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THE FOCUS OF OVERSEAS AID NEEDS A RADICAL REFORM TO ADDRESS THE DENIAL OF WOMENS RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY GLOBALLY. EXPLAIN

On the 19th of September 1893, New Zealand governor, Lord Glasgow signed the very first Electoral Act that accommodated women into law, making New Zealand an equal and free land.

¹ Yet, 131 years later, gender inequality is still interwoven within society. Despite decades of international aid efforts, women in many parts of the world still face systemic barriers to education, health care, political participation, and economic independence.

My name is Molly Linnane, and I stand before you today to address the ever-urgent fact that overseas aid needs radical reform to tackle the denial of women's rights and gender equality globally, as these issues are deeply intertwined with poverty, human rights, and social development.

Overseas aid plays a crucial role in the survival and development of many countries, from war-torn regions like Syria and Afghanistan to famine-stricken nations such as Sudan and Mali. In theory, overseas aid aims to provide indiscriminate assistance, yet too often, it creates and supports patterns of inequality in recipient countries, particularly affecting the rights and opportunities of women.

As a woman myself, my passion for gender equality is a massive part of my identity. I wish to represent the voices of women all over the world, especially those unfortunate enough to be born into a country who restrains their rights. I remember being nine years old, gazing at the TV watching Emma Watson's United Nations speech on gender equality; I was inspired by her courage; the powerful demeanour she exuded across the world, and her impactful words :” I think it is right that socially I am afforded the same respect as men”.²

I was fortunate enough to be born into the developed, equal society of Ireland, now allowing me to profess my desire to fight for countries that are not capable of doing so, and it is my honour to shine a light on the mistreatment caused by the current overseas aid campaigns upon women.

¹ <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/womens-suffrage#:~:text=On%2019%20September%201893%20the,to%20vote%20in%20parliamentary%20elections>

• ² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=nlwU-9ZTTJc>

According to the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**, only 2% of all Official Development Assistance in 2021 went toward programs specifically designed to advance gender equality.³

Many aid models today, led by international organisations and governments, do not include the voice of women in their scheme, and it has been this way for years. One substantial example includes the highly regarded World Bank, in which inequality was highlighted in overseas aid programs prioritizing male-headed enterprises and neglecting women's roles in agriculture, education, and health; exposed by a document named "**The World Bank and Gender Inequality: A Critical Review of Development Policy and Practice.**"⁴

Another such example includes the critique of the International Monetary Fund, which was revealed to be imposing strict measures that had a disproportionately negative impact on women, according to the 2003 "**Gender, Development, and Globalization: Economics as if All People Mattered**" document.⁵ A 2019 report by the **International Center for Research on Women** stated that up to 60% of developing countries still do not have adequate legal frameworks or effective implementation mechanisms for combating violence against women.⁶ If the international aid given could only emphasize gender balance as part of its terms, these women's lives wouldn't be so miserable.

Inequality is not just motivated by the work overseas aid programs have done that disregards women, but also what the organisations have not done. The lack of addressing violence against women, including physical, domestic, mental, and sexual, indirectly spurs these acts, as men are taught not to correct their ways and are given a 'free pass.'

The **United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization** estimates that 129 million girls are out of school worldwide.⁷ Limited access to education and skills training perpetuates economic inequality, with women missing out on job opportunities and economic independence. It is disgraceful that these foreign aid policies are yet to effectively address these 129 million young girls who have no access to education. For a country to succeed and push its limits to achieve maximum efficiency, it is essential that the country has an educated population.

³ [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/development-finance-for-gender-equality-2024_e340afb-en.html#:~:text=Over%20the%20last%20decade%2C%20DAC,ODA%20\(USD%20143%20billion\).](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/development-finance-for-gender-equality-2024_e340afb-en.html#:~:text=Over%20the%20last%20decade%2C%20DAC,ODA%20(USD%20143%20billion).)

⁴ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1468018112443673a>

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305369201_Gender_Development_and_Globalization_Economics_As_If_All_People_Mattered_Second_Edition

⁶ <https://www.icrw.org/publications/wd2019-resources/>

⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/supply/stories/inclusive-construction-keeps-girls-school-and-learning>

The lack of recognition surrounding the role of a woman in a country through these overseas aid schemes can also often affect the economical standard of the country. 51% of a country's population is female, imagine what that population could do given the right education and job opportunities?⁸ It is no coincidence that out of the ten countries with the least equality, 6 of them are also in the bottom ten countries in terms of GDP.⁹

Alternatively, aid organizations and governments set ambitious targets for gender equality but fail to meet them due to insufficient funding, poor implementation, or lack of political will. What if you were one of those young girls promised a better future, only to be let down because an overseas aid program could not keep their word?

Ultimately, overseas aid has immense power to change the inequality levels in these developed countries, with 135 countries being supplied with this aid, according to the OECD 2021

“Development Co-operation Report 2021: Shaping a Just Digital Transformation”.¹⁰

Having foreign aid target education, healthcare and equal opportunity is needed for our society to march forward and eliminate gender- based discrimination once and for all. Aid that aims to help a country stand on its own two feet instead of relying on the donor country is the only way to make a difference in these developing countries. By accepting women as part of their ultimate goal of a better society, these countries will finally be able to step into a new chapter.

However, things will never change if we don't make them. As mother Theresa once said: “I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.” We need to project our voices for those who cannot, so that one day, they may become the voices that change the world. This essay is my choice of action in the name of a better, fairer society, and so I ask you: What is yours?

Thank you.

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• ⁸ https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/percent_female_population/#:~:text=Female%20population%2C%20percent%20of%20total,196%20countries%20was%2050%20percent.

• ⁹ <https://www.concern.net/news/worst-countries-for-womens-rights>
<https://gfmag.com/data/economic-data/poorest-country-in-the-world/>

¹⁰ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2021/12/development-co-operation-report-2021_4d1131e9.html

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