

Representation of Women by Dutch Development Organizations

Women as empowered agents or as a group that needs extra attention?

Liane Mosselaar

3362698

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Eva Midden

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Introduction

Who has never seen a TV-commercial portraying a desperate woman or a poor underprivileged girl covered in flies. A voice-over tells to reach out. For a mere five euro each month you can provide her the opportunity to become a doctor and overcome her difficult situation. This is an example of how people from developing countries have been depicted in the western media. Luckily, I would say, this fairly limited portrayal is changing for the better. A more broad vision on how people across the world can work together for a better world is growing.

Development is defined as to extend, improve, grow, shape, or gradually change into an often favourable direction opposite of stagnation (Glebbeek 2010). My first association with development aid are the programs employed by Western countries which aim to decrease global inequality, but very much impose western ideals in doing so.

The issue of development aid first surfaced after the Second World War when programs were initiated with the goal to bring development around the world (Greig, Hulme and Turner 2007:7). However such development aid programs have lately received serious criticism due to the limited impact they seem to have. It has become more and more clear that all the trillions of dollars in aid money did not establish global equality. Governments have invested large sums of money in direct humanitarian aid or the rebuilding of countries after wars or natural disasters. But poverty and inequality are still overtly present. There are also social organizations committed to development aid, financed by the government, specialized donors or ordinary citizens. Such organizations come in different sizes - large non-governmental organizations (NGO's) or private initiatives managing small scale projects. In this paper I will analyze three large Dutch NGO's, namely Hivos, Cordaid, and Oxfam Novib. I will call these organizations *development organizations*.

The first period of development aid, which focused on modernization, was male dominated. The role of women as actors of social change was often ignored. Chua, Bhavnani and Foran state that women were seen as merely victims within systems of inequality (2000: 821). Nussbaum argues that many traditions "have portrayed women as less important than men, less deserving of basic life support, or of fundamental rights that are strongly correlated with quality of life, such as the right to work and the right to political participation (1995: 1). Issues such as political participation of women are central in the programs of development organizations today. During the last 60 years, women became more visible in the programs of development organizations, in particular as a group that needed help. Nussbaum addresses the situation of women in third world countries and stresses the low employment participation, the low pay, the low level of respect and the sexual harassment and discrimination that is often present at the workplace. In addition she addresses the large illiteracy among women, underrepresentation in decision-making processes, and also in education women lag further behind men (1995: 2). These examples show that development aid is gendered and explain why gender equality plays a large role in current development aid programs. It is clear that women are an

interesting group to analyze in the field of development aid, therefore I would like to investigate how women are seen by development organizations.

In this paper I want to examine the following research question: In what way are women currently represented by Dutch development organizations? The organizations that I will focus on are Hivos, Oxfam Novib and Cordaid. Do they represent women as powerful and strong or more as oppressed and underprivileged? My sub questions will concentrate on the following. Firstly, how is gender integrated in the programs of development organizations? Secondly, in what context are women described, are all women included in the programs and are other groups excluded in the programs? Thirdly, in what way is the empowerment of women shown, and finally, in what way does resistance or other acts of agency play a role? New insights in the representation of women by Dutch development organizations will contribute to the feminist discourse of women and development and will offer a critical analysis on their current representation. I will discuss these questions by analyzing the annual reports Hivos, Oxfam Novib, and Cordaid of 2010. I will start by outlining my theoretical framework and my methods of research. Subsequently, I will give a historical context of sixty years of development aid and the role of women discussed in development studies. In the last part, I will present my analysis of the representation of women by Dutch development organizations.

1. Methods of research

As mentioned above I want to investigate in this paper how women are represented by Dutch development organizations? I have chosen the three largest Dutch development organizations to base my research on, namely Oxfam Novib, Hivos, and Cordaid. In my analysis of their annual reports of 2010 I will focus on the following sub questions: where are women mentioned in the annual reports and in what context? I will look closely at the depiction of the concepts of gender, women's rights; subdivided in sexuality, women's economical position and their role in social and political processes, and empowerment and agency. I will look at these different themes from an intersectional approach to see how the different axes of difference are used or not, to represent women.

The concept of *intersectionality* was firstly introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, when she discussed the issues of black women in the US.

“The term was meant to indicate a manner of thinking within gender studies that was predominantly, though not exclusively, developed by North-American feminists of colour, which involved a mutual co-construction and simultaneous operation of gender, ‘race’/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and other axes of signification, such as age, nationality, and religion” (Anthias and Yuval-Davis cited in Wekker: 72).

In short, it means that all the identity markers co-construct and influence each other. In my analysis I want to look if, and how, the various axes of difference are discussed in the annual reports and how

they are used, or not used, to represent women. For example if gender is mentioned is there attention for the fact that gender is always influenced by class, sexuality and ethnicity, or is gender seen as one homogeneous category?

2. Theoretical framework

The main concepts in this paper will be agency, representation and intersectionality. I will briefly discuss these concepts and how they will be part of my analysis.

Agency

The concept of agency is central in this analysis. The term agency is frequently used when the position of women is discussed. The exact meaning of agency is debated by many, mostly feminist, academics. In this paper I will concentrate on the discussions of Saba Mahmood and Rosi Braidotti about the content and values of agency because they have recently offered a different and refreshing interpretation of agency, which is in my view highly relevant for developmental issues. In my analysis I want to look how agency of women is discussed and represented by the development organizations.

In general, agency is explained as the ability to act in society as an autonomous person. This ability to act is not possible and similar for everyone, mainly because it is related to power relations and existing boundaries. Think of the example of Nussbaum about the difficulties for women to participate in the political arena. In feminism, agency is often explained as the ability to resist against the existing boundaries in society (Mahmood 2005: 5). An example of human agency where women use their body to protest against their regime, are women in Iran that step by step show a little bit more hair from under their obligatory veil (Brouwer 2009). Other forms of resistance are visible during the feminist waves, such as their protest against dominant patriarchal norms and structures in society, eg. abortion in the second feminist wave and the right to vote in the first feminist wave. Sue Clegg argues that for most feminists agency has strong political aspects. "Agency, both individual and collective, is at the heart of the feminist, and indeed, all radical political projects, because these movements have the tendency to change elements of the status quo" (2006: 209). In these views agency is mainly seen as connected to opposition, struggle and resistance. This specific explanation is called oppositional agency (Braidotti 2008: 2, cited in Takens 2010: 4). Change of the social order is central with oppositional agency. Saba Mahmood has a different interpretation of what agency stands for, which I will explain below.

Understanding agency within its context

Mahmood argues that the western interpretation of agency as oppositional agency is inconsistent with a strongly detailed and positioned view on the subject. In addition, she argues that a diversification of agency has to be made, based on the diversity in contexts of the subject worldwide and in which they

act (2005: 203 and 225, cited in Takens 2010: 8). An example which clarifies her argument is her research among a group of religious Muslim women in Egypt. These women educate, discuss, and study Islamic writings, something that was previously only done by men. According to Mahmood, these women show agency by doing these activities. This understanding of agency is problematic for some western feminists because these women “pursue practices and ideals embedded within a tradition that has historically accorded women a subordinate status, and seek to cultivate virtues that are associated with feminine passivity and submissiveness” (2005: 205). According to western feminists this cannot be seen as agency because rather than fighting it, these women reproduce their own subordinate position in society. Mahmood states that this is just a different form of agency and sees oppositional agency as a too narrow definition:

“The liberatory goals of feminism should be rethought in light of the fact that the desire for freedom and liberation is a historically situated desire whose motivational force cannot be assumed a priori, but needs to be reconsidered in light of other desires, aspirations, and capacities that inhere in a culturally and historically located subject” (Mahmood 2001: 223).

In short, Mahmood states that resistance against a form of oppression in a society does not have to be the essence of agency. A subject can also feel connected to his or her culture or society, precisely because (s)he is a product of this culture (2001: 225). She focuses more on the position of the subject that influences one's subjectivity. This view of Mahmood is relatively innovating because it explains that agency does not necessarily have to involve resistance, whereas secular feminists often say that agency is demonstrated when one resists against oppression. The view of Mahmood is also applicable on development aid because many cultural differences and power relations are related to development aid. Western development organizations and Western states try to change non-western societies according to their own cultural values. Western countries and organizations sometimes assume that their way is the best way to develop a nation. Local cultural values and practices are not always taken into account by western parties. From this perspective, Western organizations often feel that resistance against local cultural or religious practices is necessary to accomplish liberation of current forms of oppression. Is the lack of resistance against oppression, as Mahmood states, also possible and represented as agency in the perspective of development organizations? This is an interesting aspect to pay attention to in my analysis.

Oppositional agency

Braidotti discussed the concept of oppositional agency in relation to the feminist postsecular turn. Historically, feminism was constructed from the Enlightenment critique on religious matters (Braidotti 2008: 3). Braidotti states that spirituality and other forms of interest for religious matters *are* (my emphasis) present in current feminism, which she calls the postsecular turn (2008: 2). She states that one central element is present both within different religions and secular ideologies, and this central

element is *the belief in the possibility of a better world* (2008:13). She argues that this ideology of a transformation to a better world influences people's actions. In the following citation she argues that oppositional actions are present within this belief to create a positive transformation:

“Oppositional consciousness is central to political subjectivity but is not the same as negativity and..... as a consequence, critical theory is about strategies of affirmation. Political subjectivity or agency therefore consists of multiple micro-political practices of daily activism or interventions in and on the world we inhabit for ourselves and for future generations” (Braidotti cited in Takens 2010: 12).

This citation shows differences with the understanding of Mahmood. Braidotti states that agency is a process of oppositional agency with the intention to create a positive change through political daily activism or interventions. These actions assume forms of resistance against the status quo. Mahmood argues that agency should be seen as something that is shaped by a diversity of influences. Braidotti, on the contrary, recognizes this but also emphasizes that oppositionality is the essence of agency and subjectivity. This should be seen as a structural or daily form of actions with the intention to improve the world (Braidotti 2008: 16). This is interesting because here she states that, in contrast to the western secular trend, agency is possible within religions and other forms of theology, such as Islamic feminism.

In the field of development aid the issue of culture is a basic element, and all its cultural and religious practices and connected power relations between the North and the South¹. That is why the arguments of both Mahmood and Braidotti are interesting to keep in mind while looking at women's agency, the role of women and the representation of women by development organizations. The internationally diverse basis of development work and the large cultural differences between for example the Netherlands and Congo are essential markers when looking at agency and resistance. It is important in my analysis to look at how or if different cultural markers such as religion are taken into account while discussing the position of women.

Encounters of different cultures

All encounters are based on earlier encounters that have taken place along the history line (Ahmed 2000:7). These encounters are connected to representations. Early representations and stereotypes have an influence on how representations are made today (Pfealzer 2011). For my analysis it is important to keep in mind that earlier encounters between people from the North and people from the South can still have influence on how people, and in this paper women, are represented by development organizations. The history of development aid and writings about development aid has post-colonial

¹ The North-South Divide is a socio-economic and political division that exists between the wealthy developed countries, known collectively as "the North", and the poorer developing countries (least developed countries), or "the South."

influences, in for example the belief of the West to modernize the 'others' in the South. According to the theory of Ahmed, the history of slavery, orientalism, othering² and colonialism still have an impact on encounters between people from different cultures. Because of the many diverse cultural encounters within development organizations it is important to take this history into account in my analysis. An important post-colonial thinker, Edward Said, named the creation of an image of the Other *Orientalism*. He describes this process as a way of speaking, thinking and writing of the Other to which the West can determine their own identity. The idea of the enlightened, rational, civilized western needed the idea of a back warded, emotional, and uncivilized oriental to create a better image of themselves (1978). The influences of these encounters are also visible in the different forms of agency of secular feminists and the ones discussed above.

Chouliaraki connects these earlier encounters with the current representation of non-westerners by Ngo's:

"In portraying sufferers as powerless victims or as dignified agents, these campaigns (of ngo's) intend to produce either a universal discourse of justice, through negative emotions that ultimately dehumanize the sufferer, or a universal discourse of empathy, through positive emotions that eventually appropriate the sufferer in a world like 'ours'" (2010: 120).

In what way are these earlier encounters and representations still visible in the annual reports? In order to give you an idea of what some of these earlier encounters were about, I will give a brief historical overview of development aid.

3. Historical context development aid

At the end of the Second World War, in 1944, three large organizations joined forces to collect money for the reconstruction of Europe. The first development aid project was called the Marshall Plan³, this project was aimed to build up Europe. This project was not solely aimed at rebuilding Europe, it was also an act of self-interest, the US were afraid that communism would take over Europe. In consequence of the start of development aid, around this time development studies as a discipline emerged. This discipline was above all concerned with bridging the gap between richer and poorer countries through economic growth (Greig, Hulme and Turner 2007:1). In this time, development aid was mainly seen as economic growth and as a positive improvement. A lot of wealth emerged, but was

² Othering is a way of defining and securing one's own positive identity through the stigmatization of an "other."

³ The Marshall Plan (officially the European Recovery Program, ERP) was the large-scale American program to aid Europe where the United States sent monetary support to help rebuild European economies in order to combat the spread of communism.

not distributed equally. Global inequality is the result, and this inequality is still growing today. Although the emphasis in development aid is on economic inequality, the attention for other social dimensions that influence inequality are growing, such as gender, class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, language, nationality, age, and more.

Development paradigms

The post war development aid was not only based on humanitarian grounds, anti-communism and decolonization also played a role. Over the last seventy years of development aid there have been four different paradigms in the Netherlands: the modernization-paradigm, the dependence-paradigm, the neoliberal-paradigm and the poverty-paradigm (Glebbeek: 2010). I will explain these paradigms, as explained by Glebbeek, briefly so that a clear historical context is given about the emergence, changes and reasons of development aid. This information is essential to understand how development organizations are working today, what the content and focus of their programs is, and what their beliefs are.

The modernization paradigm originated at end of the 1960's, the underdevelopment of developing countries was the original condition of the emergence of this paradigm. The focus of this paradigm was on economical growth. The general thought of the Dutch government was that the technical and industrial development in the west would also flow to developing countries and would create a more developed South. The idea was that the traditional societies in the South would be transformed into modern societies. This transformation was seen as an evolutionary process. The utopia of this paradigm was a Western consumption society. There is a lot of criticism on this paradigm because it assumes that one size would fit all. The idea that the reconstruction and the industrial development would have the same effect in - and would meet the needs of countries is seen as ethno- and Eurocentric because it ignores all local knowledge, systems, relations and interests.

In the beginning of the 1970's, the dependency paradigm came up. This paradigm was based on the socialistic theory of Marx. The belief was that underdevelopment in developing countries was caused by international inequality. The independence of developing countries with the West was seen as exploitation for the countries. The consequence was that developing countries were disconnected from the world economy so that they could create their own industry and produce and sell their products for the local or national market instead of for European countries. This would make them less dictated by external pressure, and more in favour with their own needs. This turned out different than expected and resulted in economic stagnation and structural imbalance in developing countries. Poverty, social exclusion and social disintegration became increasingly more visible in the third world. Much criticism was given about the dept-trap. Governments of developing countries were a growing market for loans from Western governments or Western institutions in this period. A too high loan with too high interest was given to local groups, which were not able to repay these amounts. This

resulted in deep debts of developing countries.

In the 1980's many developing countries had deep debts. It was argued that this needed to be dealt with through structural adjustment programs. This paradigm is called the neo-liberal paradigm. The International Monetary Fund determined that developing countries should save on education and health care, so that they could use this money to stimulate economical growth which would positively influence the market. The economic growth was stimulated by international market competition. The utopia of this paradigm was a global consumption society. The emphasis on self interest and production is often criticized. Inequality raised again as a result of the many privatizations. These privatizations made people pay for water and education.

In the 1990's many things changed. Because the Cold War ended, the fear for the spread of communism was gone. This had the consequence that countries invested less money in developing countries, because a large part of the self-interest was gone. Now, underdevelopment was seen as structural poverty through combinations of local, national, and global factors. The Dutch government realized that capitalism was not the solution for social inequality. In this period global poverty became a central issue. Within this so called poverty paradigm, a view emerged that looked at positive development. This movement concluded that development has always been unjust, because it did not result in the wished global equality. Individual development became very important. Personal growth would now be achieved through an emphasis on capabilities⁴. The focus shifted from deprivation (not having) to capabilities (being able). These capabilities are a long and healthy life, the opportunity to make choices, maintain social relations and exert influence. In short, the promotion of human development with chances and rights became central. The Dutch state paid more attention to local situations instead of big global theories. The extreme focus on positive discrimination for the poor is criticized with the argument that there should be more focus on stability and safety within the countries.

These paradigms show the shift of the motives of the West. At first the main reasons were to help modernize the people in the South, later on, in the 1990's a more human approach emerged with a focus on the opportunities and rights of people in a way to a global better and more equal world. Greig, Hulm, and Turner explain the current importance of global development practice in the following way: "the most pressing task facing development practice is to take sustained steps towards reducing social inequalities, for this is the most effective way of liberating the millions of people who live in poverty and giving them a life of greater opportunity, security and dignity" (2007: 9). They mean that the focus of international development aid is changing from an emphasis on poverty to a paradigm that is more focused on social equality. This is different because the focus has shifted from a

⁴ Amartya Sen's work on capabilities laid the foundations for envisioning development as individual human development instead of national economic development (Greig, Hulme and Turner 2007: 21)

more economical poverty to social poverty such as social exclusion because of your sexuality, gender or skin colour, and how to improve these qualities of life.

Public doubts about development aid

In the last years, development aid is a hotly debated subject worldwide. The WRR (Scientific Counsel for Government Policy) explains that in the Netherlands the support for development aid among Dutch citizens is still there, but doubts about how the money is used increases. The WRR brought up question marks about the effects of the given aid that is openly expressed in the Dutch media, “Especially the situation in Africa disappoints many people” (WRR report 2010: 11). Their analysis on the situation of sixty years of development aid and the question ‘does the aid help?’ is that it is characteristic that the Dutch development aid is for 75% focused on education and health, and less than 25% on infrastructure, agriculture, and economical activity (WRR report 2010: 11). The money is mostly spent on social care, which does not automatically lead to a structural change that enables developing countries to grow and achieve progress and become self-reliant. As I mentioned above, over the last years the poverty paradigm has been taken over by a paradigm that focuses more on social equality, making use of different social markers, such as gender, social status, and sexuality. The WRR concludes that two lessons stand out; firstly, development aid should contribute more directly to development and the self-reliance making process of countries. For that reason they should focus less on direct poverty reduction. Secondly, development policy should not be restricted to classic help, but should be more orientated on large, global questions such as the struggle for space, commodities, energy, and food (WRR report 2010: 12).

4. Women’s role in the development discourse

After this historical overview of development aid in general, I now want to look at the role of women within the paradigms of development aid. What was their role in development aid, were they subject or object in the field of development aid? I will discuss this role of women in aid as is analyzed within development studies.

Women and inequality

Inequality is a multi-layered concept, next to economic inequality, gender inequality receives particular attention within development aid. “The evidence indicates not merely that women and girls have fewer opportunities than men and boys, but that absolute poverty – be it measured in terms of income, assets, human development or leisure time – is ‘feminized’” (Lister 2004: 55 quoted in Greig, Hulme, and Turner 2007: 14). According to the UN Development Program of 1995, 70 percent of the poorest people in the world are female (Greig, Hulme, and Turner 2007: 14). These statistics show that inequality is gendered. This gendered inequality need specific measures. In September 2000, the

United Nations launched a strict goal orientated program; The Millennium Development Goals (MDG's). These goals are designed to:

“Reduce extreme poverty by half; increase participation in basic education; improve child and maternal health; achieve gender equality; control and reduce transmittable, air-borne and water-borne diseases; accelerate agricultural productivity in the poorest nations; provide neglected areas with safe water and improved sanitation; meet these goals in an environmentally sustainable manner; and establish a global partnership for development”(Greig, Hulme, and Turner 2007: 130-131).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) mirror the grown attention towards gender (equality) within development aid. In three goals women and girls are explicitly mentioned, which is very different than in the beginning of development aid.

The role of women in development

The early days of development aid were not centred around the welfare of local populations. Western countries were mostly concerned with the possibilities to access the resources of the third world, and in addition, they wanted to keep these countries from cooperating with the communists during the Cold War. Some features of Colonialism were even reproduced during the first period of development aid right after the Second World War, “It was believed that underdeveloped countries, plagued by traditional structures and values, would be transformed into modern Western-like industrial nations” (Koczberski 1998: 398). Within this modernization paradigm many binary oppositions of the colonial discourse were reproduced such as, modern/ traditional, dynamic/ static, progressive/ backward and development/ underdeveloped (398). In order to understand the role and representation of women today, it is of importance to look at the historical role of women in development aid because it will give us an idea of how women were represented in these periods. This representation can be compared to the contemporary representation of women, and might give answers in how this image is changed or not.

This first period of the modernization paradigm, which was mainly focused on economical growth, was male dominated, women's roles as actors of social change were ignored. Chua, Bhavnani and Foran state that women were also invisible in writings about global and international development. “Labour, cultures and histories of women are rarely taken into account, or, when they have been, women are most often seen as lacking agency” (2000: 821). From the 1970's this changed. The role of women in the field of development aid is distinguished in writings within the development discipline in three approaches: Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD).

In 1970, Esther Boserup published a book called *Women's Role in Economic Development*,

this was one of the first academic books that stressed on the importance of recognizing the exclusion of women from development projects in the third world (Chua, Bhavnani and Foran 2000: 822). She examined how modernization effected significant changes in the gender relations: “first, it alienated women from their traditional productive roles; secondly, it diminished their social status; thirdly, it reinforced their dependency; fourthly, it offered a vision of emancipation based on a future stage of modernity; fifthly, it made certain unsupported assumptions about relations between man and women that made women’s role in the development process invisible”(Greig, Hulme, and Turner 2007: 198) Hereafter, more, mostly female, academics wrote about the need for representation and recognition of women by aid agencies and their programs.

The WID approach was a way to argue that women should be treated equal to men. In practice, in this approach aid programs integrated women by seeing them as a group that needed strong welfare, they were not yet seen as active agents that played or could play a role in the economic development (Chua, Bhavnani and Foran 2000: 822). The assumption was that if women were integrated in development aid programs their lives would improve automatically (Koczberski 1998: 396). In the second half of the 1970’s a new approach came up, the Women and Development approach (WAD). WAD argued that women have always been part of development aid programs. This wave acknowledged that women have been part of development aid, but argued that the focus needed to change. The focus should be “on how the dependency of Third World countries is maintained by the richer nations through development strategies that assume modernization to be the most desirable goal” (Chua, Bhavnani and Foran 2000: 823). This approach more explicitly questions the intentions and strategies of the rich western nations. All these approaches have received criticism regarding their focus on subordination and oppression and their lack of attention for differences between women. For example, third world women were often seen as one homogeneous group, all with the same needs and backgrounds (Mohanty 1988: 65-67). The emphasis on gender came after the WAD approach in the Gender and Development (GAD) approach. This approach aims were: “not only integrate women into development, but to look for the potential in development initiatives to transform unequal social/ gender relations and to empower women” (Canadian Council for International Co-Operation 1991 : 5, cited in Braidotti et al 1994: 82, cited in Chua, Bhavnani and Foran 2000: 823). This last approach has in theory changed the intention on the empowerment of women instead of looking at women as a group that is ‘in need of saving’.

Chua, Bhavnani and Foran developed a new approach; Women, Culture, and Development (WCD), this approach can be explained as a more interdisciplinary approach where the different cultural, social, economic, and political markers of women are taken into account to visualize women’s agency. This approach is more focused on the possibilities and opportunities of women instead of their oppression. For me, this is the most suitable approach to look at the role of women in development aid at the moment. It gives me the opportunity to look how the different social, political,

and economical markers influence and construct each other. I will keep this interdisciplinary vision in mind when I will analyze the representation of women by Dutch development organizations. It will keep me focused to look at the agency of women in the texts of the annual reports even if the text initially might not express this role of women.

5. Analysis of the representation of women by development organizations

In this third part of my paper I discuss the annual reports of Hivos, Oxfam Novib, and Cordaid, and analyze in what way they represent women. My sub questions will structure this last part of my paper. They concentrate on how gender is integrated in the programs of development organizations; whether certain groups are excluded; how women are described in their reports; in what ways empowerment of women is shown, and in what way resistance or other acts of agency play a role? First, I will briefly introduce the three organizations.

Hivos, Oxfam Novib and Cordaid

The easiest way to understand the intentions of these three development organizations is to look at their mission statements:

Oxfam: “Nobody chooses where he or she is born. But we all have the same rights, wherever around the world. We are convinced of this, and it is the basis of our strategy and policy. The most important cause of poverty is injustice. Everyone has a right to a fair income, food, health care, education, a safe life, and the opportunity to use their voice. Certainly the most vulnerable for poverty: women, children, and minorities. We support the people worldwide that struggle for their rights and for a proper existence” (website Oxfam Novib: Strategy).

Hivos: “Hivos is a Dutch development organization that acts from humanistic values. Together with local and social organizations in developing countries, Hivos wants to contribute to a free, fair, and sustainable world. In this world, citizens – women and men – have equal access to means and opportunities for development. They can actively and equally participate to decision making processes that determine their lives, their society, and their future” (Hivos: 5).

Cordaid: “Every person counts. Their dreams, ideas, and actions for a better society inspire us. Central to us is the dignity for each person, the solidarity that without difference in age, gender, sexuality, descent, religion, or political belief, everyone has the right to a dignified life, the subsidiary that people are the carriers of their own development without patronizing of anyone, and the task to be a good agent of our earthly resources and to pass this through to future generations” (Cordaid: 3).

These mission statements show the idealist perspectives of the development organizations. Each organization uses different words to explain their ideals. Prominent words that I want to point out in

the mission statement of Oxfam Novib are *vulnerable* and *poverty*, *opportunity* and *participate* in Hivos' statement, and *dignity* and *solidarity* in Cordaid's statement. For me, this choice of words gave me an idea of the tone of the reports. Chouliaraki states that differences in campaigns of NGO's are visible through the depiction of the sufferer, as a victim or as a sufferer with agency and dignity (2010: 112). Exactly this difference is visible in the use of words in the mission statements of the organizations. Especially Oxfam Novib's use of words can be connected with the depiction of people as victims. Hivos uses more positive and constructive words, whereas Cordaid's mission acknowledges difference among people and uses proper words that value human life.

5.1 Use of gender by development organizations

For this analysis I have read the Dutch annual reports of 2010 all three organizations. All organizations point out a special focus on the reinforcement of the position of women in their programs and at times add the word gender equality in their report.

In this section, I want to focus on gender and how this concept is understood and used by the development organizations. I use the understanding of *gender* as a social construction of sex differences and the meaning of the roles of masculinity and femininity (Leezenberg en de Vries 2001: 215). All three organizations do not explain their understanding of gender in their reports. This makes it difficult to know what they mean by this concept.

For Hivos, gender is one of their eight central themes. The full name of this theme is *gender, women, and development*. In the following explanation of this theme, three bullets explain the obtained results within the field of women's rights (Hivos: 25). Later on, in the actual chapter about this theme the following is stated "Hivos also promotes gender equality within the organization and in the programs of partners, and works on the integration of gender equality within her sectoral policy" (Hivos: 28). The word *gender* is only mentioned a few more times in their report. For me, this quote shows that they strongly connect gender equality to the equal amount of men and women in the different sectors in their policies. The last part of the quote gives me the idea that the heads of the people in the organization and in the programs are counted with the intention to have just as much man as women in there.

Oxfam only mentions the concept of gender in the name of one of their programs *Gender Mainstreaming and Leadership Trajectory* in which they stimulate their national and international partners to appoint women in higher and managing positions, later on, they mention it one more time in connection with a partner in Somalia (11, 47). Cordaid concentrates on gender because they noticed that "the gender theme threatened to disappear to the background; this was visible in the number of the amount of women's organizations and a relapse in gender sensitivity" (Cordaid: 20). Cordaid uses a gender scan to map the gender sensitivity of their partner organizations. These scans allow that 54

percent of the partners are listed as gender sensitive. In their report Cordaid does not explain what gender sensitive stands for but I assume that it explains the amount of women that benefit from their programs. Cordaid also registers whether their partners are already active in gender mainstreaming⁵.

Equality theory

To me, the interpretation and use of gender by the development organizations has many similarities with the feminist theory of equality thinking. Supporters of this theory do not see insurmountable differences between man and women and state that equivalence derives from equality, men and women are equal, and have the same rights and duties (website RoSA). Rosemarie Buikema explains:

“The politics of this theory concern the claim that women receive equal opportunities to realize their ambitions and the claim that they will receive equal payments and cultural appreciation. This view represents women as an undervalued and subordinated group. According to Simone de Beauvoir, women are seen the second sex” (1993:19).

My interpretation of the use of gender in the annual reports is that in these parts of text they created a representation of women as an undervalued group that needs help of Western development organizations. Help to empower them in the fields of their human rights, mostly called women’s rights, in their economical position, their social position, and in their political position. This is also visible in the use of positive discrimination in the programs of Cordaid:

“The (threatening) deterioration of the position of women forced Cordaid to tighten their gender policy: chain analysis ought to be gender sensitive and interventions that would negatively affect the position of women would not be financed, whereas interventions that do contribute to the empowerment of women would get priority” (Cordaid: 105).

As explained in this quote, Cordaid favours women in their program. For me, this use of positive discrimination does not create a representation of strong, independent women with agency. Because it reproduces the idea that women need affirmative action and men do not. In my opinion it reaffirms the privileges of men in opposition to women. Many questions arise to me after this statement. Is there no attention to differences in local needs and wishes and local gender roles? How are Esther Boserup arguments taken into account here? Such as the alienation of women of their traditional productive roles, the possible diminishment of their social status, and lastly the point of who’s emancipation is talked about? That of women in Western countries? This raises the question if women really want to be an equal player to men in the field in farming? And who decided this? What kind of effect will this

⁵ ‘Gender mainstreaming’ was defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1997 as ‘a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of...the policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.’ (Website UNDP)

positive discrimination have on local men? Will their financial applications for their local projects be rejected immediately? For me, gender is not only connected to women but also to men. Men are missing in the conceptualisations of gender equality by the development organizations.

Where are the men?

What struck me in the annual report of Cordaid was that when visualizing their results in reach and financial contribution, they always had a separate column with the percentage of reached women (43).

Resultaten doelgroep

Doelstelling	Bereik*	% vrouwen	Bijdrage (€)	% 2010**
Leden van minderheden met toegang tot markten en natuurlijke hulpbronnen	58.000	51	760.000	237
Mensen met verbeterde toegang tot basisvoorzieningen	51.000	51	935.000	111
Mensen met verbeterde toegang tot werk en inkomen	12.000	50	651.000	93
Aantal minderhedenorganisaties dat is opgezet/versterkt	410		4.010.000	120
Interetnische/-religieuze dialoog over specifieke issues	165		1.839.000	202
Aantal organisaties met toegenomen capaciteit op beleidsbeïnvloeding	230		2.037.000	201
Aantal beleidsbeïnvloedingsinitiatieven m.b.t. discriminatie bij toegang tot hulpbronnen	105		1.471.000	173
Aantal beleidsbeïnvloedingsinitiatieven m.b.t. mensenrechten en zelfbeschikking	110		1.989.000	137

Source: annual report Cordaid 2010 (43)

This example reconfirms the binaries in gender, in which men are the unmarked category, and considered as the invisible norm. Oxfam also makes this difference of people and women visible in their explanation of the basic right to social basic facilities, “All people, *also women and girls* (my emphasis), have the right on education and adequate health care” (5). What is the reason of this addition? Is it necessary to explain that women and girls are also people? This example reaffirms the invisible norm of men and the feminization of poverty that is mentioned earlier in this paper.

Especially the fact that men are not mentioned is important in this context. This creates the assumption of Cordaid and Oxfam Novib that the current position of men is the norm of the possibilities and opportunities in developing countries. This is an interesting topic for a further analysis, but for now I will continue to focus on the way women are described in the reports.

Hivos explicitly mentions the improvement of the social position of women as an important guideline in all their programs (Hivos: 5). Oxfam Novib also emphasises to invest in especially women (Oxfam Novib: 11). In their strategy plan for 2011-2015, Cordaid stresses that the position of women will be central in all their programs (Cordaid: 15). We can question the reason why especially women are central in their programs? And what role do the MDG’s have in this decision? Inequality is gendered, as is explained earlier in this paper. This does explain the increased integration of women in

the programs of development aid over last six decennia. What does this focus on women mean on how they are represented and approached by these organizations?

5.2 Women's role in current aid programs

In the annual reports women are connected to many different topics and programs in the fields of human rights, economical positions, social positions, and political positions. In the beginning of development aid women were seen as lacking agency and as victims of existing systems (Chua, Bhavnani and Foran 2000: 821). As discussed earlier the role of women as victims changed in the different decennia where women were more often integrated in the aid programs and became active players in the field instead of passive objects. Marta Zarzycka argues that in visual expression of ngo's women are still often depicted as people that need help; they are crying or holding their children. They are represented as the Other where disaster takes place (2011). In this paragraph I want zoom in on some cases from the reports and look at how these depictions influence the image of the role of women in current development programs. In addition, I will concentrate on how and if the different axes of difference are discussed in correlation to each other or only separately.

Women's rights are a central theme in all three reports. This concept functions as an umbrella where different disciplines such as sexuality, economy, and politics are covered.

Let's start with the concept of sexuality, to me sexuality is a multilayered concept. Joanne Nagel defines sexuality as "'men' and 'women' as socially, mainly genitally defined individuals with culturally defined appropriate sexual tastes, partners, and activities" (2003: 8). Nagel mentions different layers of sexuality: sex, a personal sexual orientation, and sexual activities. Within the programs of development organizations different concepts of sexuality are discussed, one example is sexual violence. Women are depicted as victims of violence in sexualized violence such as domestic violence and war rape. In war rape women's bodies are used to destroy a culture, mainly because women are the symbolic gatekeepers of a group or culture (Enloe: 2006, Douglas: 1966). In addition, the integrity of women's bodies, such as pregnancies of very young girls which their bodies cannot handle yet is also connected to sexual violence (Hivos: 30, Oxfam Novib: 17).

Body mutilation by child birth

Oxfam cites a 24-year old woman in their report: "The child-birth ruined the lower part of my body. I became an 'impure' woman for my husband and my community" (17). In the next sentence Oxfam states: "With the help of the campaign 'Together for a better life in Niger' on behalf of Oxfam Novib and Tena she will have a view on a better future" (17). The first quote shows the consequences of child birth as a gendered practice. Only women are able to bare children and are confronted with these consequences. Location and culture also influence this situation. On the same page Oxfam explains:

“In rural areas in Niger, girls often marry at the early age of 12 or 13” (17). The physical location and the culturally normalized marriages at a young age are, according to Oxfam, seen as the source of this problem. Thereby, Oxfam represents this woman from Niger as a victim of her local traditions, which in this situation I totally agree with. In the second quote Oxfam explains that with their help, this young woman will have a better future again. This can be analyzed as problematic because Oxfam states that with western products as Tena her life will change positively. This statement contains a neo-colonialist view, where the organizations from the West, with their western products are able to improve the lives of the non-westerners. In a way, Oxfam commercialises development aid in this example. My critique shows similarities with the critique in the 1970’s during the Women and Development (WAD) wave within writings on the development discourse, where the western way of modernization in developing countries was questioned. Needful to mention is that in the current development programs all three organizations almost always work in cooperation with local partners. In this particular example I could not detect a local partner that produces the same products as Tena. This assumes that Oxfam chose a western partner to launch this campaign with, however, it can also confirm the problem of the omission of local producers of similar products.

Another example from the report of Oxfam shows a different representation of women in Congo, where violence against women is still an everyday problem. Oxfam Novib financially supports their local partner organisations in their campaign ‘We Can End all Violence Against Women’.

“With programs on the radio, events on markets, debates on universities, theatre, etc. they created attention for violence against women. This is now less easy accepted. Justice slowly started to prosecute perpetrators, among them several officers of the Congolese army” (Oxfam Novib: 15).

This openness about rape and other forms of violence against women is positive, because humiliation and the fear of being rejected by their family is a big issue for women. In her essay, Weiss stresses on the symbolic role of women, especially in traditional societies, and the historical importance of a women’s virginity and purity (2010: 288). She explains that when women do not revive to the expectations of purity, they fear rejection. The fact that Oxfam and their local partners try to fight this ‘silence’ of women demonstrates the intention not to represent women as victims but to stress on the role of the perpetrators and to devalue *their* position. To me, this campaign emphasise more on the empowerment of women instead of their position as a victim of violence. Another difference between this example and the first is that the latter is a project that is solely organized by local partner organizations. For me, this manner creates more awareness locally and creates a more realistic form of resistance against the violence, because activists do not dependent on products of a western organization but take local traditions into account. Unfortunately, Oxfam does not mention if these activities are performed by men and women, only by men or only by women. This lack of information deprives me of an idea of the form of agency and resistance by local women.

In the next paragraph I will discuss a statement made in the annual report of Hivos, which discusses the local traditions and religious practices.

Local politics and religions: repression on women's agency?

Hivos addresses the problematic influence of local politics and religions on physical integrity and self-determination of women:

“With concern we notice again that physical integrity and women's self-determination is under great pressure of different religions and politics. For *them* (my emphasis), sexuality is a taboo. Female genital mutilation is still a huge problem in many countries” (Hivos: 30).

Just as Oxfam Novib did in the example on birth mutilation, Hivos represents women in this quote as victims of their local politics and local religions. This statement assumes that Hivos does not fully accept the cultural practices that are ingrained in the local politics or local religions and claim that they should be stopped. In a way the debate on western liberalism versus multiculturalism comes to my mind. I am aware that this debate is not really applicable on this situation because this debate is focused on migrants in European countries. But I will keep this in mind in discussing this subject, because it might be interesting to look at the notions of agency in this example and the prejudices of other cultures practices.

Western, liberal feminist Susan Moller Okin labels cultures where these practices are being performed as patriarchal. She stresses in her paper ‘Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women’ that these cultural practices create inequalities within their culture, and that because of this, women do not have the same opportunities as men to fulfill their lives according to their own free choice (1999: 16-17). According to the quote of Hivos they share this thought with Moller Okin. But if I analyze this issue from Braidotti's concept of agency, and her understanding of agency in combination with religious practices, agency can be expressed within this practice from the vision to belief in the possibility of a better world. The practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) has different functional and symbolic meanings. For example, the symbolic ritual of the transition to adulthood, with means the social integration of women in their community (Obiora 2000). So a direct abolition of this ritual might influence the social position of women within the community. An alternative form of agency for women can be realized in the creation of a new symbolic, not disfiguring, form of this ritual which serves the same purpose. This symbolic form of FMG does present a clear form of resistance against women's oppression within these practices with the intension to create a better situation for themselves and further generations. Mahmood would argue that this resistance against women's oppression of FMG is not the only form of agency. She would say that women talking about FMG, without banning the ritual, would also be a form of agency.

In their quote, it looks like Hivos does not take the values of the local traditions, politics, and religions into account, including the different social markers of identity for women that are connected to these traditions. I mention the identity markers because these rituals have influence on the construction of identity of women within these traditions.

In addition to the quote, the clear mentioning of '*them*' in the sentence 'For them, sexuality is a taboo' also creates the assumption of Hivos that for 'us', sexuality is not a taboo anymore. This statement in my opinion is problematic because firstly, it reproduces the dichotomy of 'we' as civilized and a 'them' as back warded. Secondly, this dichotomy reproduces the idea that 'we', the Westerners, are more free and open-minded persons because for 'us' sexuality is not a taboo (anymore). Is this true? Is sexuality not a taboo in western societies? These somewhat hidden statement creates the underlying idea that the 'us' still needs to liberate 'them' of their ingrained cultural and religious practices. This seems to conclude that pieces of the old modernization belief from the beginning of development aid are still present in current development aid programs. Although now often hidden in a more open and cooperative form of development aid programs.

Next to an emphasis on women's rights in connection to issues on sexuality, the aid programs of the development organization also focus on the reinforcement of the economical position of women and their participation in social and political processes. In the annual reports I noticed that women are sometimes still represented by the development organizations as an additional category. How and to what extend is this visible when women's positions in economical, social, and political issues is represented?

Non-western women: still represented as a subordinated group?

In the annual report of Hivos, their *Civil Choices* program focuses amongst other things on the stimulation of democratic relations and gender equality. With this program they intent to better enable men and women to participate on political decision-making processes, manage their affairs, and arrange their lives according to their own wishes (25). In this paragraph Hivos mentions men and women together in their struggle to improve better democratic relations and gender equality instead of only focusing on women. But, in the main targets of the program in the following paragraph women are mentioned together with minorities and people with hiv/aids as special groups that need help in organizing them to defend their interests publically (25). I think this is problematic because initially men and women are portrayed as equal players in the same need of stimulation on democratic relations and gender equality. Subsequently, in the seconds reference women are placed in an extra category with groups that are labelled as 'groups that need additional help', such as people with a disability or illness, or people that are part of a minority culture. I think that in this first excerpt men are, as mentioned earlier in another example, the invisible norm. By these 'men' I mean the men that are not infected with hiv/aids and are not disabled. I argue this because it seems that the men discussed in the

first sentence are only men from minority cultures, men with disabilities and men that are infected with hiv/aids. This explains the equal position of women to ‘these’ men.

If we use an intersectional approach to analyze this, I can ask ‘the other question’, for example what is racist about this statement? Racist about this statement is that men and women from a minority culture are depicted as a group that need more help to manage their affairs than men from the majority culture. This also indicates what is patriarchal about this statement, namely that the men from the majority culture are dominant to the women of the majority *and* the minority culture. In this example we can detect many different axes of difference that influence the subordinate position of the people that are mentioned, central are gender, ethnicity, and ability. What I want to argue in this paragraph is that all these mentioned groups are labelled as people that face a form of oppression. Unfortunately, Hivos does not mention the double or triple oppressions some groups face, such as women from a minority group with hiv/aids. It looks like Hivos sees these forms of oppression as homogeneous categories and does not really pay attention to the idea that these forms can be influenced by other axes.

In short, it is clear that in this section women are represented as one of the subordinated groups that need special attention. In the next paragraph I will elaborate on the explanation of these needs according to the development organizations.

Women as learning subjects

The representation of women as subjects in need of education is visible in the annual reports of all three organizations. A short enumeration of the following quotes will clarify this:

- “Sixteen women will be trained in producing eco friendly bags, 280 women will receive training in waste management/ recycling” (Cordaid: 26).
- “The League of Pastoralist Women of Kenya wants to build up leadership of women and stimulate their participation on political, social, and economical traffic. The upcoming two years civic educators will be trained, activities of citizenship education will be performed, trainings about suffrage rights will be held and workshops for women pastoralists leaders will be organized” (Cordaid: 27)
- “The position of women received extra attention through the fight against maternal mortality and midwife education” (Cordaid 73)
- “Women organizations will continue, with the support of Hivos, to offer leadership trainings to women with ambitions in politics of within social organizations” (Hivos: 30)
- “The program that we supported managed in 2010 that more that 620.000 girls and women received education. One of BRAC way of working is to recruit married women, which had six

to twelve years of education, as teachers. They will receive a basic training of pedagogy of six to twelve days. And children's psychology, and learn to how they can use the teaching material" (Oxfam: 14)

As is visible in the quotes, these are just a few examples there are a lot more referring to training programs, a large part of the aid programs is about training and education. In my opinion, with the representation of women as learning subjects, all three organization clearly represent women in development programs as active agents that have the skills and the knowledge, sometimes with the help of education, to participate (as leaders) in social, economical, and political processes. Education is linked to empowerment. This is very different than in the first period of economic based development, the modernization paradigm, which was male dominated and ignored women as actors of social change. The quotes show empowerment of women in different positions in society. For example, the third quote mentions midwife education, this education can have a big impact on the participation of women in society and community building because they become the subjects with pragmatic knowledge on pregnancies and births. Births play a central role in the reproduction of the culture and the community. In addition, the second and the fourth quote focus on education for women on leadership in economical, political and social traffic. Education in these fields can offer women many opportunities. For example, education in political issues have influence in the opportunities of women to express their voice in policies in their community and eventually even on national level. This stimulant enlarges women's agency as it gives them the opportunity to express their voice and act from their own vision. The last quote focuses on education to become a teacher. The recruitment of women teachers shows that women are accepted as transmitters of knowledge.

Although the general intentions behind these educational trainings are very positive, it also creates questions. For example, the question if all women have the opportunity to participate in these programs. How do class and age influence the accessibility? What about the training for women who want to enter the political field and participate in decision-making processes, is this possible for all women or is this only accessible for women of a higher class? And can women in the age group of over fifty years old also participate in a program to become a midwife? Lastly, it is also important to think about the role of the trainer, who is giving the trainings? Is this a (male, white) western person that is going to impose western forms of education? Or is this a local person that has knowledge about the local context that might influence the content of the training? What about the sex of the trainers? Knowing more about these markers would give me the opportunity of a more intersectional analysis of these forms of training and education. But unfortunately, these issues are not clearly presented in the annual reports.

Development organizations still sometimes describe women as a subordinate group that need help from them or local organizations. In contrast they also represent women as learning subjects and

as active agents that have the skills and the knowledge to participate in public issues on communal and national level that strengthens their position and importance in society. Cordaid strongly shows that education is connected to empowerment of women and in general. I tried to make the empowerment of women clear already a bit clear by giving a few examples in this section. In the last section of this paper I will focus even more on how empowerment of women is represented in the annual reports and I will investigate if resistance plays a role in their agency.

5.3 How is women's empowerment represented in the annual reports?

In this last part I want to investigate if and how women's empowerment is represented by the development organizations. In addition, I want to look if a form of resistance is connected to this empowerment. The previous paragraph already showed how education is linked to empowerment of women. In the annual reports, the empowerment of women is mainly presented in connection to successful programs of the development organizations.

Empowerment of women through microfinance programs

I understand empowerment as something that is created with the final effort to offer the possibility to become self-reliant. Writing about development aid this self-reliance is, or in any event should be, the central motivation for all development organizations. What in my opinion is presented as the best practice of women's empowerment by the development organizations are the microfinance programs. All three organizations emphasize on the high number of women participating in these projects. Oxfam and Cordaid state that over seventy percent of the clients of the microfinance programs of 2010 were women (Oxfam: 39, Cordaid: 115). Hivos even had sixty eight percent of women as their clients (17). Hivos mentions that microfinance institutions should have the best methods to determine the economical self-reliance of women (20). The high number of female participants shows the empowerment of women in the challenge to start a business from scratch. As Hivos mentions that most of them live below the poverty line, which is \$ 1,25 a day, their participation shows agency. This agency is visible in their determination to change their own position in live as women, of low class, living in a non-western society. But is there also a form of resistance present in this example? The different axes of difference, gender, class and location, show the multilayered subordination they face. The microfinance programs offer them the opportunity to create a position as an active economical agent which probably empowers their position in society. But can we speak of a form of resistance against their oppressed position in society or does this microfinance program simply offers them an opportunity to improve their life situation or even just only an opportunity to survive? I think the last one, women that participate in the microfinance programs are of course trying to create a change for firstly, their current situation in the way that they can earn money to provide in their livelihood.

Secondly, they want to create better chances for their children and family. The ideas of Braidotti on agency are a bit visible but not that convincing as in other examples where women resist against the status quo of their countries policies. Nevertheless, the economical empowerment of women is visible in the microfinance programs.

Ambiguity on the economical position of women

Oxfam creates an ambiguous representation of the empowered economical position of women in the following quote:

“Less wages for similar labour, no right to possession of land, not be able to receive microcredit, not have the opportunity to go to school because you are ‘just’ a girl, etc. They face domestic and sexual violence. Not surprising that, of all people that live in extreme poverty, 70 percent is women” (Oxfam Novib: 11).

Directly after this representation of women as victims, Oxfam counters these findings by arguing that *women* (my emphasis) are the key to development. Because they “do the most work, plough, sow, and harvest to feed and care their families, children, and the sick” (11). The assumption of Oxfam is that women work to care of their families. They directly connect the economic role of women to the domestic sphere. This is problematic because the binary opposition of the women / private and men/ public is strengthened instead of being deconstructed. The vision of Oxfam that women are and should be active agents within the economic field of their country is a powerful representation of women with agency that resist against the existing male dominated economics in their community or country.

Unfortunately, their direct connection to the private sphere could devalue this empowerment. As if they presume that women are not able to enter the economic sphere with other reasons than to take care of their family? However, if we look at this example from the concept of agency discussed by Mahmood, we can speak of agency of women if they are entering the economic field with the intention to take care for their family. Their economic position does not have to be a resistance against the traditions of their culture. If we take the cultural context into account such as the high social status that is connected to women as being the head of the family, it is logical that women work to take care of their family. This can be seen as an act showing agency because they activate their ability to act and take the responsibility of earning money, and in addition also take care for their family. Subsequently, it is important to look at the reasons why these women are working next to their possible ‘work’ of being head of the family? Are their husbands sick, are they widows, or are they unmarried women with children? From this point of view I do not see the work as a form of agency to battle the existing gender roles within the economical field but again as a way to survive. These last two examples show how difficult it is to look at these situations and to analyze if there is a form of resistance against existing structures involved. We need a clear overview of the context of the situation for that, which cannot be found in the annual reports, but should be researched locally where the project is taking

place.

I want to finish this paper with a clear example of the cooperation of women that clearly represents women's empowerment. This representation is visible in the description of women's alliances in the annual report of Cordaid.

Empowerment in women's alliances

When discussing minorities, identity and diversity Cordaid creates a clear representation of women as active agents with agency in their culture by combining their knowledge to create a change.

Interestingly, Cordaid acknowledges the influence of co-construction of different axes of difference and represents women firstly as victims of double discrimination: "women of identity bound groups face double discrimination as woman and as member of a minority" (41). In the next sentence their support to the active practices of women to battle this double discrimination is presented: "Pastoralists, Dalit- Maya-, and other women's organizations exchanged knowledge and experience and formed alliances to raise abuses and to advocate for bills of change" (41). This quote shows a clear form of agency as is presented by Braidotti. The agency of local women is visible as a political act of resistance to create an intervention on legislative national level with the intention to create a better life for themselves and the future generations. Again, we can question the accessibility of these alliances for all women. How will age, location and class influence participation in these alliances? But this is a question that can only be answered by local research.

The empowerment of women is visible in the annual reports of Hivos, Cordaid and Oxfam Novib, especially in the influence of education and the successful programs such as microfinance programs. Women are represented as learning subjects, eager to learn, with the intention to change their position in economical, social and political processes. In the economical situation resistance is present, but can be questioned because of the possible focus on survival or livelihood in this stage. Resistance is mainly visible in the agency of women in connection to political matters such as the combining of knowledge in women's alliance with the belief that they can express their voices to create a change in national policies.

Conclusion

In this paper I investigated how women are currently represented by three Dutch development organizations. Are women represented as powerful and strong or more as oppressed and underprivileged? The three organizations are Hivos, Oxfam Novib, and Cordaid. I have analyzed the annual reports of 2010 to investigate the representation of women. During my research I came across some difficulties investigating the representation of women in the annual reports. The reports did not often explain the layered concepts of the programs, this can be a result of the lack of intersectionality

analysis in their reports, or it could be a result of little space. More research has to be done to go deeper into the power relations and programs that can give more information on the representation of women, such as an analysis of the use of visual images in the campaign of development organisations or local research into the programs of the development organizations.

Over the last seventy years the role of women in relation to development has changed. At first they were seen as victims with a lack of agency, who did not play a role as active agent to create social change. This image changed in the following decennia where women were more often integrated in aid programs and became active players in the field instead of passive objects. Still, absolute poverty is feminized. According to the UN Development Program of 1995, 70 percent of the poorest people in the world are female. The Millennium Development Goals and in addition the development organizations try to change this feminization of poverty with their extra focus on women in their programs. This focus on women is visible in all the annual reports, where the reinforcement of women's position and gender equality are central in all their programs. When I explored how gender was integrated in their programs it became clear that an understanding of gender was not included in their reports. To me, the interpretation and use of gender by the development organizations had many similarities with the feminist theory of equality thinking, which in short means equal rights for men and women. Women needed to be equally present in the organizations and in the all the sectorized programs. Affirmative action for women is applied by Cordaid to create more gender sensitivity in their programs. To me, this did not represent strong and empowered women, but only reaffirmed the privileges of men in opposition to women. It seemed that in the reports gender was only connected to women. Men were missing in the conceptualisations of gender equality. This reconfirms the binaries in gender, in which men are the unmarked category, and considered as the invisible norm. The focus on women results in a representation of women that need help to reach the invisible norm of men.

Women are described in connection to different topics in the fields of human rights, sexuality, and their economical, social and political positions. When sexuality of women was discussed, women were often represented as victims of war rape and sexual violence that was mainly caused by cultural traditions and religious practices. However, in some programs the focus was on the openness about sexual violence and the attention shifted from the victim to the role of the perpetrator. Hivos addresses the problematic influence of local politics and religions on physical integrity and self-determination of women. In my opinion, their statement reproduced the neo-colonial ideas that the 'us' still needs to liberate 'them' of their ingrained cultural and religious practices. This seems to conclude that pieces of the old modernization belief from the beginning of development aid are still somewhere present in current development. However, the cooperation with many local organizations clearly shows that the process of development aid has changed since the beginning of development aid.

Development organizations still at times describe women as a subordinate group that need extra attention from them or local organizations. In addition, they also represent women as learning

subjects and as active agents that have the skills and the knowledge to participate in trainings with the intention to change their position in economical, social and political processes. Education is clearly linked to the empowerment of women. One critical point in connection to these trainings is the accessibility. Are these programs accessible for all women or do different markers of difference such as age, class and ethnicity influence the participation?

In political matters the resistance against the status quo is the most visible, this form of agency corresponds with Braidotti's understanding of the agency. An example is the combining of knowledge in women's alliances with the belief that they can express their voices to create changes in national policies. In the economical situation resistance in agency of women is present, but can be questioned because of the possible focus on survival or livelihood in this stage. The representation of women within the field of development aid is steadily changing but unfortunately the men are still presented as the invisible norm that women have to reach.

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