
In Pursuit of a “Thorough and Nuanced” Education: The Importance of Gender and Social Analysis

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When prospective students land on the homepage of The Fletcher School, they are informed that The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy is a place where “broadly knowledgeable and inquisitive leaders develop a thorough and nuanced grounding in the latest political, economic, business, and legal thinking and translate it into practical successful actions that shape international issues and events.” But, what are Fletcher students expecting from a “thorough and nuanced” education and what are employers looking for? Students come to Fletcher because they want to acquire the expertise and skills required to contribute to successful actions that make the world better. Employers want people who have the expertise and skills to identify the problems to be solved and design their solutions.

As Deputy Director of the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Office at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), one of my responsibilities is to ensure that the Agency designs development projects that contribute to closing gender gaps. This responsibility derives from USAID’s Gender Equality and Female Empowerment

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Policy, which mandates Agency projects to eliminate the economic, social, political, and legal gaps between men and women of all ages. That is, when addressing problems at the “people level,” the Agency believes it is essential to understand that people are different and no single strategy will be effective in reaching everyone.

If we accept that the purpose of international development is to empower all people to solve problems, social and gender analyses are critical to understanding and addressing every challenge that an international development professional seeks to address. Social and gender analyses are analyses that uncover gaps between males and females based on social science and demography. To be clear, “social analysis” is not done simply to justify charity for “vulnerable groups,” nor is “gender analysis” simply code

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for “women’s issues.” It is a fact of life that an individual’s life opportunities and access to resources are influenced by whether one is male or female, rich or poor, young or old, gay or straight, native or immigrant, or able-bodied or disabled, and anywhere in between.

While people are inherently divided along biological and socially constructed lines, I assert that practical successful actions in the international development sector are those that proactively expand life opportunities for as many people as possible by empowering them to engage in the process of defining problems and developing solutions that are both realistic and effective. It also requires being open to multiple interpretations of how to define problems. Being resigned to the notion that some individuals are too difficult to reach or that some problems are “just the way things have always been” is not a matter of so-called realism. Rather, this reflects a lack of willingness to understanding the world as it really is. Addressing structural and historical inequalities means finding ways to transform structures by seeking solutions to problems from multiple perspectives.

While the remainder of this piece focuses primarily on suggestions to better understand the perspectives, needs, and accomplishments of women, men also face distinct challenges that are often neglected in international development. There are many examples of gender gaps that reflect that males are disadvantaged. For example, middle-aged Eastern European men

face long-term unemployment in record numbers and many of those who do work are under-employed.¹ Moreover, the life expectancy of Russian men is declining because of alcoholism, which may be linked to feelings or worthlessness brought on by political changes.² In the Caribbean, boys drop out of school at higher rates than girls.³ Across the world, former male child soldiers, who were socialized in a culture of violence, require psycho-social support to assist them to express themselves without violence when they attempt to integrate into society. These gender gaps must be closed as well.⁴

At present, members of the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs are working toward offering certifications and concentrations in “gender studies.” Fletcher can go a step further by ensuring that the *entire* curriculum reflects inclusive perspectives. A curriculum that is truly thorough and nuanced teaches every student to reflexively apply social and gender analysis to every issue they study and every problem they endeavor to solve. An excellent way for Fletcher to encourage students to do so is by ensuring that the courses that satisfy the breadth requirements discuss and incorporate evidence from social and gender analysis, as well as from institutions and scholars from around the world.

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For example, here are some real world ideas—some from research funded by USAID, some from organizations I have encountered in my career, and several from non-Western institutions—that touch on each of the core Fletcher fields and represent the kinds of materials that can be integrated.

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND ORGANIZATIONS

The opportunity to study international law without having to enroll in law school was what attracted me to The Fletcher School over twenty years ago. My coursework focused on international human rights; as an international development practitioner, this perspective has served me extremely well over the years. Key to my work is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which obligates parties to uphold the rights to work, health, education, adequate housing, food, and water. Article 3 of the Covenant also unequivocally says that States “undertake to

ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant.”⁵

Addressing these problems requires money, and governments have vastly different levels of financial and human resources to make these rights a reality. Through the concept of progressive realization, international law acknowledges that making economic, social, and cultural rights a reality can only be achieved over time.⁶ It also makes clear that governments must not discriminate in their laws, policies, or practices and must prioritize the most vulnerable when allocating resources.⁷

Arguably, the path to development involves traveling on the long road toward progressive realization. It is no secret that with less than one

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percent of the overall federal budget, USAID cannot do everything. One way for development practitioners to prioritize is to understand who is the most vulnerable and what groups of people live at the bottom of the pyramid. The answer to this question really matters. With increasingly limited resources, USAID operates under the principle to “focus and concentrate” and to make “evidence-based decisions” about the trade-offs that inevitably must be made in making decisions about who to help and where to invest resources.

Since I left Fletcher, the body of international case law on what “progressive realization” means in practice has expanded; there are now over eighty entries in the International Center for Economic and Social Rights database from Argentina, India, South Africa, and elsewhere—some of which reflect precedent setting decisions in this area.⁸ The Crowley Center for International Human Rights at Fordham Law School, at which I had the privilege of serving as a fellow, publishes original legal research on topics that include human rights violations of indigenous peoples in New Zealand, housing rights violations faced by female slum dwellers in Tanzania, the feminization of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Malawi, and my own contribution on extraterritorial human rights violations, as related to development assistance based on field work in Kenya.⁹ This is the type of evidence—from both case law and hybrid legal and social science research—that can help development agencies and host country governments make tough choices about where to start on the long road to progressive realization.

DIPLOMACY, HISTORY, AND POLITICS

The Diplomacy, History, and Politics field is at the heart of The Fletcher School and has evolved over the years to embrace a wide range of topics such as nutrition, security studies, water, environment, and energy. These are all areas where the international women’s movement and strong female leaders have made significant contributions in shaping “practical successful actions”—the types of individuals that should be household names for every Fletcher graduate. As Fletcher students acquire leadership skills required to bring about practical successful action, they would benefit from exposure to the work of leaders, who just happen to be women, who engaged in real struggles and obtained real results.

For instance, every student of conflict resolution and security studies should know about Leymah Gbowee of Liberia who, along with others, organized Christian and Muslim women to pressure warring parties into negotiations in 2002, ultimately ending years of civil war. Ms. Gbowee was awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for her “nonviolent struggle for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work.” What negotiation strategies and messages made this effort effective? Students in search of solutions to international environmental and resource issues should be familiar with the work of another Nobel Laureate, Kenyan Wangari Maathai, who founded the environment and women’s organization the Green Belt Movement. They also can get ideas from watching a film called *Solar Mamas* about the Barefoot College of India that trains low-income women to be solar-energy engineers, who then help their communities on the path to self-sufficiency and move them beyond being passive recipients of charity toward serving as change agents based on their scientific expertise.¹⁰

In being inspired by these women, it is important to remember that men have played critical roles in engendering conceptions of diplomacy and human security as well. Former U.S. Ambassador to Angola and former

Deputy Administrator of USAID, Donald Steinberg described the important lessons learned when no women were included in talks leading to the 1994 peace agreement between the Angolan government and rebel forces: “Not only did [the absence of women] silence women’s voices on the hard

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issues of war and peace, but it also meant that issues [such] as internal displacement, sexual violence, abuses by government and rebel security forces, and the rebuilding of social services such as maternal health care and girls' education were given short shrift—or no shrift at all.”¹¹

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention that for seventeen of the nineteen years since my time at Fletcher, there has been a female serving as Secretary of State in the United States of America. Has having women in this position of the U.S. foreign policy establishment led to different approaches to statecraft or a broader perspective of what is considered pertinent to foreign policy? If so, have we examined what this has meant for how we define human security and how the United States responds to crises and emergencies? Is there more or less attention to humanitarian and social issues? Has this had an influence on the outcomes of our diplomatic efforts? These questions can and should be considered as the Fletcher community reflects on lessons learned from diplomatic history and the future of statecraft.

ECONOMICS AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Any Fletcher student interested in contributing to economic security by working in the areas of microfinance, food security, or international trade and investment should be aware of the findings of the Gender Asset Gap, a project housed at the Indian Institute for Management in Bangalore and carried out by a team of international economists.¹² A central focus of this research measures gaps between females and males in property ownership and how women's lack of land ownership contributes to economic insecurity and vulnerabilities that result in recurrent societal level crises—such as famines and conflict over natural resources—and in many places, recurrent crises at the individual level. Such crises include inter-familial violence stemming from disputes over assets and making choices between which children to feed and educate.

While policy makers recognize the challenge of sustaining economic growth in times of political conflict, at the macro level they are less inclined to consider the collective impact of inter-personal violence on the economy as a whole. For example, if Fletcher students of development economics are taught to consider factor in evidence on the drain on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) caused by dealing with the aftermath of domestic violence, planning and policy choices could be very different. To illustrate, a USAID-funded study carried out by CARE-Bangladesh found that: “In terms of percentage, [the cost of violence against women] comes out to be 1.18 percent of GDP from direct monetary cost. It is about 0.87 percent of

the GDP from time cost. [Finally,] the combined cost of violence to the nation is about 2.05 percent of the GDP. This amount is almost equal to the total government expenditure for the annual health and the nutrition sector.”¹³ This loss comes from permanent physical injuries that prevent survivors from working, as well as the time spent in family and criminal courts seeking redress. In this illustration alone, we see links between macroeconomics, health systems, and justice systems that Fletcher students with cross-field expertise are uniquely poised to address in a comprehensive manner.

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While mobile technology is one of many ways to stimulate economic growth through access to information, not everyone can be assumed to have equal access. Yet, a 2007 study published by Deloitte found that a ten percent increase in mobile phone penetration rates is linked to an increase in low and middle-income country GDP of 1.2 percent.¹⁴ Those who plan to engage the world as mobile technology entrepreneurs post-Fletcher should be aware that women represent nearly two-thirds of the untapped market for mobile growth. According to the “Women and Mobile: A Global Opportunity” report by the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women and the GSMA Development Fund, operators aiming to be market leaders in five years time must excel at bringing on new female subscribers, and understand the underlying differences behind why females and males do not own cellphones.¹⁵ Future telecommunications strategists should know that seventy-five percent of married women who do not “want” cell phones state that they do want cell phones because their husbands do not allow their wives to have them. Understanding the gender and social analysis behind this finding would enable savvy marketers to design strategies that stress the benefits of female ownership for the entire family. Why does this matter? Secure families make up communities that make up secure nations.

QUANTITATIVE REASONING

Finally, the quantitative reasoning facet of the Fletcher breadth requirement is critical for development practitioners. When I work with colleagues to design projects, the first step is to understand the magnitude

of the problem being addressed and whether or not people experience the problem differently based on whether they are female or male. I encourage them to examine demographic and health surveys, as well as census information, which shows the distribution of populations based on income quintiles, uncovers the extent of rural and urban divides, and of course, indicates differences based on sex and age. This is used to create a development hypothesis that articulates a theory of change for each intervention. To monitor progress throughout the life of the project, development practitioners need data to assess, evaluate, and make decisions about what programs to take to scale and which ones are not working. If evidence from monitoring shows that projects are not closing gaps between men and women and not addressing the needs of the most vulnerable, adjustments and further monitoring is necessary. This requires being able to generate, validate, disaggregate and interpret data.

MOVING FORWARD

The world has changed significantly in the almost twenty years since I graduated from Fletcher. There now exists an entire generation of post-Cold War knowledge to be digested, debated, and applied. Between the time I applied to Fletcher in late 1991 and the time I started in the fall of 1992, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics dissolved. Between the time I began Fletcher and I completed my studies, the former Yugoslavia

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..... went through civil war and Rwanda experienced genocide. Just before we graduated, apartheid ended, and on April 27, 1994, South Africa held its first democratic elections. Attending Fletcher during that time of transition made me realize that new countries, peoples, perspectives, and problems could emerge seemingly overnight—

or at least in the relatively short time it took to apply to, study at, and graduate from Fletcher. I left Fletcher with an acute understanding of what can go wrong when you ignore the histories and differences among people.

In pursuit of a thorough and nuanced education, I strongly encourage current and future Fletcher faculty and students to embrace social and gender analysis. Students should be trained to develop the quantitative, qualitative, and analytic skills that enable them to contribute to this body of knowledge. Moreover, the highest marks should be reserved for students

who demonstrate understanding of how theories apply at the people level. Demonstrating this understanding was crucial to my landing my first job at the Ford Foundation, where I had the opportunity to attend the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China and build a knowledge base and a professional network that enables me to be successful today.

Through recent interactions with current Fletcher students, I learned about and fully support the initiative to create a research assistance fund that helps faculty seek out the most rigorous and cutting edge social and gender analyses on the topics covered in their courses. This is a win-win for everyone. Students will be empowered to play an active role by working with the faculty in shaping the content of the curriculum and ensuring that their education is both theoretically grounded and practically applicable. Faculty will have current information, and The Fletcher School’s curriculum will reflect the issues of our times, the understanding of which is urgently needed to devise tomorrow’s practical and successful actions in the field of development assistance.*f*

ENDNOTES

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- 7 Amnesty International, “Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights,” Amnesty International website, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/economic-social-and-cultural-rights>.
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 - 11 For Mr. Steinberg’s biography, see: “Who We Are: Donald Steinberg,” United States Agency for International Development, <http://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/organization/donald-steinberg>; See also: “Why Women,” The Institute for Inclusive Security, <http://www.inclusivesecurity.org/why-women/>.
 - 12 “The Gender Asset Gap Project in Ecuador, Ghana, and India,” Website, <http://genderassetgap.iimb.ernet.in/>.
 - 13 “Understanding the Monetary Cost of Domestic Violence,” United States Agency for International Development and Care International, May 2012, http://www.carebangladesh.org/rs_pdetail.php?publishid=96.
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