

UK Gender and Development Network

Detailed Response:

*One World Conservatism –  
A Conservative Agenda for International Development*

November 2009

**1. Overarching comments**

The UK Gender and Development Network welcomes the Conservative Party's recognition of gender equality as a key issue running through the heart of the Conservative agenda for international development. However, we urge the Party to make this commitment explicit, to ensure that gender equality concerns are visible and therefore funded and reported against, and to demonstrate powerful leadership on this issue on the international stage.

We welcome the Green Paper commitment to work towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the attention to MDG 5 on maternal health. However, we note with concern the absence of firm policy commitments to realising MDG 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment. This is in spite of the clear recognition within the Green Paper that the world's poorest people are often women and that women bear the brunt of poverty.

We remind the Conservative Party that releasing the potential of all women and girls is therefore not only a matter of justice, but is key to development effectiveness and poverty reduction. For example, increased women's labour force participation and higher earnings is a critical driver of wealth creation<sup>1</sup>; educated and economically independent women and girls have greater control over their fertility; and targeting spending at women has been repeatedly linked to 'value for money'<sup>2</sup>. Making gender equality a visible and well-resourced development priority is therefore both a moral imperative as well as one of the most effective and efficient ways of accelerating progress towards the goals at the very heart of the Conservative's agenda for international development.

The Green Paper promise to '*empower women to take decisions about their reproductive and sexual health*' is therefore welcome, but we hope the Conservative Party will go much further. Women must be recognised not only as mothers, but as key economic, political and social actors, and empowered to participate fully in the decisions that impact *all* areas of their lives.

The lack of support in the Green Paper for strengthening women's participation in political life and decision-making is disappointing in this regard. Women still make up only 20 per cent of decision-makers worldwide – yet true democracy cannot be achieved whilst such a proportion of

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<sup>1</sup> See World Bank, 2007, Gender Action Plan: Gender Equality as Smart Economics

<sup>2</sup> The ILO estimates, for example, that while men reinvest on average around 30 to 40 percent of their income in the household, women reinvest around 90 percent.

the population are excluded from decision-making processes. We therefore urge the Conservative Party to make a strong and explicit commitment to challenge the barriers that exclude women from decision making at all levels, supported by robust funding and implementation mechanisms.

The absence of attention to violence against women and girls as a core development issue is of particular concern to the UK Gender and Development Network. Violence against women and girls is a leading factor in perpetuating global poverty; the UN Secretary General refers to violence against women as the 'missing MDG'. This is the case in 'peaceful' societies, as much as in situations of conflict and post-conflict. Violence prevents women and girls from escaping poverty by limiting their choices and ability to access education, earn money, or participate in political and public life. It is also a major obstacle to progress in the areas of girls' education, HIV/AIDS, health, and conflict prevention and resolution.

Achieving progress towards ending violence against women and girls needs an ambitious, high-level commitment embedded in the UK's foreign policy goals. We strongly urge a future Conservative Government to push for greater attention to tackling violence against women and girls in the international development arena, through influencing multilateral agencies and giving its full support to the UN Secretary General's 'Say No – UNITE' campaign to end violence against women. We further call on the party to develop and sustainably fund a comprehensive plan mapping out DFID's role in the implementation of the new UK Violence Against Women Strategy.

Finally, in recognition of the Party's support for gender equality as a core development concern, we call on the Conservatives to push internationally to ensure that the new UN agency for women is independent and well-resourced, with a strong leader so that it has the power to be really effective. We further hope the Conservative Party will match the current Government's commitment to double new core funds to the agency.

## **2. Value for Money in Aid**

2.1 We support the strong commitment in the Green Paper to ensuring value for money in aid, and remind the Conservative Party of the numerous studies showing that investments in women and girls yield very large social and economic returns. For example, the high economic returns of investing in secondary schooling for girls are widely accepted: a review of 42 countries showed that an extra year of secondary schooling can increase girls' future wages by 10 to 20 per cent<sup>3</sup>. Studies also reveal striking differences in the proportion of earnings that men and women devote to meeting basic family needs such as food, healthcare and schooling. In short, increasing investments in women and girls can have a major impact on tackling poverty and improving broader development outcomes and aid effectiveness, as well as being central to bringing about positive changes in women's lives.

2.2 We believe that finding new channels through which to support women's organisations and other civil society organisations working to achieve gender equality must be a priority in the changing aid environment. Research carried out by the UK Gender and Development Network in 2008 highlighted the desperate need for innovative sources of funding for women's organisations, many of which are losing out with the shift to direct budget support. We therefore welcome the pledge to establish a Poverty Impact Fund, which we believe has the potential to make a crucial contribution to strengthening the work of civil society

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<sup>3</sup> Psacharopoulos, G. and Patrinos, H.A. 2004. "Returns to investment in education: A further update." *Education Economics* 12(2): 111-134

organisations. We urge the Conservative Party to ensure this money reaches women's organisations, since this is one of the most effective ways of channelling aid to the poorest and most marginalised people. We further hope that the Fund will provide long-term, core funding – this is especially important for gender equality work, where positive change is invariably a gradual process. More broadly, we hope the Conservative Party will ensure that longer-term results, including gender equality, do not get squeezed out in efforts to identify tangible results as quickly as possible.

2.3 We welcome the commitment in the Green Paper to recognising citizens as active agents of their own development and enabling them to participate in decisions about aid. We call on the Conservatives to seize this as an opportunity to promote 'gender responsive budgeting' as a way of tracking performance on gender equality and monitoring the delivery of effective and equitable development results. Similarly, while the focus on 'getting the data for a look at before and after' is important, we urge the Conservative Party to push explicitly for the systematic use of sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators across all areas of the Party's international development work<sup>4</sup>.

## 1. Wealth Creation

3.1 Empowering women to realise their full economic potential is a prerequisite to effective wealth creation. We endorse the position in the Conservative policy paper *Women in the World Today*, which insists that the equal participation of women in all spheres of society is a crucial driver of economic growth and development. This requires major efforts to tackle pervasive gender discrimination, particularly within labour markets and legal systems. The significant support for microfinance outlined in the Green Paper is encouraging in this regard.

3.2 The Green Paper also places clear emphasis on finding 'ways to improve agricultural productivity in poor countries'. Improving women's access to and control over productive resources and inputs is the obvious place to start. For example, it is estimated that agricultural productivity in Africa would increase by up to 20 per cent if women's access to resources such as land, seed and fertilisers were equal's to men's<sup>5</sup>.

3.3 Unequal access to land has particularly adverse impacts on productivity, undermining the key role that women farmers play in food production and denying women the collateral required by banks to receive credit and loans. While we strongly welcome the priority given in the Green Paper to pushing for reform of property rights, we urge the Conservative Party to make special consideration of the particular challenges women face in attaining ownership and control of their land and property. It is unacceptable that despite being over 50 per cent of the world's population women still own only one per cent of the world's land. We hope the Conservative Party will make it a priority to press for equality of property and land ownership, including by supporting land and property reform initiatives that are gender-sensitive.

3.4 As the Green Paper notes, the context for fostering wealth creation has changed dramatically over the past year in the face of the major food and financial crises. While we welcome the commitment in the Green Paper to shield the poor from the impact of these crises, we remind the Conservatives that these impacts have been highly uneven, with women and girls

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<sup>4</sup> For further information, see the GADN briefing on gender-sensitive indicators.

<sup>5</sup> Africa Partnership Forum, 207, Gender and Economic Empowerment in Africa, 8th Meeting of the Africa Partnership Forum, Berlin, Germany, 22-23 May 2007

disproportionately affected. Women and girls are typically first to forgo medical treatment and food or be withdrawn from school, and they generally have fewer assets or savings to draw on in times of crisis. We urge the Conservative Party to respond boldly by pressing for social protection programmes which address gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities, are national in coverage, and are provided over the long-term.

3.5 The recognition in the Green Paper of the importance of giving women choice over whether or not to have children is extremely positive. Yet for many women around the world this choice simply does not exist because of gender inequalities which mean it is men who decide when and with whom to have sex, and when and if to use contraception. Tackling gender inequality and violence against women must therefore be at the heart of efforts to support women and girls to take control of their reproductive and sexual lives. While improving access to contraception is a key step in terms of strengthening women's control over their own reproduction, this must be accompanied by comprehensive sexuality education and access to sexual health information to better enable women to make informed choices. Facilitating women's access to equal employment opportunities and productive assets is also crucial because they provide women with a firmer basis on which to assert their reproductive choices.

## **2. Conflict, Stabilisation and Peacekeeping**

4.1 While the promise to give greater prominence to promoting conflict prevention and resolution is welcome, we are concerned by the absence of attention to sexual and gender-based violence in conflict situations. Sexual and gender-based violence – including mass rape, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery and other forms of degrading treatment of women – are now systematically used as a deliberate, co-ordinated tactic of war, and have been recognised by UN Security Council Resolution 1820 as a security issue requiring a security response. We would therefore recommend making sexual and gender-based violence a Conservative international development priority, particularly in the areas of security and access to justice.

4.2 A review of UN peacekeeping operations is similarly welcome, but women's involvement in peacekeeping and peace-building programmes should be a central requirement. This is vital to the building of lasting peace. Women's positive contributions to peace-building and post-war reconstruction are explicitly recognised in the Conservative policy paper *Women in the World Today*. Furthermore, the UK is already committed to promoting women's inclusion in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction through UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The Conservative Party should continue to push for the implementation and enforcement of SCRs 1325 and 1820, backed up with resources and measurable indicators.

### **3. Key Recommendations**

- 5.1 *Make the Conservative Party's commitment to integrating gender equality across all areas of its international development policy explicit and visible, backed up with adequate resources and strong monitoring systems.***
- 5.2 *Place a high priority on supporting women's full and equal participation in economic and political life and decision-making, supported by robust funding, implementation and monitoring mechanisms.***
- 5.3 *Make a high-profile commitment to tackle violence against women and girls internationally by addressing this as a foreign policy priority and establishing a high-level post on violence against women that straddles the FCO, DFID and MoD, allocating UK Ministerial resources to support this focus.***
- 5.4 *Continue to push internationally to ensure that the new UN agency for women is independent and well-resourced with a strong leader, and double new core funds to the agency***
- 5.5 *Earmark funding available through the Poverty Impact Fund to support gender equality and women's organisations***
- 5.6 *Ensure the systematic use of sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators across all areas of the Conservative Party's international development work, and promote gender responsive budgeting as a way of tracking performance on gender equality***
- 5.7 *Press for equality of property and land ownership as an integral aspect of the Conservative Party's emphasis on reforming property rights***
- 5.8 *Provide support for social protection programmes which address gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities, and are provided over the long-term***
- 5.9 *Ensure that tackling gender inequality and violence against women are at the heart of efforts to support women and girls to take control of their reproductive and sexual lives***
- 5.10 *Support women's equal involvement in peacekeeping and peace-building programmes, and push for the implementation and enforcement of SCRs 1325 and 1820, backed up with resources and measurable indicators.***