

# Worldconnectors statement Gender and Diversity

Justice and Solutions for All: through Gender and Diversity

19 oktober 2009



## I. Preamble

## II. Part A. Gender and Diversity

worldconnectors

**WORLDCONNECTORS** THE ROUND TABLE FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

We, the Worldconnectors, hereby present our statement on the theme of Gender and Diversity. It is the result of discussions and dialogue in the thematic Worldconnectors Working Group and in the Worldconnectors Round Tables of 28 May and 23 September 2009.

We invite comments and reactions to the statement on our website [www.worldconnectors.nl](http://www.worldconnectors.nl), with the aim of stimulating the debate on Gender and Diversity and the implementation of the recommendations.

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Other statements:

Migration and Development  
Global Human Security  
Millennium Development Goals  
Policy Coherence on Aid, Trade and Investments  
Sustainable Development and Climate Change  
Connection of Civilisations  
New Scarcities  
Europe in the World  
Sustainable World Citizenship  
Financial Systems

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## I. PREAMBLE

We as Worldconnectors stand for equal rights and justice for men and women, young and old, worldwide. We base our views on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and more specifically on the Earth Charter and the Millennium Development Declaration.<sup>1</sup> The Earth Charter highlights the rights of women and minorities to participate in all aspects of economic, political, civil, social and cultural life as full and equal partners. It rejects all forms of discrimination and affirms that gender equality and equity are prerequisites to sustainable development. The Millennium Development Goals represent the eight quantified goals that the world leaders signed up to in 2000, to be reached in 2015.

## II. PART A: GENDER AND DIVERSITY

### O. Preamble

As stated, the Worldconnectors stand for equal rights and justice for men and women, young and old, worldwide. These views are based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and more specifically on the Earth Charter and the Millennium Development Declaration.<sup>2</sup>

The present reality is different and deteriorating. In East and West, North and South, many people 'live' their rights while millions of others cannot enjoy their full rights, let alone benefit from equal outcomes. The quick-scan that supports this statement gives a shocking indication of inequalities worldwide. It is an intolerable fact that as yet...

...in no country in the world women enjoy equal rights and outcomes to men; the difference ranges from 89% gender equity in Sweden to 29% in Yemen.

...everywhere in the world women and men from ethnic, religious and cultural minority groups (indigenous people, immigrants and refugees in particular) are often rated and treated as second-class citizens, who cannot avail themselves of the rights they are legally entitled to.

We are extremely concerned that as a result of the global economic crisis the rights and dignity of women and minorities across the globe are under increasing threat. This trend can and must be urgently reversed. But this should not be done based on a philosophy of charity; instead, a rights based approach is needed based on universal agreements of human rights, rule of law and justice. At the same time, we also draw inspiration from enlightened self-interest, that is, from securing our collective social, cultural and economic needs.

The world is presently out of balance. One third of the world population live in poverty, and more than a billion

people, the vast majority women and minorities, go to sleep hungry. This leads to all sorts of related crime such as child labour, trafficking of women and debt and labour exploitation. But the business case 'the world' could have such a lot going for it. Positive examples and developments in specific communities and in some countries tell us that the opportunities for change and transformation are plentiful. There is overwhelming evidence that affordable investments can be made in education and health, sustainable agriculture, and local enterprise based on skill training. From this basis, fair local, regional and global trade can be facilitated by rights-based local-to-global employment, trade, financial, tax, and social security systems. These could ensure the inclusion of the talents of so many women and minorities presently struggling to survive in the informal economy. With education and opportunity they can and will help create sustainable growth in an economic as well as social sense.

The Worldconnectors therefore call for a commitment from every individual to support, according to her or his capacity, all such positive developments in order to achieve - as soon as possible - a sustainable, inclusive and just world where the talents of all people, in all their many and diverse identities, are embraced as part of the whole. More than ever before, we need to involve and build on the talents of a third of the world population who are presently marginalised and whose solutions for overcoming poverty and injustice are therefore being missed out on.

In one sense the present multiple crises also provide an opportunity. Never before did so many people realize the need for value-based, local-to-global governance systems. This chance can be seized, building on the growing consensus that investing in people and fully involving the talents of everyone will lead to a momentum in solving our social, economic and environmental problems in new ways.

<sup>1</sup> There are other international conventions that proclaim and serve to ensure equal rights. E.g. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965).

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## 1. The Underlying Analysis

Many analyses of opportunities for change focus on specific groups of people: children, women, migrants, people living in poverty, ethnic minorities, people with special abilities or a 'different' sexual orientation. The limitation of such an analytic focus on specific 'target groups' is that it brings the risk of perpetuating divisive conceptual thinking. This leads to a philosophy of 'winners' and 'losers', which in today's world has increasingly resulted in a reality of 'the winner takes all'.

It is the bi-polar patriarchal philosophy (men versus women, intergenerational divisions, races, religions and nations in conflict, humans dominating the environment, etcetera) that causes economic, social and political conflict. From the moment children are born, they are exposed to power dynamics within their families and communities. In practice families and religions differ greatly: some are value driven and democratic, others are authoritarian and patriarchal. It is when the father's voice determines reality without showing any democratic interest in the needs or voices of 'others' (be they wives or girlfriends, children or grandmothers), the internalising of divisive power-dynamics in life begins. Soon the child will learn that the 'voice of authority' is not that of the father alone: the next strongest 'authority stand-in' can be the mother, or brothers, teachers, religious leaders, bosses... Children and young people learn to differentiate between 'I' and 'the other'. The 'I' of the father becomes the 'WE' of the family, the clan or the specific peer group. The dominant identity 'WE' then defines the subdominant and 'other' identities as 'THEY'. The 'WE' experiences itself in positive terms, and is in competition with the 'THEY', who are viewed as lesser persons. In this lies the root of men needing to feel that they are better than women, whites dominating blacks, people from minority backgrounds or with special abilities being looked down on and excluded. It is also the root of a philosophy which sees the planet and its plants and animals as an even lesser 'they'- a resource to be exploited, instead of a part of life inextricably connected to our own.

The larger interconnections, the larger 'we' is lost within the patriarchal philosophy. The values of human interest in 'the other' outside one's own group, of empathy, care, and cooperation are lost due to the need felt to protect oneself and those considered nearest (family, clan, peer group, team, community, organisation, country). Sexism, racism, homophobia and nationalism are products of this divisive patriarchal philosophy. This bi-polar framework is essentially defensive; it leads to conflict and is geared towards fighting against threats from 'the other', and exploiting 'the other', including the

environment, instead of seeking new solutions through respecting diversity and building on the creative opportunities it brings. Within religious, spiritual and family traditions there are ample examples of patriarchal philosophy and practice, but also of the opposite: spiritual and religious liberation movements have been in the forefront of fighting for equality and democracy.

Because of this common underlying philosophy the Worldconnectors have chosen to deal with gender and diversity as one connected issue, although there are particular aspects and manifestations to discrimination on the basis of gender, and of different minorities.

## 2. The reality in the world today

*Bad news: inequality and injustice is increasing*

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in its first Article that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'. In reality women and minorities mostly face injustice and inequality. Their subordinate position is often cumulatively reinforced throughout their life cycle. Today's global crises (the food, climate, energy, financial and economic crises) aggravate this situation and will take their biggest toll on societies and individuals in the South. UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon has warned that the crisis jeopardises everything the UN has done to help the world's people living in poverty: "It threatens to undermine all our achievements and all our progress." Women across Africa, Asia and Latin-America are bound to bear the brunt of this fall-out. In the North, people from minority backgrounds, immigrants and refugees will be hit hardest. They are the first to lose their jobs or their informal economic activities, their homes and, due to the continuing food crisis, their children's and their own lives .

What a loss of talent and energy! While women and socially excluded groups struggle (very creatively) for the survival of their families and their communities, they are insufficiently incorporated into the formal work force and political decision making. Without investment in or inclusion of their wisdom, their 'fuel for change', their energy for justice and their ability to unite communities, their leadership is lost.

*Good news: there is a growing call for change*

Women and men in families and societies around the world have always fought their own creative and passionate struggles to overcome incidental as well as structural and systemic injustices. Many have booked impressive successes. One positive result of the current economic crises is the growing groundswell of people, at all levels of society and throughout the world, who are demanding fundamental change: we are moving towards a global

tipping point. They and we demand change in how we organize individual, local, national and global relationships. This requires a value change from the highly unsustainable and undemocratic 'the winner takes all' mentality, to the shaping of relationships in ways that recognize our human and environmental interdependence. Our world can only be truly sustainable if it is exactly that for everyone. This insight is shared by increasing numbers of women and men across the globe<sup>3</sup>. The unique momentum thus created - for a different world governed by different ethics - can be acted upon without delay and with all available means and energy. It can be put into practice in smaller and larger ways at the personal level, in families and in communities - but also in businesses, in banking, in civil society and in national and multilateral institutions dealing with finance, trade, the rule of law and with other governance issues.

### 3. Strategies for justice and effective new solutions

The Worldconnectors support three different strategies to tackle injustice and inequality - and to support enlightened self-interest. The 'business case of the world' demands a value-driven approach to become secure and sustainable for people and planet, now and in the future.

Any tension or conflict, be it inter-personal, local or global, in whatever area (political, social, cultural or economic) throws up some basic questions:

- Which values determine practical behaviour (not just words)? Which (human rights) values does one adhere to, individually and collectively? This is the question; 'what kind of community (Netherlands, Europe and the world) do we want to live in and help create?
- Who gets how much of what (and is the system of distribution fair)? Who gets how much education, health, jobs, social security, money or power? What justice exists in the sense of equity and equality?
- Whose identities (which 'We') are dominant, whose are tolerated ('They') and whose are not? Which parts of our multiple identities are accepted or rejected?

These three 'conflict areas' are at the same time the basis of three strategies for change that the Worldconnectors promote.

The first is the **STOP** strategy, based on values. It concerns intolerable practices and policies that violate people's

<sup>3</sup>The Global Call for Action against Poverty and the United Nations Millennium Campaign had 116.9 million people around the world Stand up and Act against poverty, between 17 and 19 October 2008. Although these numbers of concerned citizens are mostly from the global south, it is clear that momentum for change is picking up in the 'developed' world as well.

rights and dignity. The positive flipside of the **STOP** strategy is a rights-based and inclusive approach to all.

The second, the **MOVE OVER** strategy is about distributive justice: it must be employed to change structural inequality and injustice in power relationships (gender and diversity). Distributing water, food, education, health, and corporate and political power more equally will lead to a new diversity of voices creating new effective solutions.

The third strategy we call **DIFFERENT TOGETHER**.

Transformation is about the struggle away from an idea of one dominant (closed?) culture, towards an acceptance and celebration of diversity - and a learning to connect, empathize and deal with difference. It refers to all change that women and men from various backgrounds can undertake together to achieve new policies and practices that will ensure the win-win situation of a better, sustainable and more just world for all: for our children, and for the planet.

The Worldconnectors believe that all three strategies are needed, but that a focus on this third, transformative strategy will be the most rewarding and empowering for everyone. All three strategies can be practised at different levels of society, depending on people's professional and personal positions and degree of power. Personal strategies will complement strategies devised at the level of economic and political decision-making as well as those of the media. A multitude of individual tipping points will eventually lead to collective tipping points to achieve widely supported and truly lasting changes.

### 4. Individual and collective tipping points

Strategies alone will not do the job. The real issue is how to achieve a tipping point for change:

- in individual people, through their rational and emotional connections and commitment;
- in families and communities, in civil society, businesses and governments;
- in local-to-national and global systems, which must come to respect people and planet, now and in the future.

The fascinating question is what makes some people actively advocate for justice in general, and for gender justice and people's right to diversity in culture, belief and lifestyles in particular. Whilst some others support this work only passively, and yet others advocate the opposite, that is, a return to traditional gender relationships and dominant mono-cultures.

From our interviews with Worldconnectors and others about people's own connections to justice, and how and

why they became involved (or not) in struggles for justice, an interesting pattern of answers began to emerge. Some people have had concepts of justice engrained from early childhood, and/or from their spiritual and/or religious traditions. Others became involved through specific moments, events or tensions or relationships, – within their families, schools, institutions or places of work. Yet others feel that this is ‘not their battle’ – or are irritated by being blamed or by being confronted with women or minorities who are portrayed as victims instead of as equal opponents.

It is from this ‘funnel’ moving from broad analysis to more specific strategies and from the wish to create individual and collective tipping points that the Worldconnectors put forward concrete actions in Part B of this document.

This can be described as strategic acupuncture: if enough impulses are applied in the right places at the right time, they can combine to let energy flow and a healing of the organism occurs. When ‘needles’ are lacking, or applied wrongly, blockages or destructive energy may be increased. Persons, social groups, communities, countries and the world at large can all be seen as such ‘organisms’ in need of energy for healing and change.

**Understanding the question of individual and collective tipping points is possibly THE most important contribution that the Worldconnectors can make to the debate on gender and diversity. It is a discussion worth having anywhere, with anyone and at any time – because the future of humanity and the planet depends on our evolving away from divisive patterns to new inclusive social, economic and political solutions. Solutions which are no longer based on competition, but on cooperation**