

Worldconnectors statement Gender and Diversity

Justice and Solutions for All: through Gender and Diversity

19 oktober 2009



III. Part B. Opportunities and actions for change

worldconnectors

WORLDCONNECTORS THE ROUND TABLE FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

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III PART B. OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTIONS FOR CHANGE

O. Preamble

The Worldconnectors believe that this world needs more women and men to start seeing and understanding the 'business case of the world': the loss of potential, security and sustainability caused by the inequality and injustice engrained in so many cultures, policies and practices. We believe that a different world is possible if women, men and children, individually or collectively, experience a tipping point that makes them say 'inequality of women and minorities is wrong as well as unsustainable, we no longer accept it, we will vigorously and creatively work against it, individually and collectively, always, anywhere, every day. We will, however, work towards a cultural, social and economic system based on human rights, respect and just and fair cooperation'.

If you read Part A you can follow our analysis more fully. The current multiple crises offer momentum for such change. Patriarchal values and attitudes have long been dominant; the crisis has opened many people's eyes to the ethical and practical importance of balancing this with just gender and diversity values and approaches to work and life. We therefore believe, now more than ever, that we all - both women and men - can become agents of change to achieve transformation.

Because different key moments in our life cycle reveal different threats to and opportunities for gender justice and equality, we have built up this Statement by following a person's general life cycle, with the inclusion of life-long themes such as education and health. A life cycle does not have the same demarcation points for societies across the globe and these are not universally attributed the same meaning or importance. However, we believe that the broad categories distinguished in this Statement will resonate with the life experiences of women, men and diverse groups of citizens everywhere. We try to describe in very few words something of the broad analysis: we offer some ideas about strategies and some first thoughts about possible transformative tipping points.

We do not try to be complete, but to offer a flavour of directions for change. We encourage you as a reader to take on that direction and work out practical strategies in your own personal and professional context. We hope that different professions will run with this approach to see what it could mean for them. We would therefore like anyone who reads this statement, in whatever personal or professional capacity, to ask herself or himself the following questions:

Is the analysis (see Part A) comprehensive and inclusive enough? How can it be further improved?

Can the three strategies for change be further concreted into any particular area of the life-cycle presented below? How can transformation and tipping points for change be reached for specific individuals, groups and institutions? How can the concrete actions proposed (the impulses for change) be improved and expanded? What can you contribute to this yourself, in your individual and/or professional capacity? In which area of the life-cycle can your profession work towards transformation? What support do you need to move from analysis to concrete action?

Our specific recommendations for action are based on the facts and figures presented in the Quick Scan that accompanies this Statement. We have tried to give a flavour of the international reality of gender and diversity issues. Besides global recommendations we have sometimes included recommendations of what can be done by and in our own country, the Netherlands. To the specific recommendations, we first and foremost add our pledge to re-double our efforts in the coming six years to realize the Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015. We support the vision of one of the Elders, Graça Machel, who has said that *"None of the MDGs will be achieved without gender equality. To discriminate on the basis of sex and gender is morally indefensible; economically, politically and socially unsupportable."*

1. Early childhood

Childhood experiences differ hugely: for girls and boys and for children from privileged and underprivileged backgrounds. By the age of five, most children have internalised their role expectations as communicated by their families, the media and society as a whole. Millions of girls are socialised to believe that they have less ability as well as a lower status than boys. The upbringing of millions of boys is affected by absent or violent fathers and the lack of positive role models.

Stopping violence in families, schools and communities is the most important factor for developing identity-secure children and adults who can enjoy relationships with 'others' from different backgrounds. Gender-just upbringing practices for boys and girls improve adult gender relationships. The hardest thing about early childhood upbringing patterns is that they are passed on, mostly unconsciously, through generations.

Some Stop strategies

- Governments and social movements such as 'WE CAN end all violence against women' work together to halt the practice of aborting, killing, abandoning

and adopting-out girl babies, as well as physical and sexual violence in families. Birth registration, support services to end domestic violence and raising awareness about incest and bad and good upbringing practices are some of the strategies crucial to ending the violation of children's and girls' rights.

Some Move Over strategies

- Broadening the awareness that all children, regardless of where they are born, should be able to enjoy a safe, healthy and loving childhood: the actual implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989). Investments in gender/diversity-just pre-/postnatal infant care, pre-school care centres and life-skill curricula are important strategies for change.
- Children born into indigenous, refugee, migrant or poor families have the same rights to food, water, shelter and care as any other child. This requires public-private partnerships to realize social welfare policies, as well as targeted development aid in combination with adequate national and global taxation systems to be used for social security, health and life-long education provisions.

Some Different Together strategies

- The development and widespread implementation of rights-based and gender/diversity-just early childhood and parenting programs. Human rights and women's organizations can work together with universities and governments to develop and implement these.
- Extension of parental support through community-based radio programmes as well as child-centred early childhood television programmes, which encourage the interest and empathy of toddlers and their parents for gender and cultural differences as well as commonalities.

Tipping point thought

The crucial tipping point dilemma concerning early childhood is how to move beyond the notion that young children 'belong' to their parents. This notion makes it very hard to have any discussion about upbringing practices. Young children are the only 'citizens' who do not have any direct access to the 'rule of law', who are not protected by a legal system of 'checks and balances', which can help them if their parents or custodians happen to be their abusers. A possible solution is to install a legal guardian system (similar to the old 'godparent' model), which asks parents at the birth of their child to choose a trusted person outside the immediate family who can act as a guardian who will have legal access to and be able to 'look out for' the child in a practical and, if necessary, in a legal sense. At twelve years of age the child could then be allowed to choose her or his own

guardian. Speaking with parents about this proposal is an interesting 'tipping point' discussion in order to discover how they view their young children: as their own property or as their temporary precious responsibility, yet as citizens who have human rights of their own.

2. Health

The health situation of millions of men and, more especially, women around the world is deplorable. A staggering 1.2 billion people do not have access to clean drinking water. In sub-Saharan Africa, almost 60% of adults living with HIV/Aids are women. Two-thirds of 15 -19 year olds newly infected with HIV are girls, caused by the fact that they have less control over sexual decisions. The funds and the knowledge needed to improve women's health are available. They must be committed wisely and urgently.

Some Stop strategies

- Local and national Governments must stop the violations of women's rights to safety and physical integrity – through a variety of community security measures and social services such as shelters.
- Local and national Governments and pharmaceutical companies must stop making life saving medicines for women and men (malaria, HIV/Aids) a product for profit. IMF conditionalities to governments of developing countries to cut back on public spending must stop. With help of the UN organisations and bilateral and civil society development aid the government provision of local affordable health care, is possible and essential.

Some Move Over strategies

- National and local governments and multilateral organizations should make all people's access to safe drinking water and sanitation a number one policy priority.
- Besides public policies to encourage not only abstinence and monogamy, but also the use of contraceptives and condoms, affordable female condoms must be made widely available as these can increase women's control over their own bodies and help control the HIV/Aids endemic.

Some Different Together strategies

- Schools and NGOs should take up public campaigning and education on life skills for both boys and girls, which should include every aspect of hygiene and home- and child care in an ecologically responsible fashion.
- Healthy living includes outside activities, sport, culture etc. Public programmes engaging children and adults in environmental and animal care improves health as well as the relationship between people and planet.

Tipping point thought

Good health is a basic condition for life and happiness. The quality of life depends on the health of individuals and communities as a whole. The challenge is to provide sufficient health care to all people, regardless of their gender, their status or power or their financial means. Special attention must go to ensuring the most vulnerable women, children and men have access to health care. But the whole approach to health care is primarily a physical and not a psychological one. Yet promoting self esteem and respect, valuing different identities, encouraging empowerment in families, schools and communities, and stimulating active citizenship all have been proven to have a positive influence on mental and therefore on physical health. Integrated holistic mental and physical health education and prevention programs promoted through the education systems as well as through media outlets such as community radio and TV may do more for healthy living, as well as for savings in the health systems, than any specific disease prevention campaign.

3. Education

Access to education is THE key to achieving the human rights of all children – in particular those of girls and indigenous, refugee and migrant children. The primary school enrolment of girls in relation to boys has improved nearly everywhere and 'Education for all' is the most successful Millennium Development Goal. However, more than 75 million children in the world today - of whom over 41 million girls - never see the inside of a school. They spend their days in many unprotected forms of child labour.

There is ample evidence that educating girls is the most efficient and effective way to reduce poverty, improve health, decrease family size and encourage women's participation in economic activity as well as in political decision making. There is a clear correlation between the development of stable and peaceful communities/democracies and the numbers of educated girls and women. There are many good examples of schools that manage to build - through their formal and hidden curriculum (their daily practice) - cooperative and democratic communities where diversity is appreciated and conflicts are faced and solved. A just distribution of attention and power, as well as the fostering of emotional intelligence and empathy (often through the arts), instead of an over-emphasis on only rational intellect and competition, help in achieving this. Such schooling forms the basis of active democratic citizenship, and has a positive influence on future families and communities, as well as on leadership styles in civil society, corporations and governments.

Some Stop strategies

- Citizens and governments must implement the ILO Conventions to stop child labour (C138 and C182),

and support the Global March against Child Labour, a movement with 2000 member organizations in 100 countries.

- Civil society and governments must support the work of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, which includes rehabilitation programmes for former child soldiers. Special attention is due to girl ex-soldiers, who are often also sexually abused.
- Dutch citizens can advocate against the practice of keeping refugee children in detention centres in the Netherlands. These children must go to school.

Some Move Over strategies

- Parents, social movements, cultural and religious leaders and where relevant the corporate sector should advocate the rights of girls and women and the importance of girls' education. Schools firmly embedded in their own communities can help counter certain objections from those who reject the fundamental human right of girls to be educated.
- Governments and school leaders can do much to overcome gender and indigenous and/or migrant disparity in primary and especially secondary education. Ensuring a safe school environment, and dealing with bullying and (sexual) harassment of girls and 'different' children helps. Practical measures range from providing separate sanitation facilities and promoting later marriage, to bi-lingual education.
- Schools can teach certain subjects such as maths and physics, but also life-skills and sexual education separately for girls and boys, as this has proven to lead to more effective learning.

Some Different Together strategies

- A broad life-skill curriculum, including human rights and active citizenship, can be taught in all schools. All teachers have a responsibility to be gender/diversity-just role models and to encourage similar behaviour in their pupils and students. E-communication and distance learning/exchange can greatly deepen respect for and widen the knowledge and interest of children and young people in other peoples, cultures and lifestyles.
- At primary, secondary and tertiary level pupils and students can be engaged in practical projects to improve their communities in social- economic and environmental ways. This will teach them to cooperate from a young age, using their diverse backgrounds and talents to consult different parts of the communities to build a sustainable future. This is about learning the skills of a 'do-democracy' rather than just debating.

Tipping point thought

Education is not only about knowledge (the rational brain) but also about empathy (emotional intelligence),

learning to manage oneself and others (the hands) and learning to make connections across cultures, communities and distances (the feet). A common inter-generational tension arises when children and young adults spot the incoherence between how their parents and other adults talk and how they act. Similarly children and youths are sensitive to the coherence or incoherence in espoused values and real practice, found in corporate as well as political, social and religious leadership. Through the old educational principle of 'leading by example', leadership practices based on congruency and integrity can be promoted as the alternative to arbitrary authoritarian and self-serving leadership. Women and people from diverse backgrounds and lifestyles can 'lead by example' by taking responsibility for their own sphere of influence instead of holding on to a victim identity. Discussing such issues with established leaders as well as with women and minorities with a victim orientation is not easy, but can be a concrete way of promoting inclusive democracy. The whole notion of leadership itself ('will Obama make the difference') might need to be challenged and become: what courage do I have to make the difference – and together with which others?

4. Reproductive health

More than half a million women die from pregnancy-related problems every year; 99% of these deaths occur in the global South. Millions of women lack access to contraception due to poverty or cultural and religious imperatives. Illegal abortions, teenage pregnancies and child marriages are detrimental to women's physical and psychological health. Women worldwide should have the power to decide when and with whom they want to have sexual relationships, and whether or not they want to have how many children, and when.

Some Stop strategies

- Local and (inter)national civil society and governments must do their utmost to stop a culture of forced sexual intercourse, also within the context of marriage. This means raising awareness amongst political and religious leaders that it is a woman's right to decide what happens with herself and her body in terms of sexual relationships and child-bearing.
- Governments and multilateral institutions should provide funds for specialized clinics and staff primarily to prevent but if necessary to deal with female genital mutilation, rape, teenage pregnancy and illegal abortion and to make these and more general reproductive health services part of the regular primary health care service.

Some Move Over strategies

- Governments must do all within their powers to improve the quality and quantity of accessible health

services to prevent women dying unnecessarily during childbirth.

- National communication campaigns should publicly encourage girls and boys, their parents, their friends and their religious leaders to say that no condom (female or male, regardless of sexual preference) means no intercourse – and that any use of persuasion or force is rape.

Some Different Together strategies

- Teachers should make sure that sex education for boys and girls is part of the life-skill curriculum so that reproductive health and rights become part of regular education systems. Sharing experiences across generations can be a helpful and interesting part of such education.
- Media should play an important role in communicating respectful relationships between men and women of different backgrounds and lifestyles – not just in educational but also in general programs. Telephone services and e-communication can help in allowing space for children and youths to air their questions and concerns – and to point them to spaces of support.

Tipping point thought

The Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 on mother and child mortality are hardly making any headway. It is hugely puzzling why the primary life force (being born, giving birth) is such a deeply neglected and abused part of life, globally speaking. Possibly, this points to the essence of the patriarchal philosophy: it is the one area of life where the male role is not naturally dominant. This would explain why women's sexuality and reproductive rights are such explosive cultural, social and political themes. Motherhood is both seen as godly, and yet so badly provided for. Perhaps this anomaly should be approached by understanding better the deep social, cultural and psychological drivers here. What individual and institutional drivers come out of the fact that once mothers had total control over their babies lives – and later sent boys away out of the female communities to become 'the other'? There are good transformative examples of the positive effects of involving boys, men and fathers much more fully in reproductive and early childhood care. One such effect is less sexual abuse of women and children, because the emotional bonding leaves less room to see 'it' or 'her' as a sexual object to be used. If this is true, then girls and women also have to be taught to share motherhood and to cooperate more with the men in their families – which may be as difficult and transformative as men having to learn to share power in the outside world.

To have power over your own body and your reproductive forces is very important for every human being. However, societies and cultures do not make it easy for

people, especially for women, to discover their sexual preferences and reproductive rights. Education and communication in this field are essential to achieve changes. It would be very helpful if opinion leaders, local authorities, religious leaders and media personalities would work together to promote consciousness among a broad public about people's sexual and reproductive rights.

5. Sexual rights without violence

At least half of all women in the world experience sexual or physical violence at some point in their lives. Increasingly research shows that many boys and men also undergo such violence, although this is such a taboo that numbers are harder to give. Rape is used as a deliberate tactic in ethnic or religious conflict and in war. Female genital mutilation is still prevalent in parts of Africa and the Middle East. Moreover, more than 600,000 young girls and women are trafficked annually across national borders on all continents; the majority for sexual exploitation. In many parts of the world girls, boys, men and women live in fear of being harassed by fellow citizens or the authorities because of their sexual preferences. In some countries, honour killings brutally end the lives of girls and women.

Some Stop strategies

- Measures must be taken (awareness campaigns, education, laws, policing, victim support, etc.) so that these abusive practices stop. Boys and girls, women and men everywhere have a right to live their lives free from fear of sexual intimidation or violence.
- Governments should introduce new laws and practices to stop trafficking and to ensure that trafficked girls and women are protected, supported and offered choices for their futures. International anti-terrorist police should be trained to understand the linkages between trafficking and other criminal trading activities such as the illegal weapons and drugs trade.

Some Move Over strategies

- Schools should implement physical and psychological self-defence which includes respect, empowerment and active citizenship as part of a broader life-skills curriculum for all children.
- The worldwide women's movement that works with victims of violence deserves solid policy and financial support from national and local governments. Work done on gender relationships and sexual violence should increasingly include and involve men.

Some Different Together strategies

- Increasingly a healthy (freely chosen) sexual life is seen as an integral part of a healthy and happy life. Yet in the media girls and women are still often

portrayed as sexual objects, with stereotyped ideas about physical beauty. Most of the many educational volumes about sexuality focus on the reproductive facts and not on sexuality within relationships. Sexual diversity is noticeably absent even in many recent western publications. Yet pornographic material is intrusively present on internet and television, including heterosexual male fantasies about lesbian activities: all this has little to do with sexuality within (hetero- or LGBT relationships). Transformative educational material and creative films and media programming of culturally and sexually diverse people and lifestyles are badly needed.

- In education, culture and sport as well as in our careers and communities people are generally encouraged to inform themselves, learn, practice, discover their own preferences, talents and potentials – and to grow and develop. In some cultures and in some eras this philosophy is also applied to the discovery of one's own and other's sexuality. But a combination of reasons, including the risk of pregnancy and/or of sexual diseases, and certain conservative pressures within some parts of the religious landscape as well as society in general, soon put an end to much of this. It would be interesting to develop a concept of a sexually competent and mature person – both in accepting their own sexuality and that of others. And then to find out how to develop such sexual competencies. Empathy, communication and creativity will no doubt have to be part of this route.

Tipping point thought

The double morality prevalent in common attitudes to the sexual rights of women and men is a disadvantage to both. Women are perhaps so often encouraged to protect their physical integrity as well as being held morally responsible, that they may develop an engrained 'no' instead of exploring their own sexuality as a good and natural part of life. Men might similarly become so involved in 'the chase' and breaking through barriers that their focus might be more about 'scoring' than about a shared physical and emotional experience. Some argue that such patterns in sexuality are instinctive parts of our nature, not a nurtured or learned experience. But if the transformative philosophy we need to survive, as people and planet, tells us to move from the patriarchal style of competition to care and cooperation, then perhaps that may be true for our sexuality as well. Like all aspects of life, commercialisation and commodification have led us to want more and more – instead of taking care and exploring and cooperating towards quality, joy and happiness.

6. Work, income & care

In large parts of the world, people's right to work and to decent work conditions is not fulfilled. Seventy per cent

of the 1.5 billion people living in extreme poverty (earning \$1 a day or less) are female, but with the present food- and financial crisis estimates are that this percentage and the feminisation of poverty is rising rapidly. Women's wages are on average half of what men get paid. Women's corporate leadership lags far behind that of men. Dividing formal work and domestic and child care tasks evenly between partners remains very difficult, yet is a crucial factor in prolonging the untapped potential and talent of women as workers, academics and political leaders. 'Invest in women!' should become the key motto for all economic policies. Similarly the potential of men as care-givers, educators and home-makers is underdeveloped, as can be seen by the numeric domination of women in those parts of life.

Some Stop strategies

- The corporate sector should (be made to) stop all practices that concern indecent wages, bad labour conditions and the violation of labour rights. Trade Unions should be encouraged, not forbidden: as should women's participation in them.
- Governments should put in place flexible and effective regulation to prevent blatant exploitation in the enormous and fast growing informal workforce, which is largely 'manned' by women.

Some Move Over strategies

- Governments and businesses should introduce regulations and practices to ensure equal opportunities for economic leadership of women, either by means of 'naming and shaming' or by setting quota.
- Governments should ensure that employment figures for youth, women, migrants, indigenous and other minorities such as people with special abilities mirror their percentages in the general population instead of showing the present huge discrepancy. Special skill, work, micro-finance and entrepreneurship support (in training and finance) should be designed to especially help young people survive the current economic crisis.

Some Different Together strategies

- The GRI sustainability reporting guidelines, used globally by companies to disclose their sustainability performance, should include gender and diversity in the workforce issues. The GRI guidelines should be strengthened by adding disclosure on management approach (DMA) on gender as part of a human rights policy, to be announced by companies. Companies can then explain which measures they take to on the one hand promote the advancement of women in their organization, with specific mention of their efforts to obtain a minimum of 40% of women in their board and senior management. And on the other hand, explain the policy with enabling

conditions to advance the empowerment of women and relevant diversity groups (recruitment and retention policy, training, parental leave, etc). In addition, they will have to indicate grievance procedures in relation to gender/diversity issues.

- Better child care support is crucial for women to participate fully in economic and political processes. At the same time fathers must be given better opportunities to take up their share of child care and domestic responsibilities. Welfare programmes for people living in poverty should focus on activating the mothers and grandmothers to participate in such programmes and in the workforce, as this has proven to impact positively on the welfare, education and future economic and political participation of girls.

Tipping point thought

The present crisis in values clearly reveals that not only economic values should count in our societies, but that Justice and Sense also need to be served in a healthy system. The concepts equity and equality for women are not the sole rationale for different divisions of work, income and care. Such transformation can be argued in terms of economic as well as social development. Women are the key solution to two problems in the western world: aging and a shortage in the labor force. They can similarly play a major role in combating poverty and climate change. Investment in women joining the labor force serves equality, economic growth, the 'new green deal' and the future cost of women in terms of health and pension schemes: they will be better able to provide for themselves. But perhaps more important is a cultural transformation from the era of competition and domination to one of cooperation. There is proof within the context of the present financial crisis that corporate leadership that is more diverse (in terms of gender and background) is more effective. Probably because when diversity is harnessed in a positive way (avoiding polarization and conflict) it gives space to more empathy and creativity – which in turn leads to better solutions. The monoculture of striving for quick financial gains can make way for a more cooperative value-based inclusive culture. A work place then becomes a cooperative human community, which has and knows its place in the value-chain of its own product. Much of the present thinking about a new and sustainable green economy and green jobs includes this kind of vision.

7. Active citizenship

The decision making power of girls and women at household and at community level is universally less than that of men, except in women-headed households. At national and global levels - UN, IMF, World Bank, WTO, multinational corporations, international

NGOs - their participation in decision making is even less. Nevertheless there is some reason for optimism. Government and civil society leadership of women is slowly but surely growing, and the corporate sector too is beginning to understand the (business) advantages of gender equity. It has been proven that diversity in any leadership situation (government, corporate or civil society) can initially increase tension but will actually improve the quality of decision making and performance of an organisation. Diversity in age, cultural background and gender leads to more creativity and a more rigorous process of solution seeking - partly because there is more disagreement at the table.

Some Stop strategies

- All forms of exclusion of women and minorities in decision-making at community, local, national and global levels must be stopped. Women for instance must be part of any peace processes (UN 1325) – not only on paper but in practice.
- Multinational institutions including the UN must stop explicit and implicit discrimination on the grounds of gender and diversity at leadership level and in their workforce. This is still an enormous challenge. The gender balance in global economic and political processes urgently needs to be improved. The election of Obama and the successful GEAR process to engender the UN structures and practice are positive developments.

Some Move Over strategies

- Schools must provide gender/diversity-just education and governments ensure equal access to education because education increases girls' and women's bargaining power at every level of their lives, as well as their chances of economic and political participation.
- Women's organisations as well as organisations of indigenous peoples and migrants etc. should receive much more funding (women's organisations together worldwide are estimated at present to receive no more than US\$ 120 million) from national and multilateral agencies to carry out their indispensable work to fight discrimination and to achieve empowerment for women, equal opportunities and sustainable development for all.
- Governments must put in place policies and practice to increase women's equal opportunities for political leadership.

Some Different Together strategies

- Parents should be facilitated in committing themselves to acting in accordance with their understanding that the primary place where gender relationships can be transformed is inside the home. That is where democracy and respect (or not) between

men and women, towards difference and diversity and towards children plays out/is nurtured. Such an attitude of respect will then logically be extended to animals and the environment, letting children experience from birth that they are deeply to connected, not only to their own family but to their community, the world and the planet as a whole.

Tipping point thought

Democratic decision making begins at home and within schools and communities. Authoritarian and simple majority thinking can be transformed into all kinds of consultative decision making models where respect for difference and minorities is a central and practical value. Is a child allowed to be a vegetarian (for instance) when the rest of the family are not? How to negotiate the extra work this creates? Many peace building practices used in post-conflict areas actually have developed democratic processes and values which could be transformed into general practices at household, school and community level. Using these principles and making them part of pre- and post natal care and early childhood education can ensure that the earliest socialisation of children is a democratic and not an authoritarian one. An emotive tipping point discussion about 'democracy in the home' is always about whether parents can and should physically punish their children.

8. The third age

Women are tough: despite the fact that many of them face more work and violence during their lives than men, and are more vulnerable to certain health problems (e.g. complications of giving birth, STDs including HIV/Aids), their life expectancy is on average higher. Yet old age comes with insecurities, especially for women who are financially dependent on their husbands or other male family members (who generally die earlier) or have no right to inheritance or land. Or for women who are dependent on insufficient social welfare in those countries that provide this at all.

Some Stop strategies

- Civil Society and governments must urgently ease the difficult situation of many old people in Africa (grandmothers!) who are responsible, but have virtually no means (no inheritance, no land, no pension), for looking after the feeding and education of their grandchildren and those of their friends orphaned due to the HIV/Aids pandemic.
- The general neglect of the elderly, particularly women and the marginalised, such as indigenous peoples and migrants, is a reality in most countries, both culturally and politically. Abuse and neglect should make place for political, social, cultural and economic rights of the elderly – to include explicit policies and financial support.

Some Move Over strategies

- Communities and governments should take special care to guarantee the material well-being of older widowed women who during their lives have worked so hard in unpaid jobs and have been financially dependent on their husbands.
- Migrant populations face specific challenges in providing for their elderly – whether in their original or in their adopted countries. Global provisions for remittances, and cross-country support and pensions can do justice to those who worked in one country and are growing old in another.

Some Different Together strategies

- The wisdom of the elderly (men and women) is prevalent in some cultures more than in others. Apart from the right of all older people near and far to be treated with respect so that they can live the last phase of their lives comfortably and with dignity, it is also interesting to learn from those cultures where the elderly have different but useful community roles, and where their experience is seen as something to be tapped into, instead of ignored.
- Growing old gracefully in an empowered way challenges the huge commercial western industry now encouraging products aimed at keeping everyone looking as young as possible for as long as possible. The rejection of the third age as a respected phase of life can be challenged in the media, as well as in political decision making processes.

Tipping point thought

The most interesting tipping point thought concerning the ‘third age’ is to actually organise society in a way that encourages intergenerational thinking and organising. This connects with the idea of ‘kangaroo homes’ (where elderly can have their stand alone part of the home), and community centres for pre-school children and the elderly together. There is an increasing number of different examples of organising paid as well as voluntary work, which involve diverse groups of people (in age, lifestyles and backgrounds) in shared community projects. There are also examples of ‘living history’ projects where students or theatre activists interview elderly people about their lives, and then create community theatre and music performances based on that material. This can also enhance cross-cultural understanding: for instance by showing what the struggle against or for water, or alternatively for political freedom has meant in the lives of the now elderly.

A good tipping point discussion is to ask people of any age to think about what the added value of elderly people could be in any aspect of their lives – and what they would like to learn or hear from those elders. Similarly elderly people can be asked what they would like

to understand better in the ‘modern life’ – and how they themselves would like to continue to contribute to their communities.

FINALLY: HAVING READ ALL THIS: WHAT COULD YOU DO TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE SOLUTIONS AND JUSTICE FOR ALL – INSPIRED BY THE ABOVE?

As a Citizen. As part of any level of government, or related public service. As part of the corporate sector, or as professional or voluntary part of civil society.

Can you carry our thinking further; can you develop more strategies, more tipping points?

Will you work with us to take the above beyond thinking and writing – into the practical reality, both in the Netherlands and in the wider world?

Thank you!

The Worldconnectors.