

Gender Equality in International Aid: The Case of Norwegian-Funded Development Projects in Ethiopia

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During the last decade gender equality and women's rights have become key foci in international development aid, and a main concern in the 'Millennium effort' to eradicate poverty. Being at the international forefront regarding legislation and practical policy related to gender equality, this is also reflected in Norwegian aid policies. In January 2008, Norway's first White Paper on women's rights and gender equality in international development was presented. Together with the 2007 Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation, this document accounts for one of the most ambitious donor strategies on gender politics to date.

The overall aim of my present research project is to explore conceptualisations of gender equality among various actors involved in two

Norwegian-funded development projects in the Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia. In my study I explore the concept 'gender equality' and how it is translated into development practice. This includes a focus on how local communities perceive and experience project activities addressing gender equality and women's rights. My study also has a particular focus on local gender norms, institutions and practices with relevance to women's rights. This implies a focus on the dynamics between conceptualizations situated within global development and human rights discourses, on the one hand, and local discourses, perceptions and practices on the other.

With empirical focus on development agents, organisations and development aid 'recipients'-my study is a multi-sited study. The following four levels have been identified as "field-work sites": 1) international and national (Norwegian) aid policy 2) Norwegian back-donors 3)

implementing organizations in Ethiopia 4) local community / target population in Ethiopia. Interviews at the level of Norwegian back-donors were conducted during spring 2010 and currently I am working on analysing the aid policies. Fieldwork in Ethiopia will be conducted during fall 2010 and spring/summer 2011.

The present study is a prolongation of research conducted as part of my MPh degree in International Health at the Centre for International Health at the University of Bergen, Norway. In addition to research experience, I have also been engaged in development and aid related projects in Ethiopia from 2000-2007.



Marit Tolo Østebø is a doctoral candidate at the University of Bergen, Norway, and holds a courtesy appointment at the Center for African Studies. Her study is part of a larger research project titled "Gender in Poverty Reduction: Critical Explorations of Norwegian Aid Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Rights," developed by a interdisciplinary group of scholars based at the University of Bergen, Christian Michelsen Institute, Bergen University College and Haralds plass Deaconess University College, Norway. The project is funded by the Norwegian Research Council.