival of humanity. The extensive disequilibrium in human development between some parts of the planet and others presents us with serious problems.

1. Migrations.
2. Business relocations and the ensuing unemployment in core countries.
3. The destruction of lifestyles, animal species, languages and cultures; in other words, the acceleration of entropy, already identified as a dangerous process.

In the face of such a decline, cooperation becomes imperative, not only from a humanitarian perspective but also for survival. Working with women, capitalising on their strength and, above all, consolidating their life-focused values is today perhaps our last remaining hope of reversing a world order on the path to inevitable destruction. The feminist economy has defined the era we live in as one where life is disregarded and destroyed in the pursuit of capital. The goal of feminism, therefore, is to defend and protect life, before capital. Hence the considerable importance of focusing on cooperation from a female perspective. This doesn't just mean working with women but also working in line with their aspirations, points of view and beliefs, in the hope that men will increasingly share their intrinsically human-centred values.

From the Beijing conference to the current situation

How has the position of women changed since the Beijing conference? In many ways, we have made progress. The feminist movement has grown into a global phenomenon, and men increasingly declare themselves to be feminists. Gone are the days when feminism focused exclusively on the emancipation of women from traditionally submissive roles. It has become a global campaign for freedom, one that decries inequality, planetary degradation, ecological threats, the abuse of human rights in their many guises, the indignity suffered by immigrants and refugees, etc. Yet at the same time, we are also seeing the emergence of new and powerful movements seeking to combat feminism, precisely because of the political weight it now carries. Unfortunately, this has weakened the hand of many institutions, including the UN, in their fight for equality. The proof: there has not been another World Conference on Women for 25 years, and this, despite the fact that the Beijing agreements included a commitment to hold another conference in 10 years (2005). However, at the time, feminist NGOs were reluctant to go ahead because of fears that it would depict a setback in progress. And so we continue. Yet another reason to stress the importance of international cooperation and the NGOs involved in it.

What was agreed at Beijing? Based on evolving living conditions for women, and taking into account vast differences between countries, cultures, social classes and the degrees of sexism and androcentrism, two consecutive objectives were established: firstly, female empowerment. Personal empowerment through education, and social and economic empowerment through access to resources and political power. Without this first step, which is vital in all situations but of particular import to those more affected by poverty and subjugation, women cannot progress beyond the domestic realm. And, secondly, once empowered, taking action on their surroundings, to defend and improve community life. A new approach to achieving both objectives was adopted: transversality. In other words, asking governments to consider female empowerment in all of their policies.

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At that time, the Beijing agreements focused primarily on the more urgent first goal: to empower women and place value on their strengths. 25 year later and, thanks to the degree of empowerment achieved, we can now begin to work on aspects of the second objective, but this is not true of everywhere. We still have work to do on that first goal. Simultaneously, transversality has allowed us to promote our goals in many different sectors, one of the most important of those being cooperation. Today, feminist objectives are at the forefront of international cooperation, something that could not be said 25 years ago.

The last 25 years have seen hugely significant changes in our world. Increased globalisation has blurred the lines between the first world and the third. A brutal financial crisis took place while, at the same time, global wealth poured into the hands of the few, governments destabilised, and inequality grew across the board. And now we are witnessing another development: not only are humanity's economic resources firmly ensconced in the hands of a minority, but we are also lurching into the domain of direct political rule, favouring far-right movements in every country. We have very few resources to deal with this offensive, and we must use them wisely. How should international development cooperation respond?

1. By broadening its objectives: together with social movements like feminism and environmentalism, international cooperation must defend the most oppressed to ensure their survival; preservation and betterment as a technique for halting the devastation that the most powerful of economic forces often try to impose. Similarly, cooperation must protect natural resources and cultural identities from hidden methods of domination.
2. By never losing sight of its focus on defending human rights, local characteristics and the preservation of peace.
3. By incorporating gender strategy as a cornerstone of cooperation, always starting by analysing the situation of women in each project and adopting the appropriate measures at every stage. In other words, remembering the sequence: provision of resources of all kinds, empowerment, development of projects undertaken by women and transformation of their environment based on their needs. Expressly, by providing initial training, so they become independent actors and then offering subsequent support for their initiatives.
4. By always using transversality as a method for scaling up projects, networking and using existing resources.

International cooperation is usually in the hands of well-meaning, selfless people, who do important and often unrecognised work. Let's hope that in 25 years, the outlook is more encouraging than it is now and that by working towards the ten-year vision outlined in the 2030 Agenda, lasting progress will have been made in both international development aid, and for women.

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