

## **Many Promises, Many Demands - But What About Me and My Life?**

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### Introduction

This paper is a guilt trip - a critical review of what in our haste to deliver and impose human rights paradigms we do to the powers, lives, status and capacities of women and girls in the metaphorical village, put differently, to those we unconsciously 'other' as we seek to transform their lives. It asks the question: Are we as human rights activists violating the rights of the very people we set out to aid?

Whatever criticisms emerge are as applicable to myself and my academic programmes and activities as they are to governments, international development agencies, feminists or otherwise, NGO's, trade organisations, educational, religious, human rights and political institutions and bodies. As will emerge my own Masters in Women's Law students have violated the rights of the women, girls, men and boys in the village and so have I either in 'collusion' with my students, as a researcher or as a non intervening bystander.

### **Format of the Paper**

One of the phrases that is constantly recycled within women's law is Tove Stang Dahl's diktat that 'we take women as the starting point'. (Stang Dahl 1987). In the context of this paper the starting point is located in finding a way to mainstream women's needs while ensuring that we start and end with their rights and needs and keep them as the centre of our focus. In an effort to keep the focus on the woman and her needs I have used the notional or real woman in the village's day to make critical points. In order to explain the implications of her day in responding to her perceived development and human rights I have resorted to elaborate endnotes.

At the end of the paper I have tried to ask the questions that are needed to start the process of developing an analytical framework that engages women's assumed and, wherever possible, articulated needs, with human rights imperatives. I have used both as guides and indicators to efficacy of performance and delivery in development and interrelated human rights agendas.

### **Where are we going? What are we doing?**

The day and the week of my representational woman in the village is long, hard and goes largely unrewarded in any significant material sense, hers is largely a hand to mouth existence. If she is 'fortunate' she is at what might be styled subsistence plus level, able to generate surplus cash or resources, and maintaining an adequate but basic standard of living - albeit hard.

There are a variety of human rights instruments that alert us to her needs, but our own knowledge and compassion could alert us to the self same considerations if we knew her life and its trials and tribulations. But as a general proposition her life is not that well known or understood - but it is a life that is the focus of donors, law reformers, development project designers, health for all campaigners, feminist activists all of whom

focus their programmes and activities on her and her life. Too often, in the rush to develop her, she is lost as an individual, her voice is not the one that resonates, her life has been appropriated not just by the patriarchy that we rail against but by the very persons who purport to be liberating her from patriarchal oppression and exploitation - a kind of neo-patriarchy or a new age feminist matriarchy that knows best.

Certainly she is not ignored she is the focus of much concern and the expenditure of significant sums of money. Arguably if her needs were carefully identified, if her own concerns and the inhibiting factors in her life were taken into account and real consideration was given to her as an individual who can articulate her needs, then she can plan and order her life if given the space and time. CEDAW Article 14 is directed at rural women and states' obligations in meeting her needs.

In unpacking the implications of Article 14 it is important to appreciate how those rights are formulated. Article 14 (2) enjoins States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas ... [and] that **they participate in and benefit from rural development and in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:**

(a) **To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;**

(b) To have access to **adequate health care facilities** ...

(d) To obtain **all types of training and education**, formal and informal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, **the benefit of all community extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency.**

(e) To **organize** self help groups and cooperatives to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self employment;

(h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, **sanitation, electricity and water supply** ...

**(Emphasis my own.)**

There is a clear focus on the right of rural women to organize among themselves, to plan, to have access to education to enhance their technical proficiency I do not read this to be cast as 'planned for', and just implement as directed. I do not read it as just a focus on functional literacy it is a framework for involvement and self sufficiency - being in command of your life and how it develops. This does not exclude planning assistance, constructive dialogue about what is needed and why between development agents and potential partners in the village but it speaks to the need for her input, potential for control, development of managerial skills and at the end of it all self determination.

But, and this is the perplexed bit, too, too often planning is top down, remote, based on a generic rural woman - too many disparate entities are planning her life. There are too many demands but, coming from the context of Zimbabwe and ever increasing measures

to regulate and control individual's lives for political gain, I make this comment guardedly. It is not an invitation to exclude interventions; it is about genuine respect for those we seek to assist. Nor is it about passive cultural relativism, letting things lie because there may be resistance or because we have not found the right points to facilitate the dialogue. In a way it is about quite hard work for all the players. For example Article 14 (a) regardless of who is doing it tends to end up with the woman in the village as the end implementer, meeting targets set elsewhere, plans made in another place, frequently with no reference to her, or examining her capacities and imperatives (See the sewing machine and freezit projects discussed in the 'village' timetable. )

The right to **sustainable** development as articulated in Article 19 (b) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa has a similar directive, that directs States Parties to take all appropriate measures to:

(b) ensure **participation of women at all levels in the conceptualization, decision-making**, implementation and **evaluation** of development policies and programmes.

The emphasis is clear; it is on participation, not just as implementers but as conceptualisers, decision makers - the involvement that leads to creative capacity building and independence in decision making.

### **Hopeful Bit**

Although so far I have seemed to be extremely critical of the way in which development and other initiatives are imposed on the woman in the village I must hasten to assure the reader that my criticism is focused, focused on how her life has been appropriated, how agendas are imposed on her. My concern is how we engage her in development and human rights issues not whether we engage her. Engage her we must and human rights, in their tiered multiplicities, can be very sound pointers to her entitlements and states' obligations to her. They are means to make demands on governments, the means to test and assess attainment of basic minimum standards of provision of services and rights and entitlements but none of these are utilised or addressed in a vacuum - there are real people and real lives at the end of the chain. In the frantic quest for her advancement the woman in the village vaporizes in the planning process - she becomes a global 'woman' in the village to be rescued with global plans and global agendas. Can we take a breath and look at her, look at her as a potential partner not as a mere object of our plans. Can we fit ourselves into her days and weeks not shove her days and weeks into our programmes? There are human rights implications in this query.

### **A Constructed Reality**

This is a constructed reality day, hopefully not quite as ludicrously off reality as so called reality television, these are events and activities that take place and all the activities do happen but perhaps not all in one week. However, as NGOs get to the end of the budgetary periods the drive to have workshops, training sessions and activities in the village can be quite hectic, so especially if it is a village in an area close to a large urban centre visits can be frequent around these times.

## A Woman's Day in the Village - Time for Everything and Nothing

Time	Activity	Needs and Issues
04:00	Wake up - make fire and heat water for family bathing	Solar heater, piped water if possible from an accessible bore hole or a bore hole that is not too faraway and the water is potable
05:00	Boil water for tea, prepare food if any	
06:00	Fetch water - 20 litre cans, or other available container - carry on head.	Potable water readily available - preferably pumped, piped
07:00	Provide men (husband) with bath water. See husband off to farming extension field day	poultry or goat Piped and heated water, even solar heating. But women are the ones who look after these animals - oh well that's what officialdom thinks and who am I to argue. Realization of who is responsible for what in this family by outsiders.
08:00	Carrying out housework, washing etc possibly at the river.	Relax and gossip with other women while undertaking these tasks. This is a good time and space for information exchanges - we are together as women and time won't be wasted. This is often a useful time to exchange vies etc.
09:00	Undertaking vegetable gardening, assist in the fields - seasonal.	This might go on all day but there are other externally imposed 'obligations' - where participation is expected. [Possible variations are listed below.] If I knew more about the markets and pricing and transport I could probably sell some of these vegetables - I need a cell phone or the village needs a cell phone.
10 :00	Monday Attend child health clinic - on specified days attend	ante natal clinic, family planning clinic or provide care to HIV/AIDS patients in community home based care programmes. [Wait while passing researcher interviews clinic nurse - get angry because not attended to but appear to just sit and accept the situation.] I need someone to understand that I have a life too - I need time and space!!! I need someone to talk with, someone to understand my needs and problems. Why do I have to do all the listening? I need to be treated like a thinking person I am able to work out what is needed, may be some help on how but I don't need to be dictated to. If these groups listened to us and coordinated their efforts we would all benefit.
	Tuesday Attend human rights, children rights, or other work	shop arranged by NGO that needs to spend its money quickly before year end. Be talked at by presenters not talked with. Take home piles of glossy pamphlets - wonder how the organisation can be contacted in time of real need.
	Wednesday Possibly wait hours for local politician to arrive	to be harangued about local issues; possibly wait for local politician and aid donor to arrive with yet another sewing machine, or freezit maker or some other income generating machine that a do-gooder thinks we could use. Dance and ululate in real or feigned gratitude.
	Thursday Be given exhortatory messages about domestic violence, FGM, and how it is wrong. Yet I have been kept at workshop all day - expect beating in the evening for being late and chores not done. Be told by husband that FGM keeps women under control.	
	Friday Work in the fields; make baskets etc at local women's	cooperative.

	Saturday Catch up on week's work. Funeral in nearby village, provide food or assist in food preparation.	
	Sunday Church - a rare moment of relaxation.	
11:00	Probably still waiting at clinic or general community activities continue.	
12:00	Hope oldest daughter has arrived home or is on her way to care for other children. Need a way to relieve the burden on my daughters.	
13:00	Make way home, purchase a few very small food items - on good days. Need disposable income - subsistence plus base.	
14:00	Monday Feel guilty about not attending group sewing session huddled around one machine donated by foreign well wisher. Need projects that are linked to our core activities. Need projects we want to do, not someone else's idea. Need researchers to realise that we have lives, need them to come back, need them to listen. At least this was not a questionnaire - and I could ask questions and get information from them.	
	Tuesday Attend or fail to attend as expected some other income generating activity devised for the women in the community by NGOs - well wishers.	
	Wednesday Communal toilets cleaning duty.	
	Thursday Be interviewed at home by women's law researcher - whole community arrives to see what is going on - have to provide refreshments - if lucky researcher has refreshments.	
	Friday Visiting foreign aid delegation comes to inspect village projects - need to make it look like something is happening.	
15:00	Monday Attend adult literacy class - puzzle about curriculum and its continuing relevance. Need literacy programmes that progress; programmes that deal with my needs. We are adults we know what we need to know!! We are used as show pieces - we need activities that benefit us!!!!	
	Tuesday Income generating and managerial skills lessons - feeling exhausted and aware of urgent activities to be undertaken at home.	
	Wednesday Attend church women's group.	
	Thursday Some women's human rights day activity - sing and ululate for visitors.	
	Friday Launch of national millennium goals day, promises of aid, development and services from all sorts of visitors who arrive in 4 x 4s and sit in a tent with fellow dignitaries - villagers sit in the sun.	
16:00	Continue class, other activities - whatever - and/or Fetch more water / collect fire wood on way home Reticulated water - electricity, solar power, a shorter more manageable day.	
17:00	Begin preparations of evening meal - press daughters into assisting while sons do homework and/or bring cattle in.	
18:00	Feel guilty about not attending village planning meeting - but children have to be organised and fed	
19:00	Clean up - prepare for next day	
20:00	Knit, sew, crochet - small income generation activities to supplement/provide cash income Need to know realistically about pricing - selling opportunities	

21:00	“”	
22:00	Prepare for bed	
23:00	Sleep - you hope	
24:00	Possibly on duty as village support or safe house person for cases of domestic violence or rape.	So much to do,
	so many expectations!!	
01:00	Nurse new infant	
02:00	Sleep	
03:00	Sleep	
04:00	Start all over again - with daily or weekly variations	

It was pointed out to me when I showed the timetable to a colleague that NGOs, CBOs and other organisations may do combined days, where perhaps if there is an agricultural field day or a workshop on some topic they all come together, to save time, fuel and resources and do everything in one day. Potentially leaving the recipients bemused and bewildered after a plethora of information and exhortations to change their lives, their practices; literally anything and everything.

Thursday

04.00	Wake up - make fire and heat water for family bathing	
05.00	Boil water for tea, prepare food if any	
06.00	Fetch water - 20 litre cans, or other available container. Carry on head.	
07.00	Provide men (husband) with bath water.	
08.00	Carrying out housework.	
09.00	Attend women specific workshop - full day programme - HIV/AIDS information session - AIDS Organisation	
	We had one of these sessions last week from another group - do they ever talk to each other?	
10.00	Home-based care information session - AIDS Organisation	
	Need gloves, soap, ARVs, respite from the stress of caring for ill people.	
11.00	Nutrition information - AIDS Organisation	
	Time to grow the vegetables, time to fetch the water - time to sleep!!!	
12.00	Inheritance Campaign Information - Women's Legal Aid NGO.	
	Would like more information on women's rights to inherit, time to go to the	

magistrate's court.

13.00	Bread and cordial/tea for lunch Space to check that children are ok Something more interesting to eat - more substantial.	
14.00	Inheritance campaign information - Theatre group performance Would like more time for questions - explanations, time to explain my problems, someone to listen.	
15.00	Information on how to get birth certificates - Women's Legal Aid NGO Transport to nearest town to do the registration or a traveling registrar.	
16.00	Information on importance of marriage certificates Information on how to get my husband to register the marriage.	
17.00	Sing ululate as presenters all leave in 4x4s. (Well tomorrow is Friday and then the weekend.) Time to chat and discuss - but they have to get back to town.	
18.00	Catch up on housework etc; press daughters into assisting while sons do homework. Try and organise food - what little we have.	
19.00	Generally sort out children and husband.	
20.00	Clean up - prepare for next day	
21.00	Knit, sew, crochet, basket weaving - small income generation activities to supplement/provide cash income	
22.00	“”	
23.00	Prepare for bed	
24.00	Sleep - you hope	
01.00	Lie awake thinking about the day's information - no time to absorb it all. Will I remember it all?	

02.00	Nurse new infant	
03.00	Sleep	
04.00	Start a new day Time to rest, think!!	

### **The Development Imperative - Object or Subject?**

The interventions that intersperse or intrude into the ‘woman’s ‘day or week are driven by the interveners’ conceptualization of issues and needs for the woman in the village. They incorporate her as a voice-less recipient, they seem to take little account of her daily imperatives and activities. They rarely if ever, consult her and her sisters about their own needs and aspirations.

The predominant question that comes to mind is whether our efforts to liberate this woman, give her our version of self determination have we made her an object rather than a subject? Even asking the question is problematic - because care must be taken not to create the wrong impression about the reason for asking the question in the first place.

Set out below is a real day of a real woman in a village setting at a landing stage on an island in Lake Victoria, Uganda. Her business is focused around the arrival and departure of the ferry from the mainland two to three times a day. Also the arrival times are erratic and even whether it arrives or departs at all is dependent on the availability of fuel. As she put it herself:

*“I have never had an education but I would really love to. The problem is that I just can’t find the time to attend FAL (Functional Adult Literacy programmes). If I dare to close and go for the classes, not only will I miss that days income but my customers too may leave me and go to some one else, I can’t afford to hire some one to stand in for me because as you can see the business is still very small. My children expect me to put food on the table. If it were you, what would you do? I need these two businesses to survive hopefully when one of my businesses grows I may abandon the other and spare time to study”*

<b>Madiina Nanya</b>	
<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
6:00 am- 6:30 am	Wake up, wash up
6:31-7:00 am	Rush to sell dry fish to boat going to Kasenyi
7:00-8:00 am	Make tea, dress children for school
8:00-9:30 am	Hotel, make tea & peal food for sell
9:30-11:00 am	Serve customers BF & cook
11:00-12:00 pm	Press the Matooke

12:00-3:00 pm	Begin to serve the customers lunch, eat, send food home to children.
3:00-4:00 pm	Go to the fish display table buy remaining fish
4:00-7:00 pm	Buy wood fuel, clean the fish and smoke the fish.
7:00-8:00 pm	Buy food for selling in the hotel, cook super, bath, and bath the children
11:30-12:00 (Mid night)	Go to sleep
12:00-4:30 am	Sleep
4:30-5:30 am	Sleep

Mandiina Nanya's day poses a real challenge to adult educators, how can her educational needs be factored into their programmes? The assumption is that the recipients will come to the programme and at fixed times and on a regular basis, but her day precludes her attendance. Like many other women in the village she must try and balance child care obligations, income generation and plain daily survival issues. Her's is a hand to mouth existence and education or learning to enhance her business skills and capacities would be desirable but she has no time or space in which to do it. Mandiina Nanya is making a living, it is hard work and her days are long, but she knows what she needs - to develop one business and make it more profitable - to make time for herself. Arguably if assistance is to be provided to her she needs to be a player in the shaping of the content of her assistance and the priorities. As Kanya notes adult literacy programmes attract dwindling numbers of participants, there is a saturation point especially in small communities where children are attending school but there is reluctance to revisit or reshape the programmes to meet different needs. Expense is often cited as the reason for sticking to old methods and old curricula but this misses the obvious point that empty programmes are even more expensive.

That there is a need for development, that women have at the very least an equal right to development with men is not at issue. What is at issue is the how and the price of the development imperative for an individual woman or a woman in the village.

Also at issue is who determines the shape, form, content and pace of the development initiatives, in other words who is driving the development train. Are we in driving the process forward at the same time as enhancing, or seeming to enhance economic rights violating other rights? Is it time for a re-vision of the development paradigm? One might ask who is really benefiting from the development process is it the woman in the village or is it the development 'provision' community.

I write this with great trepidation, I must not be misconstrued - development is a critical process for women, for their children. The much vaunted millennium goals are noble and desirable, they are intertwined and interlinked, one with out the others is sterile but is there balance in our expectations of the woman in the village?

It is to the woman in the village that we all turn to achieve or achieve through her the goals:

- 1 Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger

- 2 Achieving providing universal primary education
- 3 Promoting gender equality and empowering women
- 4 Reducing child mortality
- 5 Improving maternal health
- 6 Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- 7 Ensuring environmental sustainability
- 8 Developing a global partnership for development

Rights are not self implementing, we have to be alerted to them, we have to pursue them, we have to hold onto territory gained and forge new arenas for the application of equality paradigms to operate but who sets the pace, who determines the context and the needs?

Frequently, there were complaints from the woman in the village that development agency agendas were not relevant to her needs. That there was little if any consultation as to what ought to be provided in the form of training and information. There was little coordination between donor agencies, NGOs and CBOs to ensure a balanced do-able development calendar. Realistically, even a woman in an urban area with ready access to transport, daily resources such as piped water, electricity and health care services nearby would find the externally created development daily diary or monthly calendar taxing. Yet the woman in the village is the target object of all eight millennium goals.

In empowering do we dis-empower, subtly, unconsciously overwhelming the objects own knowledge, own perceptions? Do we ever really listen? Do we believe, genuinely believe, that they have something to say? We have a message, does that message overpower, obscure other issues, the objects own aspirations. Take a breath and think, pause to analyse self !!! What are we implicitly or explicitly demanding of the woman in the village by our multiple agendas for her?

She is bombarded with initiatives to get into income generation - so that she can eradicate poverty and hunger - but one might cynically ask is this achieved by donations of sewing machines by misguided well-wishers who do not even wait around to see if the women have sewing skills, access to materials, access to markets. If they have these skills and knowledge is there a market for the product, is it a competitive market? Or does it distract them from other activities that at least might ensure food for the family? Without a doubt, the women in the donor agencies would object violently if they were dictated to and had projects imposed on them in the way in which the woman in the village is expected to gratefully, joyously and most of all enthusiastically adopt the latest project cooked up in some urban workshop, often not even in Africa with no consultation with them, with no reference to their needs, and probably based on something that was undertaken in another country with totally different economic dynamics..

Has thought been given to the family dynamics where a woman to accomplish imposed development goals has to harness the skills and energies of family members - daughters may have to be substitute carers while she is out at field days, workshops, undertaking caring duties? Who does the housework and child minding while the woman in the village is doing income generating activities? Is it daughters, grandmothers who are being deprived of their own opportunities, their own self development actualization?

How much thought, real thought has been given to the impact of user pay paradigms when the user at the bottom of the chain is now paying for water, health services, education for children, maternity services, breast milk substitutes to avoid passing HIV/AIDS through breast milk. Each component looked at in isolation seems feasible, but in concert the burden is overwhelming what gets left out are those things that are less pressing, less immediate in their adverse consequences. Yes, you got it - school fees go by the board, children don't go to school or go to school for the minimum period of time. Women neglect their own health to meet the health needs of others, better the man's illnesses are treated or those of the boy children because they are the perceived bread winners. Perceived is often the key word, a realistic analysis would show that it is the woman's efforts that keep the family fed, it is her resources that pay the school fees, but at the end of the day she does not get the recognition within the family. Persistent lack of recognition of the woman's work devalues women's labour contributions, devalues women and girls, devalues the potential of their contribution so that the 'female' is left on the side lines.

The lack of financial resources means inadequate access to safe processed resources, unsuitable water, water borne diseases, cheap possibly contaminated food stuffs, unbalanced diets, diets lacking in protein, malnutrition, yet misguided income generating activities don't help.

Globalisation of agendas, so there is a globalization of aid and aid initiatives. Macro planning, macro implementation but what about the micro environment?

The Human Rights instruments proliferate, they amplify, develop, adumbrate, explain, their committees deliberate, recommend better and more effective measures for implementation, we teach and critique the processes, we analyse and fulminate against failure. Projects are evaluated, assessed, strategic plans are developed until we are all exhausted - the woman in the village still sits, still struggles. Why?

She needs her rights, she needs a package that works, that suits her today and grows for a better tomorrow - she needs a vision for a future, her vision, on her terms, grounded in her own time and space, grounded in our understanding of her as an individual. Not a globally constructed recipient of largess who at the same time as being expected to be pathetically grateful for a few crumbs we expect to be fiercely independent financially, socially and personally.

We expect more of the woman and for that matter the man at the bottom of the chain than we expect from those at the top and with significantly less resources of any kind, material or personal. We expect the woman in the village to be an environmentalist, a carer, an educator, an entrepreneur, a proponent of democracy, a participant in the decision making, involved in the community. We are puzzled when she is not an ardent feminist, when she is wishy-washy about elections - preferring the system corrupt or otherwise that she has a niche in.

We are angry if she doesn't pursue the rights that we have created for, we forget that in reality she is the pawn, with little room to manoeuvre. We expect her to meet all our specifications, perform all the tasks we appoint to her and keep us in our jobs. I am guilty

as the rest of you!!!

So we can't ignore her, we shouldn't exploit her. We have to listen to her, but we can't let her sink into the mire of her own life. We need to help her develop but not at the cost of family and security. We need her to be assertive, but not aggressive. We need her to care for her health and the health of her family but neither at the expense of the other. We want her to take on the burden of caring from the state without the state taking on its share of the burden.

Literally, and I mean literally not figuratively, we do not see her as an individual she is in all our eyes a composite being, an object of our plans, our projects, our concerns, our need to feel good!! We feel better when we send second hand clothes for 'her' when we raise money for her sewing machine, when we buy products made by her with fair trade labels on them, when we pass laws for her, when we protect her from her own misconceptions, when we urge her to cast aside her delinquent 'husband'. We feel better when we have made her functionally literate but unemployed, when we have empowered her to demand her rights but cannot realistically deliver the rights that are most critical to her - a job, a steady income. We feel good, we get more project money when she appears as a statistic at a workshop - a workshop she could barely keep up with - not because she was incapable but because it all went in a blur, she had barely grasped the first lot of information and synthesized it to her own needs and environment when there was a '*volte face*' and we are off on something else.

There is sympathy but little empathy!! She is our victim as much as she is the victim of her society, of patriarchy or whatever.

SO WHAT? The good old leveler the so what question!!

What is the problem? Not human rights - they alert us to needs, they alert us to the individual, they alert us to the group and the needs of the group.

Not the talking shops about human rights, about implementation because potentially they are a source of intervention, of new and fresh ideas.

Not the busy, busy NGOs and CBOs, holding end of year workshops to boost their numbers and meet their logframe planning targets.

Not necessarily even busy government departments screaming at managers to spend their line budgets, to get out there and do something.

We need to seriously go back to the woman, the man in the village, the children and understand their perspectives, it is about engagement and the right to rights.

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