

DRAFT DSA Introduction:

At the last DSA forum at the conference in September 2016 we explored the findings –in some detail- of research from GADN on the meaning and practice of feminist research and evaluation, and the findings from a major piece of cross country research undertaken by Womankind around women’s participation and voice, especially in political spaces. Several contributors shared their own research and experiences and we ran out of time. It was felt that we need more time together to explore what feminist approaches to gathering and using knowledge are and what benefits and challenges they bring to both academics and NGOs/activists undertaking research into issues around women’s empowerment, participation and representation.

One major piece of NGO research was missing from the Sept meeting, work over three years by Trócaire on issues of women’s leadership and empowerment, again in the political arena. So we are v happy today to welcome two people from Dublin to share some of the findings and issues arising from that very long-term research undertaken largely by staff and partners in three countries and how Trócaire has used it.

We are also bringing together other NGO staff and academic researchers and activists in development, to share with us their successes and challenges around how to listen to and work with women using feminist research approaches in development. And how to use the findings generated in ways that really reflect the voices of those consulted and follow strong ethical principles- often difficult in the current funding and operational climates facing both NGOs and academics in their different ways. How to meet publication standards for RAE purposes, how to report findings that contradict the contracts or grant agreements underlying many women’s empowerment projects?

We are trying to do many things today- to learn from research undertaken and projects run how easy/hard it is to reach women, to listen, to understand and analyse their experiences. How far are we able to follow core feminist principles of e.g. joint planning and reflection, addressing unequal power relations, understanding our power and position in the research process, using the findings ethically and appropriately, ensuring inclusivity in the whole process and much more. Fenella will talk to the some of the issues we have identified as critical for feminist research/evaluation in a recent paper written for GADN.

Trócaire will talk to both the findings of the research undertaken and also how it has been processed and used to shape the work of Trócaire around women’s empowerment. If there is time we might also explore some of the real challenges of engaging busy staff and partners in research processes that take time and demand new skills. Womankind will perhaps focus less on some of findings of their research on women’s empowerment processes and more on how the findings of research are then analysed and used for advocacy and campaigning purposes by an INGO. What issues this work raises, where are there clear gains and where do challenges lie. The

'meat' of the WK findings are all written up and available on the WK website.

There is a great deal of material available to us today and each of you are bringing your own experiences, questions and resources, so the intention then is to have small group discussions allowing each of you to speak and share, for about an hour. This is usually where people find the most benefit and learning and I hope that will be the case today. The questions are many:

- How easy is it for women to speak out?
- Can we listen to them well?
- What skills are needed and what are the barriers?
- Are they able to influence 'the findings' we develop?
- How well do we understand their concerns and ideas and how effectively do we share their often challenging views and experiences?
- How do we use feminist research principles in development organisations to check our work with women on issues important to them?
- How can we better 'package' feminist research when developing tools and methodologies for advocacy and programming in development?

Some of the findings that recur from recent research include the time that change takes, especially for women who are often starting from a low base where leaving home and entering the public arena can be a big step; the power of local social movements/organisations and how NGOs processes can sometimes disturb these; the critical importance of context meaning 'rolling out' solutions is often not working very well; the huge diversity among women in the same communities and their v diverse empowerment journeys, and the hard work needed to ensure the inclusion of the v poor, low caste, migrants, refugees and others. And so much more....

Undertaking feminist research, however partially, often challenges dominant assumptions and paradigms around women's participation, voice and agency in development work, and raises many questions as well as providing strong ways forward for working with women. Nikki will close the session by both drawing out some of the key issues emerging from the presentations and discussions and also by sharing some experiences from Oxfam based on their extensive work with raising women's voices and promoting women's leadership and engagement.

TINA WALLACE
3 APRIL 2017.