TRANSCRIPT OF DEVELOPMENT DRUMS [EPISODE 32 – GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT]

Host: Owen Barder. Guests: Prue Clarke and Andrea Cornwall

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Owen Barder
Thanks for downloading Development Drums number 32. My name is Owen Barder at the Center for Global Development. Today, we're talking about women and development, and we've got two really great guests. Andrea Cornwall is Professor of Anthropology and Development at Sussex University, where amongst many other things she directs a multi-country research program, pathways of women's empowerment. Andrea, welcome to Development Drums.

Andrea Cornwall
Thank you.

Owen Barder
And my second guest is Prue Clarke, an award-winning journalist formerly with the Financial Times and with the Australian Broadcast Corporation, who founded New Narratives, which is a project supporting women journalists in Africa, who use the power of media to transform their countries. Prue, welcome to Development Drums.

Prue Clarke
Thank you very much.

Owen Barder
I'd like to begin the discussion, if I may, by focusing on two different views of why we might be interested in women in development. And one – the first one we're going to talk about is what you might call an instrumental reason. So, this is something you hear a lot in development circles. The idea is that women and girls have a lot of potential which is underused. So, if you can get girls into school, you will reduce birth rates, you will have more women in the labor market. If you lend women money, they will start up small businesses and that will help them support their family and reduce poverty. If you give them more political power, they will be less corrupt and less violent than men.

So, this is an instrumental reason for having women be more economically and politically empowered in their communities. There is another reason that we'll come to in the second half of the podcast, which is less about what women and girls can do for development and more about what development can do for women and girls; as you said, Andrea, in a recent Guardian article. So, we'll come to that. But let's start with this instrumental case for investing in women and girls. Andrea, you've called this empowerment light; tell us what you mean by that and why you think this is problematic.

Andrea Cornwall
Okay. Well, I agree that women and girls have got lots of potential that's been denied to them in terms of their opportunities to make a contribution to their own lives and to the lives of their societies. But I think interventions that provide a palliative without addressing the structural causes of inequitable power relations. So, there is no real change for women in general, just better prospects for those individual women on the receiving end of those interventions. I don't think that's going to make the kind of change happen that all this talk about women and girls is aiming at. I mean, it's aiming at broader development outcomes but if all we're doing is giving women little micro loans and getting them to compete better in a highly unequal market, where they're not really going to make themselves that much better off, we're not really

getting at the root of the problem. And I have a colleague, an Egyptian colleague, who is a social policy specialist. And she argues that investing and ameliorating a lot of individual women is far less effective as an investment than interventions that can tackle some of these structural inequities and enable all women and girls to enjoy greater freedom and equality.

Owen Barder
So in some ways, this is a parallel to a debate that we have in other development contexts, which is are we trying to ameliorate the symptoms of unequal power relationships in effective institutions, decades of marginalization and oppression, or are we – so are we trying to tackle the symptoms that those problems cause or are we trying to tackle the underlying causes? And what you're saying is that many of these things that focus on women in microfinance getting them into school and so on, giving access to reproductive health are tackling the symptoms of a more fundamental power imbalance, is that a fair caricature?

Andrea Cornwall
Yeah, that's fair.

Owen Barder
But are we saying, Prue, what – do you buy the idea that this is – that we're tackling symptoms rather than tackling causes. I mean if women are getting a better education or do have more economic power because they are running small businesses, doesn't that actually help to tackle the causes, the imbalances as well as tackling the symptoms of imbalance?

Prue Clarke
Well, I mean, I would think so. We work primarily with journalists in Liberia and we do believe that if they become role models for other women that they will do more stories related to women and children that they – the impact will be broadly felt across the society, they're more likely to tackle subjects like ills that are not confined to Liberia, high-teen pregnancy, unsafe abortions…

Owen Barder
Female genital mutilation.

Prue Clarke
Exactly, we just had a big victory…

Owen Barder
Tell us about that? What was the victory?

Prue Clarke
Yeah. So one of our journalists did the first major reporting in Liberia in the major media on the health effects of female genital cutting. And it was the first time really that there had been a discussion about the impact that many women bleed to death afterwards or suffer horrible infections as a result, but also down the track when they're giving birth, I've always understood it to be one in 10 births ends in a death of the mother. And the high prevalence of female genital cutting is a big factor in this. And people just don't know this, women and children and men don't know this in Liberia.

So, we did the first story on this subject. We got a terrible backlash from the secret traditional society in that community that practices genital cutting. Of course, genital cutting is practiced widely across this region and it's not confined to this religious society, but it is one of the things that this secret society does and any time anyone discusses anything that happens within the secret society outside, they are marked for death.

So, our reporter faced death threats and our newspaper there, FrontPageAfrica, for about a month until the government came out, three ministers came out and some traditional leaders came out saying: we're going to use this – the softening of the ground that came from this article to actually crack down and do something.

And so they have shut down the traditional societies in Liberia temporarily. I think they've done the right thing in getting the traditional leaders to take charge on this, so it's actually being handed over to the men's secret society for four or five years or however long, but we've been told that government is going to use this as an opportunity to end this practice.

Owen Barder
So, this is an example, isn't it, where – and I would guess, Andrea, you would call this – this is kind of empowerment, right? Or this is changing the political context, it's changing by using media and enabling women to speak out through the support your – the New Narratives is giving them, you're actually doing the genuine empowerment, not the empowerment light. Am I – I don't want to put words in your mouth…

Andrea Cornwall
Oh I completely agree, especially if some of the money that was invested in all these little, little interventions was put into more work in the media or with media with representation, it would be a far better investment because precisely for the reasons that you give. And I think also we need to look at FGM and look at where changes have come about, they've come about through empowerment, through community mobilization, through men mobilizing as well. There are cases in West Africa, very successful men's mobilization against FGM.

So, actually what we're talking about is forms of empowerment that try and change structural relations in society, they change gender relations, they change images that women have of themselves and of other women and that is something which goes far beyond these piecemeal interventions which are simply about putting women to work for development aren't changing those fundamental gender relations and that's the difference between working for women and girls and working with gender.

Prue Clarke
Right. So where I was getting to eventually was that what we have found though is that you've got to be extremely careful. There is a lot of weariness in Liberia about organizations that are targeting women. They're dismissed, they tend to be "that's the women's group", so they're not taking that seriously and there is a lot of resentment as well towards men. So we are not just empowering women, we have men as well.

Owen Barder
Right.

Prue Clarke
But we do believe and that's to minimize that sort of dismissiveness that we get, but also men have to be part of the processes – of course they have to be part of the process. So, we find that to be critical. Men have to be able to tell stories that relate to women. It's very important to us that our journalists can go and interview warlords and do stories on politics. It can be counterproductive just to focus on women.

Owen Barder
We should come to this because I think that's going to be common ground that men and boys have to be part of the story too. I want to focus on not the proper empowerment that you're talking about, the empowerment in the original sense of the term, but on these micro interventions – the putting women to work as we might dismissively call it.

Now I want to explore how much of what goes on in the name of working with women and girls is genuine empowerment and how much of it is these small projects. So, for example, the UK Department for International Development has said that women and girls are at the center of everything they do in Pakistan. And this is a series of projects like trying to get more girls in school. It's things like investing in sexual and reproductive health, access to contraception and safe abortions.

Now, how should we think about it, what's our yardstick for judging, does this contribute to genuine empowerment or is this putting women to work in the name of development? I mean it seems to me that, for example, having girls go to school that sounds like an attractive long-run empowerment, broad

empowerment intervention, whereas I suppose microfinance depending what happens with the money, I don't know, that's economic empowerment, genuine economic empowerment or if that's – how do we distinguish, how do we know which one we're doing?

Andrea Cornwall
I think, in the case of education, it's complex, because you can send a girl to school, she can receive a lousy curriculum that teaches her about things that she won't be able to put to use in her life. She can be sexually harassed at school, on the way to school, on the way home from school. She can find it very difficult when she menstruates to be at school and she may have no opportunities in the labor market afterwards.

Now as part of the Pathways program, some colleagues of mine in Ghana, Dzodzi Tsikata and Akosua Darkwah, did a study that showed that for this generation of young women, the opportunities from education are far less than for their grandmothers' because there have been really fundamental changes in the labor market in Ghana.

So unless a structural change to the labor market makes it possible for more women to find productive work, decent work, all that's happening with these young women going to school is they come out at the other end and become traders as they might have done if they hadn't gone to school in the first place.

So, I think we need to look at the boarder context and something I find really problematic about this narrow 'invest in goals, here are the targets, we need to get X number of people here and the X number of people educated here and there, actually misses that bigger picture, that enabling environment, the gender relations that contextualize the experience of those girls, the relations with boys in their class, with men in their community, and in the labor market, highly gendered labor markets that have huge obstacles to women getting on.

So, I think we need to see the bigger picture here and something then I think that development interventions need to address is what that bigger picture needs to look like. And where I've seen very effective work that has tried to address those, it's come through women's movements, women's organizations, remobilization, it's not come through the piecemeal projects of a foreign agency, even if they throw millions at it.

Owen Barder
And let's nail down, are we saying that this is not effective or not as effective as we would like it to be, because of this broader context not being addressed or are we saying this is harmful that having girls go to school, for example in the situation you described, where they may be sexually harassed, the number of – the cases of rape by teachers of schoolgirls, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa is something that we don't talk about enough. Are you saying that these might – these interventions are just not good enough or are you saying they are actually bad, that if you were – that you would actually stop doing them, because these girls actually would be better off not going to school if we haven't changed – if we can't address the broader context.

Andrea Cornwall
I think I would never take a position that was so extreme and I think also generalizing like that is very difficult. I am thinking back, I was a secondary school teacher in Zimbabwe, 20 years ago, and I think what would make a difference to those girls in my class, what would really make a difference to their lives.

One thing would be to engage with boys. So projects that are simply saying, let's get more girls into school can end up creating backlash, resentment, they don't work with those boys who are also getting left behind because of racism, because of the history of colonialism, because of all the reasons why boys in Southern Zimbabwe at that time were unable to get themselves off a very difficult life that's bound up with poverty.

So, I think we need to think about – so when I say let's think about the broader conditions, I don't mean let's stop thinking about ways in which people might be able to assist, but I think what we need is a radical rethink of the ways in which development agencies proceed, away from results and outcomes and the colonial style interventions and towards trying to understand the real pathways of change and how those

can be hindered by people who wish to help and I think there's a really big issue there and I think it's something the development industry finds very difficult to confront.

Owen Barder
So, again, we will come to what that constitutes and what are the things we need to do to address that. But I just want to close off on these kinds of interventions and I was – there is a paper by Esther Duflo last year – she is at the Poverty Action Lab at MIT on women's empowerment and economic development. Where she really questions the evidence about – you often hear in reports and speeches by the Secretary General of the United Nations that investing in girls is by far the most effective development intervention that if girls go to school then their kids will have better health and if you invest in sexual and reproductive health that this will make a huge difference to the family's health and so on.

And she challenges that, she says that actually the evidence isn't so good. There is some evidence about infant deaths and nutrition being better when you invest in girl's education for example. But if you give women more power in communities for example, you end up with less rather than more investment in education than if men are in charge of how the resources are allocated is one of her examples.

So, she says that it's not all useless, but that it's much less of a silver bullet than is sometimes portrayed in the literature that comes out of international organizations and aid agencies. Is that – in the absence of the broader empowerment agenda that we're going to come onto next, is that broadly what both of you – do you think that she is being too negative, that actually these things like really getting girls a decent education is good for the family, is good for the community, or that that has all been oversold as part of the kind of gender myth about the role of women in society.

Prue Clarke
Well, I think as Andrea was saying, I think it depends on the quality of the education and it depends on it whether everything else is being addressed around it and the societal attitudes. You know, obviously education is – obviously information, facts are great as long as they are in a holistic context.

Andrea Cornwall
I would first say that I'd be highly suspicious of the evidence that Esther Duflo uses. I recently reviewed a systematic review that discounted about 95% of the studies and didn't take into consideration any studies that involve qualitative data – the real data that would understand what's actually changing in peoples' lives. So, I think, let's first start by saying 'what is this evidence'?

Owen Barder
Right.

Andrea Cornwall
And I know it's controversial to questions somebody as famous as Esther Duflo, but I look at those methods and I wonder how much they really allow us to understand what changes in peoples' lives. How much are people involved in asking the questions and setting the questions to ask. How much were generalizable findings sought that flattened out any sense of context? How much was it driven by development's narrow vision of results and outcomes?

So, let's question that evidence, at the same time, I think what it shows is that this narrow instrumental approach doesn't change things enough, that actually without working with gender, which is what I'm suggesting does make a difference, changing those structural power relations, then yes it's not going to make that much difference. You can pour millions of pounds at something but unless you're actually addressing the causes, you're only going to address the symptoms; it's sticking plaster.

And I really think there is an important need in development right now to question this bounding around of evidence as if quantitative studies somehow provide us the magic truth, when all they provide is positionality of the person or the teams doing the research and this huge selecting act of all the studies that could actually help you to understand something. I reviewed a systematic review on FGM. It came to no conclusions. It said there is no conclusions about what works, but you know there are conclusions about

what works, but those things because they're written by journalists, because they're done by social movements and by local organizations, they don't count as evidence.

Owen Barder
I really wish we had time to get into the pros and cons of randomized control trials now because that is an issue on which I think we probably disagree, but that isn't what we're going to talk about for the rest of this podcast.

[Music]

Owen Barder
You are listening to Development Drums with me, Owen Barder and my guests today are Andrea Cornwall from the University of Sussex and Prue Clarke of New Narratives and we are talking today about women's empowerment.

Now let's turn to this idea of empowerment more broadly. We've discussed this narrower version and said that that's insufficient and is unlikely to be effective in the absence of a broader empowerment agenda. Tell us a bit about what the original idea of empowerment was and why we need to reclaim it?

Andrea Cornwall
Well the original language of women's empowerment is just captured really powerfully in the work of Srilatha Batliwala who is from India. And for whom empowerment is all about changing power relations and I think it's worth quoting from her work and she says that "Empowerment is not a goal, but a foundational process that enables marginalized women to construct their own political agendas and form movements and struggles for achieving fundamental and lasting transformation in gender and social power structures." And to me that's the best definition of empowerment that I've yet found and I think her work is extremely insightful. And she was doing this work in the 1980s and 1990s, when there was a much more of a connection of the nation of empowerment with power. What we now found is, as a senior bureaucrat put it, we have emment: empowerment with power taken out. So this evisceration of power from the word empowerment produces what I've argued is empowerment light.

But if we go back to empowerment, it's fundamentally about power. So therefore it's fundamentally about gender because gender is fundamentally about power. And I think that's what that notion takes us back to. And also, it's about the power of movement, the power of collective action, people coming together for themselves with their own agendas, not being put together in groups for a microcredit scheme where they just come and sign-off and get their money and go away again. It's about collective processes, it's about collective consciousness, about women looking at their lives and understanding the difficulties they're experiencing in their lives as something that's structural rather than personal and bringing about change when they decide that they've had enough of it.

And so, that would be those two things, power and movement, would be central for my definition of empowerment.

Owen Barder
Prue, your organization is engaged in empowering women, not only in their own lives but in changing their communities and their societies. Tell us about your experience so far – you gave the example of female genital cutting, what are the other examples of how media can change power relations and what do you think about this broader empowerment agenda?

Prue Clarke
So, I've been covering Africa for about 5-years before I started New Narratives and time and again I was going to cover women in the Congo who suffered horrific rapes or post-war Liberia and the spate of young women suffering fistulas because they'd had children too young, all sorts of things.

And whenever I ask these women why this was happening to them, they would tell me witchcraft. It was extraordinary just how little idea they had of why they were in the situation they were in. And it was very

obvious to me that you can do nothing about your situation, you can do nothing to stand up, unite, fight, demand change, if you don't know why it's happening to you. So, we really believe that media is an overlooked tool in development in particularly in relation to women.

So, there is a lot of work being done in media development, I would argue not enough, I think media needs to be a bigger – needs to get a bigger share of development focus. But – and I understand that some people see that as hard to do and there have been a lot of efforts but I think they've been done poorly and wrongly and even, I would say, destructively. So…

Owen Barder
In what way destructively?

Prue Clarke
So, we see other big organizations coming to a market and the big thing that they don't acknowledge in media in Africa is that the business model of African media is almost exclusively what I've been calling pay-for-play or yellow journalism. So, the journalists are not paid by their employers, they're paid by the people they write about. And in many cases, that's aid agencies or the UN. So, the incentive…

Owen Barder
Or businesses.

Prue Clarke
Or businesses or politicians or whatever, so at the same time, there are none of the incentives that drive us in advanced democracies like societal recognition for the bravery of your reporting, international travel opportunities, pay rises, it's a toxic ecosystem that encourages – it rewards corrupt reporting and offers no incentives for positive reporting.

Owen Barder
And it entrenches the powerful.

Prue Clarke
Exactly, exactly and misinformation and misallocation of resources, absolutely. So, and women is a big factor in this. So, we believe that you need to target the business models of these – of good journalists, of good media houses, you need to – we would argue, create or empower standard setting media in each market.

So, for instance, the BBC for one will play a role where journalists and BBC attract awards, generally the journalists are paid quite well, international travel opportunity and societal recognition, which is key. And other journalists say, I want to be like that so they copy the BBC style; this doesn't exist in most media markets in Africa.

So, we believe that empowering those media houses and they exist. There are media – often they are diaspora returnees or in some cases, there's one, Joy FM in Ghana, it's started by a businessman who just wanted to do a good deed for his country in radio, and they are striving to create businesses based on independent revenue streams that are rewarded when they attract increased audience share and advertising revenue. So, targeting those standard setting media we believe is cost effective, costs are lot less and you'll create the ecosystem system that rewards good journalism, incentivizes good journalism here.

Now where aid groups can be destructive is that they go into a media market, let's use Liberia for example, where there are about 40 newspapers, there are about a million people in Monrovia and 40 newspapers is clearly unsustainable.

Owen Barder
This is 40, four zero.

Prue Clarke

Yes.

Owen Barder
Okay.

Prue Clarke
Whereas in New York there are three.

Owen Barder
Right.

Prue Clarke
So, to support all of those media houses without recognizing that some of them are trying to develop independent media – independent business models, and the rest of them are just happy with their pay-for-play model, you undercut the advantage of the independence.

Owen Barder
Right.

Prue Clarke
And it will perpetuate that toxic use of ecosystem into perpetuality. So, we are really frustrated to see that continuing and we would like to – I mean, so what we are doing is a much smaller amount of money targeting standard sitting media, we and – we argue women is a business argument, half the audience is women and this is a very important pitch because many – media tends to be a testosterone driven sort of business. So, it's often men, we find all sorts of dismissive attitudes to women in those media houses. So – I mean, there's one of the major media houses in Monrovia has no women whatsoever, because the proprietor believes that they're lazy.

In most instances, women are at the back of the newsrooms so we say to them, look, half of your audience is women, you need to boost the number of women in your media house just to make – to actually serve your audience. And then you'll get more advertising revenue and more readership and that argument appeals to them.

Owen Barder
You're changing the power dynamics or working to change the power dynamics within the media industry.

Prue Clarke
Yes.

Owen Barder
You want to shift from media outlets that are paid by the existing elites and privileged to media outlets that succeed because they serve a broader audience and that will help shift the power in the media industry. Tell us how that contributes more broadly to social and political empowerment of women, why – I mean I see how it changes the power relationship within the media market and that's – for me that is good enough, but I assume that you have a broader agenda of thereby in helping to shape power relations in society as a whole, is that right?

Prue Clarke
Absolutely.

Owen Barder
And how do you see that working?

Prue Clarke

Absolutely, well, for one – journalists happen to be high-profile people in a society, so you have that benefit of being role models for other women. Secondly, women are much more likely to interview other women, so women will go to other experts in the society and give them a platform as well…

Owen Barder
Right.

Prue Clarke
…to increase their credibility. Women are more likely – we see that the men cover almost exclusively politics and scandal. Women are much more likely to see a story in the 12-year old child prostitute.

Owen Barder
Right.

Prue Clarke
Or the 5-year old child who's been fed nothing but rice its entire life, it is now malnourished, for instance. So, we don't – we never say we just cover women's issues, we say we're going to cover the most pressing issues in society that aren't being covered.

Owen Barder
Right.

Prue Clarke
And 4 out of 5 times, they tend to be women's issues. So, we have done the first stories on the massive problem of child prostitution in Liberia, on unsafe abortions, taboo subjects that the men wouldn't go near, wouldn't recognize as being stories, but the women see it. And the important thing about – and also another thing that we do that's – it's quite different is we don't believe in short-term workshops, we work over a long period with our reporters, which is how I learnt, it's how everybody learns almost any trade is over a long period. And we – over that time have seen them start to develop the confidence to tackle the subjects that they're seeing all around them.

And so now we've had the first story – the first gay people to be interviewed in Liberia, our reporters did that. They wouldn't have recognized that as a story 18-months ago. And then the genital cutting, two of our reporters did these first stories on genital cutting and it's just – it's a long process but they will expose these societal issues that are definitely news stories that definitely need to be discussed. We were frustrated that we were seeing a lot of groups working with small piecemeal around the country, working on gender-based violence or whatever in small communities, primarily with the women trying to engage the men. And no national discussion about this, it seemed to me like – that it was trying to address an issue like domestic violence in the U.K., without engaging the major media in the country, just going to small communities all over the – or some small communities, you can't reach everybody. And it just – it seems futile and destructive; the conversation needs to happen at the top as well.

Owen Barder
I'd like to come to what the empowerment agendas are for women's empowerment. You've made a compelling case that engaging the media and using media is a way to drive this, but let's pan back and ask what it is we're trying to achieve. And I suppose the question is: is the Beijing Platform for Action, the 1995 statement that eventually part of which became one of the Millennium Development Goals, is that the best existing statement of what women's empowerment means or do we have – are there things that we should be – is there a particular focus that we should have when we read that or is there something better than that that helps us to understand what we're trying to achieve, Andrea?

Andrea Cornwall
Well, one thing to bear in mind is that the Beijing Platform addressed a whole range of issues, which were completely boiled down to this little focus on education, not little because it's an important challenge, but a focus on education and women in politics. So, there's a whole range of other issues that are in the platform…

Owen Barder
Right.

Andrea Cornwall
…that I think are absolutely of the moment, I read it the other day and I thought wow it's still as relevant now, I'm aware of it but I re-read the language and I was thinking how far have we come. We've come a lot of way on some things, women in politics for example because of this emphasis through the MDGs and other initiatives, but there are still unaddressed areas, areas where we're actually experiencing a lot of much more backlash and difficulty these days. Sex wars around, for example, women's rights over their bodies, advanced in the Beijing Platform for Action, around which there's a lot more contestation, very virulent forms of opposition, including ones which we're facing now in this country that are trying to turn back the clock on women's rights over their bodies.

But I think something interesting, looking at Beijing, and I think well what could be updated; is precisely stuff about women in the media, it mentions women in the media without being able to know what was going to happen 20 years later. And I think there's a huge amount that's happened in relation to the media and a huge amount that's possible to do.

With our Pathways program, something that we've said from the very beginning, is there's a lot of research out there on women and what changes women's lives. There's a research that's very much neglected, when development takes it up, it takes it up in these motorway, one-shot solution type of forms.

It neglects a lot of the complexities. There's a need for different ways of telling stories using that information and something that we've invested a lot in is producing films, working with short stories, working with journalists, working with other ways of communicating and thinking more creatively about how to communicate the change and I think precisely the kind of work that you've been doing does make a major difference because what it does is it doesn't say let's get X number of women into the press, let's get X number of articles about women. It's saying let's have a process where we're training journalists to think differently about their society, to do gender analysis, to go out and to find stories and to see those stories in new ways.

And then let's find ways in which those stories can get represented differently, so let's get away from images of heroines and victims, that's been something important for us, brave women facing all odds, all the burdens of development dumped onto them, they are the ones who are going to lift communities and save the world, the Nike kind of style language or terrible victims, women are so downtrodden, they're so oppressed, they need to be rescued, which is the continuing colonial narrative that development industry still has about women and women's disadvantage. And saying actually now let's get rid of those images and focus on real women and the real issues that women are facing.

So for my money that bit of the Beijing Declaration is something which is I think a great opportunity – the Beijing Platform for Action – sorry – that bit of the Beijing Platform for Action on media is a great opportunity for more effort to now be put into developing, expanding further in the light of these new opportunities with digital media and new technologies and precisely the kind of work that New Narratives and other exciting big media people are doing.

Owen Barder
So you've been quite dismissive, both of you actually, of the way that aid agencies have taken up these issues both in terms of the media in development and in terms of the way that the Beijing Platform for Action has been implemented. In part, because they've tried to take power out of empowerment, right? And maybe that's – I'd be interested to know why you think that is, is it because bureaucracies have difficulty talking about power and thinking about power, is it because of the role of men in these organizations who are not thinking hard enough about these issues, is it because of a broader trend towards quantification and what? So, you tell me, I don't know, I'm putting words into your mouth. You tell me what you think the problem has been in translating what seems like a very good declaration and a very compelling declaration into policy response on the part of development organizations.

Andrea Cornwall
It's all of those reasons. I think when we look at the gap between the promise of Beijing and the practice of development we need to look at the ways in which Beijing at that point in 1995 was in an entirely different historical era. The mid-1990s were a time of great promise, participation was on the agenda, human rights were on the agenda, gender was on the agenda, there was a talk about power, there was some concern about social relations. That was a big coming up thing in the '90s. So there was a lot of scope in the '90s for those things.

Fast forward 20 years and we see the practice of development has left behind massive parts of that whole agenda around the social – around human rights. What we have now is a highly narrow focused emphasis on delivering results, a purer version of neoliberalism that existed – than existed 20 years ago and a diversion of a lot of development funds to large institutions like the World Bank, which we probably had 20 years ago but we have now a huge amount of DFID's money is spent on these multilateral institutions, on the World Bank – I think, receives almost £1 billion every year from the British taxpayer to go out there and implement its one-shot solutions and look for its results. Now, the time has changed. I think part of the problem is that the implementation of Beijing might have been possible if the mood of the '90s had lasted.

Owen Barder
I'm mystified by the idea that bilateral aid agencies can deal with power but multilateral institutions like the World Bank can't. Is that…

Andrea Cornwall
I don't think bilateral agencies could deal with power at all. What I'm saying is there was a time where the social, where human rights, where power was very much more part of the agenda.

Owen Barder
Right.

Andrea Cornwall
I think what's happened in development, we've seen trends in development thinking over the last two decades which have taken us further and further away from engaging with these issues of context, with issues of power, with issues – human rights is barely even on the development agenda, the U.K. government's development agenda.

Owen Barder
So what has changed, what has driven, is this to do with a change in the societies in which these development agencies are operating, is this to do with the good fortune of particular forces within the development industry? Why have we lost that narrative and that discussion and that ambition to be talking about power and empowerment of rights? What's happened over – to what do you attribute that?

Andrea Cornwall
Again, it's very, very complex. I think the hegemony of a particular kind of economics and a particular push towards certain kinds of metrics and certain kinds of ways of thinking about change have pushed that in a direction which is unhelpful. A colleague of mine, Rosalind Eyben, has as you probably know a project called the Big Push Forward, which is really questioning what's happening around all of this results agenda.

So I think part of the problem has come from the ways in which the aid industry itself has worked. It's come from harmonization; it's come from the kind of modalities of aid which have led to a situation where those issues are much more difficult to advance. It's come from large swathes of money passing through these bilateral donors to these multilateral institutions who are possibly less accountable and less able to drive change from the other kinds of ways in which they could push that money through or spend their money.

For example, give their money to women's funds. So rather than direct all of this money to the World Bank, why not give money to Mama Cash or to the women's funds, the African women's funds, the other women's funds who are giving money to small organizations who can do the kind of work that we are taking about that brings about change on the ground. So I think it's a complex question, I am not able to provide you with a very satisfactory answer but I think we need to look at the ways in which the modalities of aid, the structure of the aid industry and also the hegemony, the renewed hegemony of the economics within the aid industry as being part of the problem.

Owen Barder
So you've said something about why the aid industry has lost, as you see it, its focus on these issues. What is it that you would do if you were in-charge or that you would like to see the aid industry do? You've mentioned the example of giving money to women's funds, what else – what is it you would like to see the aid industry either in terms of what it funds or how it funds, what is it you would like them to see – to do differently if they were taking the empowerment agenda seriously in the way you describe?

Andrea Cornwall
Okay. Well, I think for me to take it to a concrete example, there is an Indian sex workers collective that's called VAMP, and they have a slogan, "save us from saviours" and they say, rather than saviours coming in and trying to rescue and rehabilitate us, make us into people who we aren't and rescue us from things that they don't really understand. Why don't you stand with us as we organize ourselves and we can find ways to secure rights and recognition and safer work and better livelihoods through our own organization. So that to me – their slogan, "save us from saviours" and the way in which they work to me epitomizes a good way of working.

Owen Barder
Don't aid agencies differently – in what sense do aid agencies not stand with organizations that they fund and stand in solidarity with them?

Andrea Cornwall
Well, it depends on what you mean by aid agencies, big generalization but if you take many organizations, for example, have three-year project cycles, they projectize people, they log frame them, they have to have measurable results, they need to have – everything gets kind of programmed in the ways in which aid organizations want to see things going, people have to start rewriting their work to make it fit in with the priorities of the aid agencies and suddenly you get this whole business of second guessing what the aid agency wants and by the end of the day you've lost what is it that you wanted to do in the first place.

Owen Barder
Right.

Andrea Cornwall
And I think what really impresses me about this organization, VAMP, is that actually they say this is what we want to make change happen for ourselves. And actually if they work with 5,000 women, they are spreading further in working with more and more women in their area, they do things their way.

Owen Barder
And do they get funded?

Andrea Cornwall
So I think that's actually – they do get funded, they get funded from progressive organizations such as EVOS [ph]…

Owen Barder
Right.

Andrea Cornwall

...who are able to recognize that they are doing it for themselves and they shouldn't be forced to have all these log frames and these monitoring instruments and all of these things which kill I think any creativity or action. And I think I'd far rather Britain put money into women's funds at a national level or a regional level who are able to support the kind of mobilizing and organizing which brings about real change, than to put billions of pounds into organizations which simply have simplistic slogans, lots of hot air, but little staying power or capacity to really support women in their own pathways of change. So it's a focus on womens' own pathways of change is something that I think development agencies need to really turn their attention to and to realize that they can be a hindrance rather than a help in helping women to achieve those changes.

Prue Clarke
Can I just add to that?

Owen Barder
Yes.

Prue Clarke
I absolutely agree, but I have seen some women-led organizations on the ground that are insane; didn't make a lot of sense. There is a – there does seem to be a big push in Liberia to give women's organizations the money and the funding. But again they are undercutting radio stations that are – that really don't have a financial future that are undercutting other viable media in the country. So just needs to be much smarter. I just – I'd like to see in the media space specifically – and I imagine that this example extends to other fields – there just isn't enough due diligence. There is sort of an understanding that, oh, this person has some great people on their board, therefore I am going to give them millions of dollars to implement something in Africa without any understanding that – or any effort to understand whether they can do this in Africa. And so often these organizations are not run by people in that field. They are not run by journalists. There very much seems to be an idea that journalism is an unskilled labor and that we can – we, human rights advocates, can go and run a media organization, it just doesn't work like that.

Andrea Cornwall
I completely agree with you. I think this is where the women's funds and the kind of organizations like Mama Cash come in because what they provide is accompaniment support but also some critical analysis of what is it that people are doing. So rather than saying, oh, women's organizations are nice, let's get them more money, let them do all kinds of nice things for development. What we are saying is actually if you want to bring about change, let's look at where change has been effective and where change has been effectively brought about, often it has been through women's movements and through mobilizing and so actually the support that can be given by women's fund at the regional or international or national level to that kind of work is considerable. It's a different thing from just throwing money as I think is sometimes the case and saying, oh, you know, let's put this money into this one single thing and then suddenly you have a huge philanthropist or a donor shoveling money at any women's organization that exists and that's obviously not the solution either. But it's changing the balance of power and the money then gets decided on and spent in the country by people from the country rather than some wishful foreign organization that decides, oh, there is problem here, we need to go and fix it.

Prue Clarke
And it's so hard to get. It's so hard to get in the face of the big money and we are a tiny little operation that was started with a grant from a Goldman Sachs partner but even with phenomenal – really I would have thought pretty good contacts and an amazing track record in the last two years just getting – it's an industry, you really have to know – be in with DFID or USAID or whoever to really get in their face, it's very hard.

Owen Barder
Can we talk a bit about the legitimacy of foreign intervention in power relations in developing countries because on the one hand I think all of us – I am sure everybody listening to this wants to see a change in power relations that – of the kind that's set out in the Beijing Platform for Action and on the other hand I think we're all nervous or the kind of liberal interventionism in which white saviours come and tell other

people how they should run their society and their community and I am interested in how we know where to draw the line. If you have a community, a society that's set up with a set of values that I don't share, to what extent is it okay for me – now I wouldn't be suggesting that I should go and do it – but by providing my financial support in the way you suggest to one women's group rather than another women's group, I am – there is no neutral – there is no non-intervention approach here really. We are deliberately intervening try to change power relations in a society. How do we know what the legitimate scope is for outsiders to do that? Should we say this is – this really has nothing to do with us and we very much hope that things get better but we have no respectable role to play or should we be more – should we take sides and if so where do we draw the line. What's – how do we judge what kind of intervention is acceptable?

Andrea Cornwall
All development is based on the premise of intervention and it all has a normative value on it. So it's not just intervening in issues around gender, intervening in issues around the economy and economic growth, it's also a normative project. It's informed by a particular ideology; it has certain consequences in terms of wellbeing and in terms of equality. So I think we need to see the whole of development as being covered by our question.

Owen Barder
Right.

Andrea Cornwall
So then the question is should people engage in development as a foreign enterprise? So should a foreign country go to another foreign country and say, I don't like your economic system, you need more economic growth and if you have the economic growth, everything is going to get solved and of course all of issues of property and inequality that you face are going to be dealt with somehow in the process and I don't like the way in which…

Owen Barder
You are certainly caricaturing, I'm not sure that anybody says that.

Andrea Cornwall
No, I think I've seen it in the Lords report, I have seen it in DFID policies. This is the – to me, that's what the current developments thinking in this country coming from our government boils down to economic growth is good and it's going to deal with other things and we need to get that right; if there is more economic growth, other things will get solved. Okay, so let me just take that as an example, that's a change in value, so that's a value, it's a normative project, it's an ideological project. Now, if you think of that as something, you think, okay, what right does a country have to intervene in another country in that kind of way. What right does Britain have to intervene as a power in the lot of the rest of the world and in developing countries in particular?

I think what we need to do is to go back and take some lessons from colonialism. Because I think a lot of what currently passes as development has extremely strong resonances with the colonial project and the colonial project had as it – as a part of its project the rescue of women. It had as part of its project commerce and increasing Britain's wealth and I think we need to look and it – there is part of its project changing the governance of countries. Britain is engaged a lot in governance. Look what it's doing in so-called fragile states in terms of governance.

So if you look at the development project as a whole and nest gender within that, I think it's a far more helpful way of looking and then you say, okay, if this is the way in which development currently works, is this a 20th century project or is it a 21st century project? Is it part of that era of colonialism which is about Britain saying we do things better, now we are going to go to the rest of the world: you need economic growth, you need gender equality, you need this, you need that. Or is it about Britain changing the ways in which it engages in the world, recognizing the different geopolitical dynamic, but also being part of that change and changing the ways in which it goes about its business in relation to development. So that's – my question would be, if we looked at those things, looked at the bigger picture we might think of gender in a very different kind of way.

Prue Clarke
I mean it seems obvious but ask them what they need. Everywhere I go in Africa, the media houses are so frustrated that they're saying they send us off to a course that costs $15,000 run by American who has never worked in Africa before on business – how to run a business. I can do something with that $15,000. And what I'm telling them I need is a long-term trainer in business or economics reporting or something in the newsroom. I don't need a journalist taken out to another country and then either not coming back or not coming back and sharing that information. There are – I think it's just a respect for the leaders in that market or area in the country; it's an understanding of the industry working out who are the right players to work with if you can. And then often the diaspora – I think diaspora is extremely important and give them what they need because you're undermining them at the moment.

Owen Barder
But we're self-consciously not identifying with the existing elites, right, I mean part of changing power relations is not identifying the existing leaders in a formal and political sense but identifying who are the people who are struggling to change those power relations.

Prue Clarke
Yes, exactly. So it's being smart about choosing those people.

Owen Barder
It's being smart about who we choose. Do we – I was reflecting, as I was thinking about this discussion, on the difference between what we do about the role of women in developing countries today and the action that Britain took against the slave trade in the 19th century where having decided that something was morally unacceptable to us. We didn't just pass laws against the slave trade but we sent the navy out to blow ships out of the water that disagreed with us. Do either of you feel that actually our response to the position of women in many countries, not just in developing countries, is such a matter of moral outrage, and, for example, the very high numbers of people suffering from genital mutilation or the number of people who don't have access to sexual and reproductive health services. Does either of you think that we're being far too placid that we actually ought to get stroppier with the rest of the world or does that take us too close to the kind of colonial attitudes that you were talking about, Andrea? I mean what surprises me is that we don't have a stronger sense of moral outrage about women's empowerment but I – perhaps you think that that would be unhelpful to have a sense of moral outrage, that that would lead us to act less in solidarity and too much in anger?

Andrea Cornwall
I think there are some really important lessons for people working in development from the movement against slavery. That will focus our attention on our own government, on the role of our own government in producing and sustaining poverty in the global south, just as slavery was a way of enriching Britain at that period and on the continuing exploitation and suffering that comes about as a result of economic models that have got little concern with equality or equity. I think there are other lessons that are important. Think if we look at the role of activists and advocates who spoke out against those injustices and worked against the grain, I think development could do a lot of support those kinds of people who are working against the grain in their own countries, in their own ways, in their own voices just as you say, people choosing for themselves the issues that they are going to engage in. And I think something that development often – development agencies or development industry will often do is have a very facile analysis of a problem and I – because it generalizes massively across very complex different contexts.

Figure out a one-shot solution, put the money behind the one-shot solution, barge in just like the navy in the era of empire, let's go in and make this better and I think we need to look at that imperial era and look at what Britain was doing in that imperial era and take that very seriously as part of our own history and our own responsibility. I also think if you look at what came after the end of slavery, we had colonialism and we had people going into, occupying countries, forcibly removing people from their land for their own exploitation and commercial gain and fundamentally changing gender relations. What we've ended up with now in terms of gender relations in many countries that were formerly colonized is the outcome of Britain's intervention in the first place. Look what happened in, for example, West Africa. If the British colonials go

in, they create the breadwinner, there was no such thing as a nuclear family that had a man going out to earn the living and the woman at home looking after the children doing domestic the work. They then trained women in domestic science and gave them lesser education, gave the men jobs as clerks, produced a lot of gender inequalities that weren't necessarily there at all in coastal West Africa.

So I think we need to look at that, when we say let's look at the history of slavery, let's look at the history, let's look at it properly and let's look at actually what Britain's imperial interventions were, what Britain's colonial interventions were and what our responsibility now in the world ought to be given that history.

Owen Barder
Still – we're coming towards the end but I think if I was listening to hear you speak, I would share your analysis of the problem of the lesson from our imperial past, but I am not clear what conclusion you would draw from that in terms of what you would do differently on Monday morning to ensure that Britain's role now is sufficiently active to respond to the depth of the problem that we're talking about, but doesn't – isn't guilty of creating bigger problems and broader problems, unanticipated consequences of the kind that you are describing. I am still struggling to see how we can come at this in a way that makes us and – how – if you feel a sense of moral outrage but take seriously the idea that we don't want the saviour mentality, what is it – beyond giving some money to some women's groups – that you want us to do?

Andrea Cornwall
Well, I think seeing Britain's imperial past and colonial past – and locating Britain in its current geopolitical presence calls for a joined up approach to government. So what I would like to see the development industry doing is being of this joined up approach which actually says, Britain has caused a lot of harm and suffering in the world as a result of illegal wars, as a result of the export of arms to countries. There is a lot of poverty being produced by economic models that take no account of very important research that shows that actually inequality is the thing that can drive – addressing inequality drives changes in well-being.

And so what I'd like to see is a more joined up approach to all of that which looks at the role that commerce plays in producing poverty and ill-being and to change the models of trade, the ways in which Britain engages in the global stage around warmongering and around these global, geopolitical issues. I think that's one thing that I think is very important.

The other one I think is to move away from one-shot solutions. Possibly, think about cutting the aid budget rather than increasing it and redirecting that money to sources that can work with people in these countries that they themselves create on agendas that they themselves are able to put together. So they would be able to then receive money or make applications to funds which are administered in an accountable way by national or regional organizations of some kind rather than a situation where Britain decides – we've got now four planks, we're going to fund this, we're going to shove a few million at this and a few million at that. And I'm simplifying but I really think there is a problem with this approach because I think where development has gone wrong is not learning from its history, not being humble enough to take lessons from colonialism, not being realistic enough about the contextual – the complex context in which people live and die in the global south, not being realistic enough about the massive and widening inequalities that we see in many of the countries that are prospering now on the global south.

And also, not being able to then say, okay, we want to do something, we're nice liberal people, we want to make the world a better place, but actually it is not our role to go barging in and to start doing our projects here and there without actually engaging people in determining for themselves what their agenda ought to be.

Prue Clarke
Yeah, I totally agree. I would like to see more money go into the due diligence upfront. I heard recently that USAID has about four people in media. They are distributing millions and millions of dollars around the world every year and four people in Washington who oversee this portfolio. They can – how can you do a good job and I absolutely agree that barging in there is a big problem. I mean, people who have their daughters' genitals cut at six don't think they're doing anything wrong; they think they're doing the right

thing for their daughter. And there is a huge problem with that's a western idea being imposed on us and a big backlash every time anything is brought up. I mean the backlash against the gay rights in Africa right now has been quite nasty in some ways because it was pushed by the west. It's just – that's just not productive, but then it's smarter development. I mean you've got somewhere like Liberia where there is a woman leader, you would think that this would solve so many problems. But in fact, the number of women in politics – in their legislature there went backwards, especially this time. So it's about being smarter about it, I think.

Owen Barder
Thank you both very much.

You've been listening to Development Drums with me, Owen Barder, from the Center for Global Development. If you like this podcast, you may also like the Global Prosperity Wonkcast from the Center for Global Development which talks rather – in a rather shorter format about the work of the Center. You can hear other episodes of Development Drums by going to Development Drums' website or on iTunes where you can download it for free onto your mp3 player or on our Facebook page. Development Drums is produced by Anna Scott. Today's guests have been Andrea Cornwall from the University of Sussex and Prue Clarke from New Narratives.

Andrea and Prue, thank you very much indeed.

Prue Clarke
Thank you very much.

Andrea Cornwall
Thank you.