

WIDE PLUS Newsletter

ISSUE 1

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This WIDE PLUS newsletter includes news about the current situation of WIDE PLUS and its activities at the international level. A new feature is the spotlight on a WIDE member, which is in this issue on the WIDE PLUS Spanish Platform. This newsletter will also offer news from other WIDE PLUS members and interesting news around women's rights in development.

Previous WIDE is restructuring into a WIDE PLUS

WIDE is currently engaged in a process of renewal and reconfiguration. The 'old' WIDE ceased to exist at the last General Assembly held in December 2011 where the members decided to dissolve the formal structure. At the same time a new WIDE has come to life: WIDE PLUS.

In the coming period, WIDE PLUS will discuss the objectives, structure and way of working for the new entity. At the same time WIDE PLUS continues to organize ongoing activities such as a WIDE representation at the Commission of the Status of Women, the AWID forum and in the Better Aid coalition towards the Aid Effectiveness agenda, and will continue to do so as best as it can. The WIDE PLUS e-newsletter will become again a more frequent newsletter (bi- or tri-monthly).

WIDE PLUS is, as the name suggests, a transformation of the previous WIDE. The previous WIDE has achieved a great deal in its more than 20 years of existence, thanks to a very dedicated staff and network. However, new challenges in the global and European economic and political development call for new feminist responses, which we are committed to developing jointly. In order to lead the WIDE PLUS process, a Task Force has been formed with interested members of the WIDE network and several sub-groups.

Interested organizations and individuals can join the informal WIDE PLUS network:

-by writing info@wide-network.org;

-by contacting a WIDE PLUS member in their region.

WIDE PLUS at the 56th UN Commission of the Status of Women: Backlash on women's rights reaches UN level

The 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 56) took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from Monday, 27 February to Friday, 9 March. The priority theme was the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges.

The negotiations at the CSW 56 ended on 15 March without agreed conclusions among member states. This lack of consensus on their common policy and measures to empower rural women shows that some states openly question the importance and need for promoting gender equality.

Instead some states give priority to traditional values and practices, which are harmful to women's rights. This is very alarming for the future of women human rights' advancement. It raises the question whether the states will fulfil their commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action and if the global human rights framework is being undermined by growing conservative forces already present at the level of United Nations.

Concerns of women's rights organizations

The failure to adopt agreed conclusions caused an outrage among women rights organizations as well as among representatives of the European Union and some representatives of the United Nations. Feminist and women's organizations are alarmed by the highly negative change in the global debate on women's rights and gender equality. After the CSW, many women and women's rights organizations have protested against making the advancement of women's rights dependent on political battles between states.

The NGOs are especially alarmed by the fact that the states failed to reach consensus because some states want to protect their "traditional values" at the expense of fundamental human rights. They have also called upon the member states of the UN and the various UN human rights and develop-

ment institutions to recognize and support the important role of women's groups and organizations working on eliminating harmful traditional values and practices which contradict fundamental human rights norms, standards and principles.

On the final day of the CSW, Norway's UN Ambassador Morten Wetland delivered a strong statement in defence of gender equality and women's rights. He stressed that we cannot accept that states use religious, cultural and so-called moral arguments to block decisions and avoid obligations that would lead to women's empowerment and freedom, and would save hundreds of thousands of lives every year.

In a similar manner, the representative of the EU and its Member States stressed that avoiding any further commitments concerning women's empowerment means that the key concepts included in the fundamental documents such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are now being questioned by some states. The EU representative declared this approach by some states to weaken the internationally agreed agreements by blocking the decisions as 'unacceptable'. The representative emphasized that the EU will pay special attention to gender equality and the rights of women and men in order to meet the MDGs. The EU will remain committed to the full implementation of the broadly ratified treaties constituting the global human rights framework.

WIDE PLUS at the CSW

WIDE PLUS facilitated a space for members present in New York to meet and strategize. Several member delegations met, including KULU (Denmark), WIDE Austria, KARAT Coalition (Eastern Europe and CIS region) and WO=MEN, the Dutch Gender Platform. Several meetings of WIDE PLUS were arranged to share information about main challenges, strategic events to attend and entry points for advocacy and lobbying. It was also an opportunity to discuss the process of the development of WIDE PLUS.

KARAT Coalition represented WIDE PLUS in the North America/Europe Caucus. In the context of the development of UN Women, the NGOs debated their expectation of and possible

(continued on page 3)

Women's rights organizations say NO to safeguarding "traditional values" at the expense of women's human rights

with UN Women. They presented the main points of this consultation at the face-to-face meeting with UN Women on 3 March. And through e-mail discussion, a paper was developed that brought together concisely the expectations of the region towards UN Women.

What European NGOs expect from UN WOMEN

As said, the North America and Europe Caucus at 56th session of CSW in New York formulated their expectations in the cooperation between UN Women and the women NGOs from the regions. In their paper, the women rights organizations stress the need for a strong UN Women being a partner of not only member states but also NGOs. UN Women should be an effective door opener and liaison agency for the cause of gender equality. Further, the NGOs expect that UN Women makes the CSW a large exchange space, accessible for a much larger number of NGOs, that stimulates an open and substantial mutual dialogue. They also expect formalization of the rules, methods and channels of communication between NGOs and UN Women, similar to those between NGOs and the UN Treaties bodies like alternative/shadow reports submitted to the CEDAW Committee.

The women's rights organizations from North America and Europe had also some recommendations specific for their regions towards UN Women. The NGOs pointed out that UN Women cannot leave any region behind and should add the "sub-regions" to its system of representation and priority work in the region. The current global economic crisis is strongly hitting the women rights NGOs in Europe which now get less or no funding. Because

of the cuts in NGOs' funding, it is necessary for UN Women to pay more attention to the financial situation of NGOs in this region and put steady pressure on the governments to re-define their funding policies towards NGOs in Europe. European women rights organizations should not disappear from the global map of women's rights advocates.

Concerns about the push for a 5th UN World Conference on Women

At the very end of the CSW, there was a surprising official announcement from the UN expressing their wish to hold a [5th UN World Conference on Women in 2015](#). Women's rights organizations, such as those involved in WIDE PLUS are concerned that a next World Conference on Women in the current climate can lead to an opening up of the Beijing declaration and Platform for Action and the Beijing +5 commitments, thus reducing standing commitments to women's rights. The women rights organizations have advised UN Women that they should support and secure decisions that will not open up the Beijing and Beijing+5 documents for any negotiations. Instead UN Women should advocate that states focus on the new challenges, obstacles and measures which the member states must respond to. The coming year will show whether the UN member states will come to a next World Conference on Women.

The article WIDE PLUS at the CSW is written/ compiled by Gea Meijers, using articles from the KARAT newsletter (March) (<http://www.karat.org/category/newsletters/>).

WO=MEN, a member of WIDE PLUS has a blog about the CSW: womeninnewyork.blogspot.com

WIDE PLUS at the AWID Forum: how the European crisis is impacting women's rights, 19-22 April 2012

More than 2000 advocates of women's rights from across the globe discussed and strategized on how to strengthen women's economic rights during AWID's forum on "Transforming Economic Power to Advance Women's Rights and Justice".

In a time when economic crisis has spread across the globe making the governments cutting budgets on issues important to women, the forum ex-

pressed the great determination to make women's angry voices heard. The women shared their concerns and fears about the coming months and years, since women are the first to be hit by the states' financial cuts on jobs, salaries and social security.

WIDE PLUS organized a session on how the European crisis influences the women's lives. *(the article continues at page 4)*

WIDE PLUS was also co-organizer to a workshop on migrant worker's human rights. And of course several of the WIDE PLUS members were involved in sessions or hosted ones.

KARAT organized a session on social and economic rights of marginalized women in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia. This interactive debate reflected on experiences that women have gathered in the 20 years of transition from a central planned to a free market economy combined with 20 years of neo-liberal policies. Experiences were shared on how the economic positions of women have worsened in the region, such as the position of rural women in Kyrgyzstan, and how many Polish and Albanian women became unemployed and were forced to take jobs which did not guarantee the fundamental labour rights or social protection.

Filomenita Høgsholm spoke in one panel on behalf of KULU, WIDE's Danish platform, and WIDE PLUS in the session "*Building Alliances to Claim Migrant Women's Human Rights*". WIDE PLUS was one of the thirteen co-organizers to the session. Networks from different fields of activism co-organized the session in order to bridge gaps between women's human rights activists, migrant women's and labour organizations. The session discussed global migration from an economic justice and women's human rights lens. Current policies create the need to migrate and then they exploit migrants' labour and criminalize them. Because many migrant women are denied basic rights and basic services, advocacy for women's rights must make migrant women's rights explicit or they will be left out.

WIDE PLUS: The European Crises for women

The session of WIDE Plus titled "*The European Crises*" brought together women's rights speakers from countries strongly affected by the current economic crisis. During the session speakers from Greece, Italy and Spain shared their experiences on how the governments' austerity measures have dramatically impacted the women's livelihoods and rights. It was also discussed how the crisis is moving into Northern Europe. The speakers were: Christa Wichterich, Germany, Begoña San José, Spain, Wendy Harcourt, Italy, and Lois Woestman, Greece. It was moderated by Silke Steinhilber, Germany.

Reports from Spain, Italy and Greece stressed the negative impacts of the currently implemented austerity programmes. Often, a job does not provide enough money for living. Christa and Lois highlighted how the tense economic relations between states have led to negative stereotypes and new divisions in Europe, for example between Greeks and Germans. Thus, a growing economic polarization and inequality between the European states can result in a rise of xenophobic and nationalistic views in societies. The full report of the speakers' contributions can be found at the [WIDE website](#).



The session met a lot of interest and ended with a very lively discussion within the audience. Audience members shared examples of local actions to influence the governments and to stop further financial cuts at the cost of human rights to life (the number of suicides has sharply grown recently), fair salaries and social security. Participants expressed the strong need for cooperation and for developing a critical European feminist voice. Feminists should engage in the discussion on what kind of state and Union women want as feminists and their definition of European citizenship.

The AWID Forum became a good occasion to meet and talk about the strategy and development of European Network WIDE PLUS. The women involved in the organization's restoration agreed that the network's activities should focus on the most current problems that European women face, especially in the context of ongoing economic crisis.

The article is written/compiled by Gea Meijers, using articles from the KARAT newsletter (April) (<http://www.karat.org/category/newsletters/>), and information from Filomenita Høgsholm and Silke Steinhilber.

Spanish WIDE platform faces a process of restructuring and enlargement

The Spanish platform (WIDE-E) has a long history of participation in the WIDE network, to which it owes so much as source of inspiration and support to its advocacy strategy, capacity building and development process on gender issues. The platform is also a very active partner in the WIDE PLUS network that is being established.

The Spanish platform started from the Gender Group of the Spanish Development NGO Network CONGDE. The Gender Group was one of the first working groups created after the founding of the CONGDE, bringing together women rights activists from different NGO's and backgrounds. It was this group that pushed towards integration into WIDE network in the mid-90s. Soon the group took an active role within WIDE, with the appointment of Carmen Cruz as president of WIDE (1998-2001). These were years of intense activity and exchange between WIDE and CONGDE realizing many capacity building workshops that were well received by CONGDE's member organizations.

The Gender Group members have also faced many difficulties to maintain their commitments to WIDE next to ensuring that gender equality is an integral part of CONGDE's day to day work as well as responding to their NGO's own management demands. Often members struggled to get full support for their work from their boards who had not stated a serious commitment to gender equality and women's rights in their organizations. Also the CONGDE did not always understand the strategic value of its membership to WIDE because it lacked political will to mainstream gender equality in its political agenda and management.

Despite these difficulties, the Gender Group has maintained a high profile and has remained in the vanguard within the CONGDE, not only in terms of gender and women's rights but also in terms of its policy and its European and international approaches. WIDE membership helped the CONGDE, through its Gender Group, incorporate the human rights approach in its political discourse. It is, also, being partly responsible for CONGDE's involvement in some of the European and international agenda's.

Let's take the Aid Effectiveness Agenda, including

the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), as an example. This process was led in Spain by the Gender Group and WIDE network, and had a strong impact on the overall strategy of CONGDE. In 2007, the WIDE Conference in Madrid focused on: "[*The new aid architecture and international trade, what women have to say?*](#)". This milestone event helped the Gender Group to promote within CONGDE the Aid Effectiveness agenda, which has become a major theme of its political agenda up until now. CONGDE has been actively involved both in the High Level Forum of the Accra Agenda (2008) and its next High Level Forum in Busan (2011), taking part in the Civil Society Forum and the Women's Forum.

The coordination and cooperation between WIDE and CONGDE was reinforced thanks to the successful joint application to the Spanish International Cooperation Agency for funding that allowed the network to actively engage European women's rights organizations and activists into the Aid Effectiveness agenda and other agenda's, and which also strengthened the work of the Gender Group at national level. During this period and thanks to the financial support it has been possible to hold several meetings and capacity building workshops among the diverse gender working groups in Spain. These groups are part of the different regional NGO Networks, and they are articulated in a state-wide network, the so-called GGEA network. It focuses on the promotion and strengthening of the capacity of gender group's advocacy.

To conclude: the CONGDE owes to WIDE part of its capacity and policy approach while it has actively supported WIDE.

In recent years there have been several circumstances that have led the CONGDE's Gender Group to start a process of expansion and restructuring of the Spanish WIDE platform. On the one hand, WIDE's agenda became a much more ambitious and complex agenda. It defined itself as a feminist organization which has made it increasingly difficult for the CONGDE to connect its work to WIDE.

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On the other hand, the visibility achieved by the Aid Effectiveness agenda increased the interest of many Spanish NGOs, feminist organizations and individuals in joining the network. And thirdly, the current political situation in Spain urges for the existence of a feminist network leading the collaboration between the development cooperation agenda and the feminist movement to promote women's rights. The political agenda of the current Spanish government has greatly impacted development cooperation policy as well as other social and economic policies, and their programmes aimed at promoting the empowerment, women's rights and gender equality.

Thus, the Spanish platform is expanding membership by including new members. On 26 March 2012 the renewed WIDE-E platform was formally set up in a meeting, where new organizations and national networks attended. It also means a more horizontal and inclusive representation towards the new WIDE PLUS as the formal representation of the Spanish platform shifted from the CONGDE,

through its Gender Group, to a more plural and inclusive delegation.

The parallel restructuring process of the WIDE network is a challenge and a motivation to address the enlargement and restructuring process of the Spanish platform. We believe that carrying out this transformation parallel to the process at the European level can be useful to enrich both processes. If we are able to articulate visions in Spain around a common agenda, bringing together networks, organizations and women with motivation, energy and willingness to promote our national network, then we will be better capable to contribute to the WIDE PLUS rebirth process, not only contributing with proposals and ideas, but also with involvement, actions, and participation. This is the spirit that moves us to take this step forward and we hope it will be a positive step for the whole network.

This article is written by Esther Pino and Rosabel Agirregomezkorta.

Spanish WIDE platform in Diálogos Consonantes: meeting Latin American and Spanish feminists, 16-18 April 2012

The *Diálogos Consonantes* held their 5th meeting last April in Spain. The meeting strengthened synergies between Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) feminists, Spanish cooperation actors and Spanish feminists for greater development effectiveness.

During this encounter it could be clearly seen that LAC feminists and the Spanish ones are in different moments. On the one hand the Spanish showed their deep concern about the setbacks in social rights achieved, especially the attacks on the rights of women and gender equality from the current conservative government under the pretext of economic crisis, which is a speculative crisis centered in European countries but with global impact. On the other hand LAC feminists claim that their region does not face any dismantling of welfare states because there are scarce democracies and welfare states, and governments do not rule for the whole citizenship but for small and powerful elites.

Therefore, the discouragement and anxiety were more visible and present among the Spanish activists.

However, it also could be seen that this critical situation brings in turn new opportunities. Perhaps for the first time in the history of Spanish development cooperation, the vision of the cooperation as a linear transfer from the North to the South that is in a worse situation and depends on the North, vanishes. It enables the breakdown of power rela-



tions and shows us the way of more horizontal relationships between equals, as we share equally the impacts of a predatory, unequal and exploitative system. A system of the neoliberal capitalist economy based on speculation and endless con-

sumption, which threatens our livelihoods and our right to live our life's with dignity and free from violence.

The attacks are on the rights, made through speeches based on fear and insecurity repeating that welfare states are unus-

tainable, that rights cannot be universal and free, and that markets are the best guarantees to promote the well being they stole us (while it is those people and corporations, also so-called the markets, who provoked this crisis in its ambition for unlimited profit).

Despite any differences, in this event it became clear once again that women share the transformative values of feminism, and that we will resist, once again, the "new old" attacks on rights, environment and social justice and we will defend our bodies' sovereignty and autonomy.

We are here and we are united!
Much is at stake.



[More info about contents of the Diálogos](#)

[Final Declaration](#)

The article is written by Rosa Belen Agirregomezkorta.

Other WIDE PLUS member News

GADN contributing to UK development policy

In the past months GADN has contributed to several agenda's. GADN participated in the meeting of the UK Sexual Reproductive Human Rights network discussing DFID's International Family Planning Summit taking place in July. The meeting concluded with some key messages around the financial mechanisms to be set up or built upon after the Summit.

GADN also joined the Beyond2015 campaign and attended meeting in Parliament to discuss 'The World We Want for Beyond 2015'. The Millennium

Development Goals expire in 2015. There will be a new framework for development and this year GADN has prioritised policy work around this to ensure that the new framework better promotes women's and girls' rights and gender equality.

GADN VAWG working group attended DFID's meeting on preventing Violence Against Women and Girls. In April GADN's VAWG working group were invited to a meeting at DFID to hear from DFID partner 'Partners for Prevention'. P4P specialises in involving men and boys in work to prevent gender-based violence.

WIDE members' publications

KARAT and One World Action's publication: "[Climate Change: Women in Developing Countries, the Hardest Hit](#)"

KARAT Factsheet "[Women's Access to Justice in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia](#)" based on the national reports from Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

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EDITORIAL TEAM

WIDE PLUS contact mail: info@wide-network.org

Editorial team: Kinga Lohmann, Gea Meijers and Rosa Belen Agirregomezkorta with contributions from different newsletters such as the GADN newsletter (<http://www.gadnetwork.org.uk/gadn-newsletters/>) and the KARAT newsletter (<http://www.karat.org/category/newsletters/>) and from Esther Pino and Silke Steinhilber.

Brief News

Gender & Development Special Issue on Business and Enterprise

This issue features an innovative and inspiring collection of articles from researchers, practitioners and activists, on gender aspects of business and enterprise. The articles reflect the creative ways in which these issues are being approached, via activism, advocacy, and grassroots development work. Gender & Development provides free access to individual articles. For more, please visit the [Taylor & Francis website](#).

Women and climate change: new resolution adopted by the European Parliament

On 20 of April 2012 the European Parliament adopted a new resolution on women and climate change. The [resolution](#) recognizes that climate change is not gender-neutral issue, and gender discrimination in addition to its catastrophic effects must be a high priority of EU policies. The document also calls for ensuring that climate action does not increase gender inequalities but benefits to the everyday situation of women, which are mostly affected by consequences of global warming like floods, droughts, air quakes etc.

New partnership between EU and UN Women to increase gender equality worldwide

A new partnership between the EU and UN Women was signed in April to strengthen cooperation between the two organizations on their work on empowering women and gender equality. The new Memorandum of Understanding focuses on their closer collaboration to improve women's situation in the economic, political and social spheres of life. The EU and UN Women will work

together to ensure women's representation in decision-making in the fields of economics, politics and justice worldwide, as well as promoting better access for women to work and social opportunities. The bodies declare to cooperate closely in combating sexual and gender-based violence.

DAWN e-book "Marketisation of Governance: Critical Feminist Perspectives from the South"

The book is DAWN's third [global analysis](#). Based on the findings of commissioned regional research and consultations, the analysis strongly critiques global financial and trade liberalization, a process that has resulted in the erosion of the state's capacity to meet national social development needs. The analysis highlights the challenges and dilemmas for social movements pursuing economic and gender justice in the era of globalisation, and lays down a number of fundamentals which cannot be compromised.

Other publications

UNRISD book "[Rethinking Care in a Development Context](#)".

New Oxfam publication "[Women Leading Change: Experiences promoting women's empowerment, leadership, and gender justice](#)".

New publication "[What Works for Women: proven approaches for empowering women small holders and achieving food security](#)". From: Oxfam, Save the Children, ActionAid, Care, Christian Aid, Concern, Find Your Feet, Practical Action, Self Help Africa.

New UNRISD publication "[Pension Reforms and Gender Equality in Latin America](#)".

New from Social Watch: "[The 2012 Gender Equity Index](#)".