

THE GENDER DIMENSION OF THE EU DEVELOPMENT POLICY: THE CASE OF NAMIBIA

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O Autorce

Simona Krammerová studuje navazující magisterský obor Mezinárodní vztahy se zaměřením na politiky Evropské unie na Západočeské univerzitě v Plzni. V roce 2024 absolvovala studijní pobyt na německé Andrásyho Univerzitě v Budapešti se zaměřením na perspektivy a budoucí výzvy východního rozšíření EU. V Institutu EUROPEUM začínala na jaře 2024 jako stážistka a v rámci své stáže pomáhala s realizací workshopu Prague Climate Academy. V současné době se zde podílí na pořádání akcí, které mají za cíl vzdělávat občanskou společnost a zároveň pomáhá výzkumným pracovníkům týmu Green Europe a Just Green.

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The International Partnership portfolio of Czech Commissioner-designate Jozef Síkela has been a topic of discussion in recent weeks. The portfolio includes the European Union's (EU) development policy. In this analysis, I would like to explain the functioning of the EU development policy in more depth, focusing on a concrete EU aid programme in a concrete country. The European Union is the largest donor in the world in development aid.¹ Development is one of the fundamental pillars of the EU's external action, alongside foreign, security and trade policy. One of the essential values the Union is built on is the principle of equality - including equality between women and men. The EU's emphasis on gender equality is also evident in EU development policy. However, there is also considerable criticism of this gender dimension of development policy. Concerns have been raised that the EU includes gender in its development policy mainly to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) rather than to focus on the real problems of women and girls in the global South, making the role of gender in development policy only superficial or symbolic.²

My aim is to verify whether a critique written a decade ago is still up to date. That tells a lot about the design of this policy. It is introduced in the case of Namibia which, according to Statista, has the highest gender gap in Africa.³ I conclude that the EU's development cooperation does not ignore the issues mentioned by the critics so that there is visible progress and effort to affect fundamental problems.

Gender equality is one of the key themes the EU seeks to reflect in all its policies. To achieve the goal of gender equality, the EU uses a strategy called gender mainstreaming, which means taking into account the role of gender in all EU

¹ European Development Policy, "International Partnerships".

² Debusscher, Petra. "Gender Equality in European Union Development Policy: Incorporating Women's Voices or Confirming Hierarchies?".

³ Statista. "Gender Gap Index in Sub-Saharan Africa 2023".

actions. Gender mainstreaming can generally be seen as a response to the tendency to exclude women's concerns from mainstream politics.⁴ In development policy specifically, the advent of this strategy has seen a move away from the conservative “women in development” (WID) approach and towards “gender and development” or gender mainstreaming, an approach that includes the voices of local women and their organisations.⁵ The EU's external policies are the first area where the EU has started to apply gender mainstreaming.⁶

As part of its external actions, the EU publishes so-called Gender Action Plans (GAPs). The current one, the third in the series, is focused on putting women's and girls' rights at the heart of the global recovery for a gender-equal world.⁷ The new GAP III provides the basis for the 2020 agenda under which the EU seeks to strengthen the role of women through its external action. It is based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the UN development plans. According to this plan, 85 % of the EU's external actions must contribute to gender equality.⁸ Thanks to these actions, efforts and steps, the EU is referred to as a 'global gender actor', i.e., an actor that seeks to promote gender equality globally.⁹

EU development policy has faced considerable criticism due to its ineffectiveness and low impact, mainly because it does not reflect the fundamental problems of

⁴ Bacchi, Carol, and Joan Eveline. “Gender Mainstreaming or Diversity Mainstreaming?: The Politics of ‘Doing.’”.

⁵ Debusscher, Petra, and Anna van der Vleuten. “Mainstreaming Gender in European Union Development Cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa: Promising Numbers, Narrow Contents, Telling Silences”.

⁶ Debusscher, Petra, and Ian Manners, “Understanding the European Union as a Global Gender Actor: The Holistic Intersectional and Inclusive Study of Gender+ in External Actions”

⁷ European Commission, „EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III – An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in External Action“

⁸ European Commission, „EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III – An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in External Action

⁹ Debusscher, Petra, and Eva Luna Maes, “ The EU as a Global Gender Actor: Tracing Intersectionality in the European Gender Action Plans for External Relations 2010–2025“

locals.¹⁰ According to Debusscher, the EU is unable to include women's voices in the planning of individual development strategies.¹¹ This gap is due to the lack of involvement of local social organisations that would provide the EU with the valuable know-how needed to reflect the lived experience of the local women and girls. In other words, the main concern here is that the EU does not address critical issues with its aid and, therefore, does not contribute to gender equality because it omits critical problems faced by women in developing countries in its strategic documents on development aid.¹²

The EU fails to sufficiently address three key obstacles faced by women in the Global South. First, unpaid care at home contributes to women's poverty and gender inequality, limiting their access to education and employment.¹³ To put it clearly, unpaid care creates gendered time and income poverty, which in turn affects women's access to education and full-time paid work and has implications for domestic violence. Women's income poverty is also influenced by property rights, which are still largely discriminatory as women in some states in the Global South (that means including Namibia) do not have the same access to land as men.¹⁴ In Southern Africa, women depend on land to provide livelihoods, especially food for the family. The problem is that most women do not own land.¹⁵ Another area is lacking in EU development policy is reproductive health and sex

¹⁰ Arts, Karin, and Anna K. Dickson, eds. "EU Development Cooperation: From Model to Symbol"; Bossuyt, Fabienne. "The EU's and China's development assistance towards Central Asia: low versus contested impact."

¹¹ Debusscher, Petra, and Merran Hulse, "Including Women's Voices? Gender Mainstreaming in EU and SADC Development Strategies for Southern Africa."

¹² Debusscher, Petra, and Merran Hulse, "Including Women's Voices? Gender Mainstreaming in EU and SADC Development Strategies for Southern Africa."

¹³ Debusscher, Petra, and Merran Hulse, "Including Women's Voices? Gender Mainstreaming in EU and SADC Development Strategies for Southern Africa."

¹⁴ Debusscher, Petra, and Merran Hulse, "Including Women's Voices? Gender Mainstreaming in EU and SADC Development Strategies for Southern Africa."

¹⁵ Mutangadura, Chido, "Women and Land Tenure Rights in Southern Africa: A human rights-based approach."

education.¹⁶ Africa has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world, specifically 531/100,000 maternal deaths per year.¹⁷ At the same time, as Debusscher highlights, women and girls face problems such as sexual abuse, which leads to unwanted pregnancies (often at a young age, which prevents girls from going to school).¹⁸ Thus, unpaid care, property rights and reproductive health are three key areas that Debusscher argues are not considered in EU development cooperation. For women in developing countries, these are the biggest obstacles to gender equality.¹⁹

As outlined in the introduction, Namibia has the highest gender gap index, according to Statista.²⁰ The specific index is 0.8 (with a best possible score of 1), meaning Namibia has closed 80 % of the gender gap. Gender equality has indeed been an important issue in Namibia for several years. In 2014, the government even introduced the so-called zebra principle, which essentially quotas for female representation in parliament. This puts Namibia in the role of a regional leader in gender equality but still in the poor context of the third world.²¹

However, introducing quotas does not solve all manifestations of gender inequality.²² As the local media writes: "the everyday reality of women continues to be a struggle".²³ According to the article, statistics do not reflect the reality that

¹⁶ Debusscher, Petra. "Gender Equality in European Union Development Policy: Incorporating Women's Voices or Confirming Hierarchies?"

¹⁷ WHO, „Maternal mortality: The urgency of a systemic and multisectoral approach in mitigating maternal deaths in Africa“.

¹⁸ Debusscher, Petra. "Gender Equality in European Union Development Policy: Incorporating Women's Voices or Confirming Hierarchies?"

¹⁹ Debusscher, Petra. "Gender Equality in European Union Development Policy: Incorporating Women's Voices or Confirming Hierarchies?"

²⁰ Statista. "Gender Gap Index in Sub-Saharan Africa 2023“.

²¹ Clayton, Amanda, "Namibia at a crossroads: 50/50 and the way forward“.

²² See e.g. UNHR, " Experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Congratulate Namibia on the adoption of its First National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, and Ask Questions about Gender Parity in Politics and Early Marriage“.

²³ Ngatjiheue, Charmaine, and Petersen, Shelleygan, "Women Say Their Reality Remains a Struggle“.

the local women face, and there is a gender pay gap, whereby women are unpaid and would have to work 25 more days a year than men to achieve the same earnings when doing comparable work.²⁴ Inequality between men and women is therefore often economic and due to unpaid care, which is still a significant concern for local women.²⁵ Due to unpaid care (and the resulting lack of time), women are mostly represented in lower-paid jobs, and therefore, the gender income gap is, on average, 22 %.²⁶ Specific (lower-paid) jobs for women are provided by the primary sector, i.e., agriculture, where 29 % of Namibian women are employed, in general, due to limited access to employment opportunities (mainly due to lower levels of education) and to ensure food security for their families.²⁷ Although women and men have legally equal status in some areas (e.g. politics), the gender pay gap continues to exist because women generally work fewer hours than men. Thus, Namibia is failing to address equal pay for equal work or to support women in equal rights to work.²⁸

An issue also highlighted by Debusscher²⁹, which also negatively affects women in Namibia, is property law.³⁰ A common problem for women, in this case widows, is the appropriation of property after the death of a husband by his relatives.³¹ Even though there is a law regulating this issue, the situation does not seem to improve.³² This poses the most significant risk to surviving widows caring for children. According to the study, although only 3 % of women in Namibia have

²⁴ Ngatjiheue, Charmaine, and Petersen, Shelleygan, "Women Say Their Reality Remains a Struggle".

²⁵ Ngatjiheue, Charmaine, and Petersen, Shelleygan, "Women Say Their Reality Remains a Struggle".

²⁶ Ngatjiheue, Charmaine, and Petersen, Shelleygan, "Women Say Their Reality Remains a Struggle".

²⁷ Kalimbo, Hileni, "Inside the gender pay gap: What explains disparities in gender pay in Namibia?"

²⁸ Mufune, Pempelani, "Female Employment and Unemployment in Namibia".

²⁹ Debusscher, Petra. "Gender Equality in European Union Development Policy: Incorporating Women's Voices or Confirming Hierarchies?"

³⁰ University of Wyoming Human Rights Clinic, "Women's Property Rights in Namibia: An Investigative Report to Determine The Potential for Litigation".

³¹ Legal Assistance Centre, "Namibia Gender Analysis 2017"

³² Although this opens the debate about the reasons for this failure, this is not the subject of this analysis.

been widowed, 40 % of these women have lost all of their husband's property, which has been distributed to their relatives.³³

Another problem in Namibia is women's public health. A concrete example can be seen in the number of AIDS cases, which are higher for women compared to men. Namibia went through an AIDS epidemic in 2017 in which 15.7 % of women and 9.3 % of men were infected.³⁴ This is due to many women earning money through prostitution.³⁵ Consequently, reproductive health is a weakness here.

Similarly, abortion is also a big topic in Namibia because it is only legal in cases of rape, incest or when pregnancy endangers the health of the mother.³⁶ However, sexual violence (meaning domestic violence, which is not considered rape; hence rape can only happen outside of marriage), inadequate sex education, and irregular (or no) contraceptive use often lead to unwanted pregnancies from which, as a local NGO points out, there is legally no way back.³⁷ Between 2015 and 2019, the number of unintended pregnancies was around 104 women per 1,000 pregnancies, with only 29 women per 1,000 pregnancies having an abortion.³⁸ Unwanted pregnancies are often the result of domestic violence. Moreover, statistics show that one in three women in Namibia suffers from this kind of violence.³⁹ The threat to reproductive health is an issue also mentioned by Debusscher.⁴⁰ It is thus clear that the gaps highlighted by Debusscher are still relevant in Namibia, a country identified as a regional leader in gender equality. Does the EU reflect those gaps in its development cooperation?

³³ Legal Assistance Centre, "Namibia Gender Analysis 2017"

³⁴ PHIA Project, "Namibia Final Report 2017 - PHIA Project,".

³⁵ PHIA Project, "Namibia Final Report 2017 - PHIA Project,".

³⁶ see Act 2 of 1975.

³⁷ Sister Namibia, "Here's How You Access a 'Legal' Abortion in Namibia,"

³⁸ Gutmacher Institute, "Namibia,"

³⁹ WHO | Regional Office for Africa. "Namibia's Health Sector Responding to Violence Against Women and Girls | WHO | Regional Office for Africa,".

⁴⁰ Debusscher, Petra. "Gender Equality in European Union Development Policy: Incorporating Women's Voices or Confirming Hierarchies?"

The EU and its member states provide 70 % of Namibia's aid, which means it's the most significant donor.⁴¹ The flagship EU initiative in Namibia focused on gender equality is called Education and Youth.⁴² This is further divided into three sub-categories: Early Childhood Development; Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET); and Governance/Gender Equality. In the first sub-category, the Commission addresses gender equality only indirectly. In fact, a specific action under this initiative is to improve access to ECD (Early Childhood Development) facilities, which may free local women from unpaid family care (although this is not explicitly mentioned in the Commission's plans). Another project under this section is the so-called TVET. It's focused on equipping workers (including women) with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in the hydrogen and renewable energy sector. Consequently, the EU is providing equal employment opportunities for women and men. The third sub-category is Governance/Gender Equality, which aims to strengthen civil society participation in governance and green growth, as well as to reduce gender-based violence (GBV). The EU aims to achieve this through support to the local Ministry of Gender Equality.⁴³ As part of this initiative, in addition to reducing GBV, the EU wants to provide technical assistance (more unspecified) to the Ministry mentioned above in areas of family law - in particular, amendments to laws that keep financially disadvantaged women trapped in violent relationships.⁴⁴ That means that while not explicitly written in the development strategy, the EU reflects the fundamental problems mentioned by the critique (unpaid care work and reproductive health). Altogether, evidence suggests that the above criticism is no longer valid and that the EU's development cooperation is constantly evolving and improving efficiency.

⁴¹ Milani, Raúl, Fuentes, "The European Union: Relations with Namibia".

⁴² European Commission, "NAMIBIA: Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2021-2027"

⁴³ European Commission, "NAMIBIA: Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2021-2027"

⁴⁴ European Commission, "NAMIBIA: Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2021-2027"

This text shows that unpaid care, property rights and reproductive health are still current key topics for Namibian women. It is important to highlight that it isn't in the EU's competence to solve the problems of women in the third world. Still, this text shows that there is an effort to improve the situation in the key mentioned areas by cooperating with locals and governments. To conclude, the critique that the EU ignores fundamental problems is no longer valid. Even in the country marked as the local gender leader, there is still monitoring of women's situation, and part of the aid budget is aimed directly at ensuring gender equality. It can, therefore, be concluded that the EU's development aid is constantly evolving to make it as effective and tailored to the recipients as possible.

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