

# The Broader Story of Progress with Dr. Naila Kabeer | Hopper Lecture 2023 | Text Transcript | GIDS

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This is a text transcript for the recorded Hopper Lecture “The Broader Story of Progress with Dr. Naila Kabeer” presented by the Guelph Institute of Development Studies (GIDS) at the University of Guelph. The event is part of the Hopper Lecture Series. The guest speaker was Dr. Naila Kabeer. The event was moderated by Dr. Andrea Paras and Dr. Erin Nelson.

## [Transcript](#)

### [Introduction]

Dr. Andrea Paras:

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome! Everyone it's good to be here. My name is Andrea Paras. I'm an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and I'm also the Interim Director of the Guelph Institute of Development Studies. It is my great pleasure to welcome you here today for the 2022-23 annual Hopper Lecture.

This lecture represents an almost 30-year collaboration; we're approaching 30 years with the International Development Research Center and is one of the most important events in the GIDS calendar.

In a few moments I'll ask one of our distinguished guests Dominique Charron from IDRC to say a few more words about the Hopper Lecture and the relationship between the University of Guelph and IDRC. The purpose of this lecture is to provide an opportunity for us to learn about some of the most important current and future issues in International Development Cooperation. As we consider the present and future of International Development Cooperation our starting place should be to reflect on our origins, where we are coming from.

So, it is in this spirit that I begin with acknowledging that we are meeting here today on the traditional and ancestral territory of the Mississaugas of the credit. The land where the University of Guelph resides is also located within the territory of the Between the Lakes Purchase, also known as Treaty Three which was first negotiated between the Mississaugas of the credit and the British crown in 1784.

But before that treaty was signed there was already an existing treaty, the dish with one spoon treaty between the *Hodinöhsö:ni'* and the *Anishinaabeg* peoples and their allies that committed them to live peaceably together and over the years newcomers to this land have been integrated into its terms.

The dish with one spoon requires those of us who reside and work here to take responsibility for being stewards of the land and creating good relationships with each other. I also want to acknowledge that other people arrive in this territory through processes of colonial exploitation particularly those people of Afro-Caribbean descent whose ancestors came here as a result of escaping the transatlantic slave trade.

Still others have arrived in Guelph and surrounding areas through other processes of resettlement or dislocation. Some of them forced, some of them chosen. Regardless of how they came here many

communities continue to live and experience the long-lasting impacts of this colonial history in their daily lives, and many struggle with the inequalities that have resulted from global capitalism and exclusionary economic systems.

At the Guelph Institute of Development Studies, we respond to this history by teaching and doing research about how to address the causes of global inequalities and injustice as we are here today to listen and learn from our distinguished guest Dr. Naila Kabeer.

We do so with the intention of taking responsibility for building a socially just world that is truly inclusive. Let me officially say to you Dr. Kabeer, welcome! There is so much excitement around campus about this lecture. I've lost count of the number of people who have told me that your work has been deeply influential in their own research and teaching, and what has been so remarkable to me in these conversations is that I've heard these comments from Junior Scholars, as well as Scholars closer to the end of their careers. You have truly influenced generations of Scholars across multiple disciplines here at this university, and it is an absolute honor to have you here today. I have a few words of housekeeping before I invite Dominique Charron to provide some opening remarks and before our Provost Gwen Chapman makes her formal introduction of our guest.

First, this event would not have been possible without the contributions of many people and when you thank people you always risk leaving people out. I know that, so there are too many people to mention by name here but please know that we are grateful, but I will however provide two specific mentions of gratitude.

First, this lecture would not happen without the endowment provided by our wonderful partners at IDRC. Thank you for your continued support and friendship. Second, I want to thank Daphne Campomanes who's over there, wave a hand Daphne, who is the Administrative Assistant at GIDS for all her hard work behind the scenes. She has taken care of all of the details of this visit and we would be absolutely lost without her.

Another final housekeeping note about the format of our lecture today, please hold your questions until after the lecture is finished. There will be time at the end of the lecture for you to ask a question. For folks who are attending remotely on teams please type your question in the chat, and Erin Nelson will read it on your behalf.

I would like now to invite Dominique Charron to say a few words. Dominique is the Vice President of programs and Partnerships at IDRC. Prior to this role, she was the Director of IDRC 's Agriculture and Environment Program where she supervised research on agricultural productivity and food security. She also has Guelph Roots prior to joining IDRC. In 2016, she completed two degrees here at this university. So, thank you very much for making the trip from Ottawa to be here with us today and welcome back to the university!

Dr. Dominique Charron:

Thank you, thank you. It really is a pleasure to be here. Can you hear me all right? Good! It is like coming home. I have spent much of the day wandering, running late between meetings from central campus to vet school. So, it's been really quite a pleasure to come back and spend time on campus.

I am also very honored and pleased to be here on the traditional treaty lands of the Mississauga. So, I normally where I live is unseated traditional territory of the Algonquin and Anishinaabe people, and I

won't be able to do justice to the wonderful acknowledgment that you gave Andrea. But for us at IDRC, the idea of reconciliation is an important part of our journey.

In thinking about knowledge, decolonizing knowledge, understanding how colonial pasts here in Canada as well as internationally have led to entrenched deep inequalities and looking for how we, through our own work, can be more a part of the path forward here in Canada and as a global leader and voice for decolonizing and for reconciliation... You'll have to forgive me because I can't get the password to work on my laptop so I'm going to be doing this you know middle age thing.

So, I mentioned IRDC and that sounds very loud but you tell me if you can't hear me properly, we are IDRC Canada's International Development Research Center. You may know this but if you don't, we're a crown corporation which is an arm's length body of the federal government. Our mandate now for nearly 53 years has been to fund, support, encourage, foster research on key issues that are holding back countries in lower- and middle-income countries that we used to call developing regions of the world and support the capacity in those countries in partnership with researchers in other parts of the world to bring about knowledge—new knowledge, apply that knowledge, bring about innovation to solve those problems.

It's a wonderful mandate. It's a very unique Canadian institution. There are very few bodies or even programs like it around the world. It's precious! I encourage you all to take a look and follow IDRC's work. It's not well enough known in Canada and so I'm very happy to be here to be able to talk a little bit about a partner of IDRC and both Dr. Kabeer as well as our partnership with the university.

Now, the Hopper Lecture was created 30 years ago by the University of Guelph with the support of IDRC. We were having lunch today and we said why and someone emailed Sally to say who so my indefatigable assistant found the answer.

In the opening remarks of, hold on I had it a moment ago, that were given at the inaugural lecture by Pierre Beemans for IDRC. It is fitting also that this event be based at Guelph several IDRC governors have been a faculty of this university including Bill Winegard, Lila Engberg, and at that time recently, Janet Wardlaw. This is where David Hopper had his first job, University of Guelph, after graduation and as an Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics. He also did his initial doctoral research and much of his career in India.

Our inaugural Hopper lecturer was also in India. So, that's the answer why IDRC well that's the answer. Now, who was David Hopper aside from a prophet at Guelph? David Hopper was IDRC's Inaugural President and he served as President from 1970 to 1978. He is the one who helped with the initial board turn IDRC from what might have been a think tank or what might have been a body that funds Canadians to do International Research into the organization that it is today, which is a partner for creating knowledge in the global south.

His vision of this the country setting their own agenda was really fundamental to helping shape our way forward as an organization and we still believe that there's the need has never been greater for ideas from around the world to be brought, to bear on the problems, that we are facing—huge global problems that no one country or university can solve on their own.

There are too many barriers to achieving those solutions and even to advancing research and science towards those solutions. There are still too many barriers to the participation of women and marginalized groups of people in research. The bulk of the research endeavor worldwide remains largely gender blind, or at best simply acknowledges that gender is an issue without moving forward in generating evidence in a different way.

It doesn't consider how gender inequality may define the problem if it doesn't consider how methods may need to be adapted such that women and men can benefit equally from research and it doesn't consider the impact of the research and how that may be different from an uptake perspective on women and men and other marginalized groups.

So, we're very fortunate that today's lecture from Dr. Naila Kabeer is going to help shed some light on strategies and ways in which this can be changed. Now, not only did Dr. Kabeer write very foundational evidence that informed the focus and design of an important program of IDRC's called "The Growth, and Economic Opportunities for Women Initiative" that has been funded by the government of the UK the Hewlett the William and Flora Hewlett foundation, and Canada as well as the Gates Foundation but she has been such a longtime friend and partner of IDRC.

We again, with a little bit of forensics, with the help of Ida discovered that when you know this but 1987 was the first work that she did with IDRC and many in subsequent years to really help define what has now become an approach at IDRC that puts gender equality and inclusion at the heart of our entire research agenda.

So, I thank you Naila, for your long partnership with IDRC. Now, the work continues. The need is great. We now all have lived through the pandemic that's not quite over, and reinforce the need for thinking about gender; and thinking about inclusion; and thinking about inequalities in a new way; because we've seen how not only different groups of people were affected by the disease, but also different groups in society were affected by control measures—how informal workers were left overnight without income, had to walk home hundreds of kilometers to their village—where there wasn't enough food or work for them there and a huge impact that this has also had on women in society who had to leave whatever perhaps income generating activities they were doing to look after kids who are not in school, or to look after family members who were coming home from having lost work.

The work that IDRC is leading on economic opportunities for women is developing and looking for solutions that will promote women's entry into high value sectors the economy of the future. So, it's not just about making things better for women, and the jobs they're in now, but how we can find the pathways for women to become real drivers of that economy green high-tech economy of the future. In order for them to do that, then we need to find solutions to the unfair, unpaid, burden of care responsibilities—let's not call them a burden—we love them; they're children, there our elders, but the unfair load that women carry in terms for all society and for families in in doing most of that work themselves. So, we look forward to hearing about your story Naila about how your work has helped shape the movement of women in labor, but also to help us think forward about what and where we need to go from here.

On behalf of IDRC, thank you Naila, and welcome, and thank you to the Guelph Institute for Development Studies and to the university for the partnership and for inviting us.

Dr. Andrea Paras:

I would like now to invite Gwen Chapman to offer a formal introduction of our speaker. Gwen became the Provost, and Vice President Academic of the University of Guelph in 2020. Prior to that, she was the Dean of the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences, and was in that position when the Guelph Institute of Development Studies was created in 2018. It's wonderful to have you here Gwen thank you so much for joining us today.

Dr. Gwen Chapman:

Thank you, Andrea and yes, it is such a pleasure to be here today. I've been reflecting as I came in and I see so many familiar faces and you know many people that I really haven't seen since early 2020. Because at that time I was the Dean of the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences; the Dean that was overseeing the Guelph Institute for Development Studies. So, I was quite involved with a number of you.

Then, of course, we all know what happened. But one of the things that happened to me not too long after that was that I moved into the role of the Provost and Vice President Academic. So, once we all came back, I was in a different place than I'd been before. While I've seen some of you, we haven't had the same context so it's great to see so many familiar faces.

I also, Dominique, really appreciate your introduction because it's interesting to hear about the history of IDRC; and the history of IDRC in relation to the University of Guelph; and some of the names that were mentioned. Even though there were people here long before my time, they were a couple of well I Lila Engberg and Bill Winegard. I was actually able to meet both of them and I certainly knew who Janet Wardlaw was. So, very interesting to hear that. Then, I think also how our stories intersect when I was still at the University of British Columbia. I was involved somewhat properly, but I was involved in an IDRC funded project partly because of the gender framework that was involved. They needed somebody who could help a bit with that and so, that was quite interesting.

Anyway, enough about me. I'm here really and I have the distinct pleasure of introducing this year's Hopper lecturer Dr. Naila Kabeer. We had a great time getting to know each other a bit last night over dinner with a group of people.

Dr. Kabeer is a Professor of Gender and Development, in the Departments of Gender Studies and International Development, at the London School of Economics and Political Science. [She] is widely regarded as one of the most influential feminist economists of our time.

She received her PhD in Economics from the London School of Economics in 1985. After which, she held appointments at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, the School of Oriental and African studies, and most recently this London School of Economics. Over the course of her nearly four decades-long career, Dr. Kabeer has been a trailblazer in research about women's livelihoods and economic empowerment within the household labor markets, and the broader economy.

It is a daunting task to attempt to summarize her work. I certainly won't go into all of the details, but she has written on a wide range of topics from social exclusion and gendered poverty traps, to female garment workers and microfinance, to citizenship and collective action.

She has authored or co-authored six books, edited and co-edited six volumes, published more than 60 journal articles, and 30 book chapters. This is all in addition to numerous working papers, commission studies, and more than 50 keynote speeches and presentations. So, I think you're well experienced to give our presentation tonight.

Dr. Kabeer has also served as the President of the International Association of Feminist Economics from 2018 to 2019. [She] has sat on the Editorial Boards of several of the most influential scholarly journals of the discipline.

Her lifetime contributions were recognized by an honorary doctorate from the University of Sussex in 2020. Unsurprisingly, her expertise has been sought by major donor agencies, including the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Department for International Development in the UK, multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, and UNESCO.

She is well known for her work in South Asia, but she's also known for her work around the world including in Mozambique, Vietnam, Mexico, Jamaica, Uganda, Morocco, and the Gambia. Her work is so influential, because it is attuned to the importance of local contexts and the diversity of the experiences of women around the world. But above all her work, is intersectional understanding that empowerment looks different for women, at different intersections of race, cast, class, ethnicity, and legal status.

At the same time, her work points to the importance of linkages between local feminist and global solidarity movements. It is through those linkages that we will come to understand different ways of being and doing alternate visions of justice and empowerment that are feminist, anti-colonial, and inclusive.

Here, at the University of Guelph, our mission is to improve life. We're committed to fostering research, and learning that will benefit the lives of people and communities in Canada, and globally. Dr. Kabeer's lecture fits in so well within that focusing on how women in the margins in South Asia and their allies engage in collective action to challenge legal and policy structures that perpetuate gender discrimination. Welcome, Dr. Kabeer. I really look forward to hearing your lecture.

### [Lecture Portion]

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

Hello, and thank you very much for inviting me. I'm very pleased that it's an IDRC linked picture, because as you mentioned my very first commission study after I finished my PhD, and I became an adult, was actually from IDRC. Over the years, there have been many connections, but I've never been to the University of Guelph before, so this is a real treat. I've seen a little bit of Guelph while I've been here but not enough, maybe I'll come back at some stage.

What I'd like to talk about today is "Building Solidarity and Collective Action on the Margins". The margins that I'm talking about [is] in South Asia—how in Bangladesh people who are amongst the poorest / come for the poorest households.

In India, a group, an Adivasi is indigenous. In Adivasi group, from Jharkhand called the Gond Community, the questions that I try to address in this talk are questions that have been with me through the years,

and it was a question that was put to me yesterday by one of the students. I said I'm going to try and answer it tomorrow, so I hope the answer is satisfactory.

Let me begin by the question. The talk is going to be about empowerment, gender justice, and citizenship assign posts to particular pathways of change that are often connected and that we want to make connected. Empowerment, I'm talking about the processes by which people gain more control over their lives.

Okay, so it's about choice, and voice. But, you know, we make choices every day. So, in order for choices and voice to count, is empowerment, there are certain conditions that have to be fulfilled—the most important is that you should have been able to choose—otherwise, if the choice that you make is the only choice available to you, it's not a choice at all.

Now, to be able to choose, otherwise you need material resources obviously, but you also need a capacity to imagine alternatives. So, simply having material resources without knowing that other worlds are possible is not a very useful way of looking at choice, and here, of course, what I've been concerned with is that in many—this goes to your question, in many societies, it seems that women comply with norms and practices that denigrate them or place them at a subordinate position to men in their societies.

Now this compliance, the silence, if you like we can interpret it in a number of ways, we can say it's an unquestioning acceptance of what society hands out to them. They're perfectly satisfied with what they have been assigned to. It may reflect the material and social costs of descent, but speaking out has penalties or it may simply be that the idea of protest is inconceivable. So, when I talked about imagination, they cannot imagine protesting. The other qualifications one has to make is between the trivial choices that we make every day and choices that have consequences for the kind of lives we lead.

So, a trivial choice might be you know what I decided to wear today, you know I could have won something completely different, and the world would have remained the same. But the decision to go out and work, or the decision or the choice to marry somebody you want to marry, rather than somebody else wants you to, all of these are consequential choices, and empowerment means that you have some say in these matters. Finally, of course, we don't want choices that simply reproduce the structures of power. You know, I might become very active in a political party, but if that political party is dedicated to the elimination or discrimination against minorities, it may be a very strategic choice, but it's not a particularly empowering choice.

So, when we talk about women gaining you know some degree of control, we're also qualifying the kinds of controls, we want them to be consequential. We want them to be strategic, but we also don't want them to be reproducing patriarchy.

So, I understand for me, empowerment has an irreducibly subjective component. Whatever else it entails, it must entail changes in women's consciousness, in the way they perceive themselves, and how they perceive themselves in relation to others.

We're talking about societies where these things are denied. So, [this] begins with individual change. When we talk about gender justice, we're talking at a very different level. We're talking about these institutional arrangements that govern a society, and to what extent not only legally, but you know normatively—policy wise—to what extent do they promote the fair treatment of men and women. So, such struggles around gender justice are struggles at the level of institutions.

In formal terms, we talk about gender justice in some of the terms, of these norms and conventions that have appeared at the global and at the local levels you know, [inaudible] equal pay legislation, and so on, and a major driving force behind this has been women's movements, right. But legal change doesn't everywhere translate into real change in the lives of the millions of men and women who never, don't, may not even know that these laws exist. Certainly, have not taken part in making that happen. But, of course, at the same time, the world does not remain static. There have been many changes intended in otherwise that have education and so on that have started to destabilize long-standing patriarchal structures.

Rising levels of education, female labor force participation, all of that, but increasing these women's individual capabilities do not necessarily change into greater awareness of their rights or with a willingness to fight for their rights. So, in this talk, I want to draw on Ruth Lister's conceptualization of citizenship as a bridging concept.

So, Ruth Lister distinguishes between citizenship as status, by which I mean the current way in which the law and policy and structures of a society define women, define men, and what kind of rights and obligations they provide to them. Citizenship as practice or as agency where we're talking about people mobilizing to either claim their rights, or to expand the notion of rights that's at stake. In other words, to have a say in the kind of society that they belong to.

So, the question I'm asking is that in the face of oppressive patriarchies, and some patriarchies are more oppressive than others, that deny women a voice in shaping the institutional arrangements, that assign them a subordinate status, what are the possibilities for empowerment and how can they be translated into a struggle for gender justice?

Now here, I'm going to move on to a particular way of thinking about justice which I found very useful. It comes from Onora O'Neill. She is trying to steer a power between, on the one hand, the liberal notions of justice as individual rights, and on the other hand, a relativist notion of justice as reflecting the culture and norms of different societies.

The liberal notion of justice taking roles has a very idealized version of the human beings as somehow, being able to abstract themselves from their gender, ethnic, and other identities behind a kind of veil of ignorance. Justice is the kind of institutions they would choose when they don't know what position they will occupy in the society that they're trying to design.

So, it's people—choose a range of institutional arrangement as if they have no gender, and ethnic identity. They don't have a special stake in any particular outcome, and the institutions they choose are likely to be fairest. It's likely to be just, but the problem, of course, is that it is based on a model of the individual as free-floating agency that is more easily exercised by men than women because it assumes a way the relations of dependence and interdependence which are far more central to the lives of most women than of men.

Relativist approaches on the other hand, try to ground ideas about justice in the traditions of actual communities. This is a notion that's put forward by communitarian thinkers in the Global North. It also features in work about societies in the Global South.

Very often, to challenge liberal feminist ideas that are influenced by individualized notions of justice. So, authors writing about South Asia will say that there's a cultural association between women and domestic domain. Women derive a great deal of satisfaction from this. So, you know there's no need to



try and destabilize that. But they do treat cultures as seamless, and timeless, and internally coherent. They rarely allow for the possibility that women in these cultures may not be happy with the predetermined nature of their roles, but may have nowhere to express their dissent.

So, in defending this notion of justice you are defending practices that relegate large portions of women's lives to the domestic domain, precisely the domain where issues of justice are not debated.

O'Neill believes an adequate account of justice must speak genuinely, universal principles, but it must still recourse between the abstractions of roles and ideas of liberal justice, as well as relativist approaches which valorize culturally specific ideals of relationships. The challenge then is to articulate principles of justice that can adjudicate between the inevitably diverging views that exist in any society, about what is desirable.

So, she argues that justice requires that the basic principles for organizing institutional arrangements in the face of these disagreements and divergences, must be principles that can be adopted by any one of these pluralities of actors. Then, these institutional arrangements become in the background against which you live your life.

To illustrate, what she means, she says, consider the situation of poor women and poor economies. How do we judge whether the existing social arrangements that isolate them or exclude them ensure their lifelong vulnerability and dependence are just? This is not quite a question about the kinds of arrangements that these rational actors would consent to which is the hypothetical, the court experiment of roles, nor is it a question about the kinds of arrangements that people in oppressive situations do consent to which is the assumption of the relativist approach. It is a question about the kinds of arrangements that a plurality of interacting actors could consent to.

So, we're asking to what extent are different aspects of arrangements that structure the lives of oppressed groups are ones that could have been refused or renegotiated by those that they constrain? Institutions can only be regarded as just if they allow those who are affected by them the ability to refuse or renegotiate those aspects which they find to be unfair.

Just societies are built to parity of participation by all concerns but this takes me to a conundrum which is and that's the reason for my research that the capacity for refusal and renegotiation is not evenly distributed how do subordinate groups who are the receiving end of unjust institutions acquire the ability to refuse and renegotiate, when all the structures the patriarchal structures of their society not only define their gender roles at home but their gender roles in the whole of society.

Clearly, recognition of injustice must precede the struggle for justice. If justice is ingrained in the social relationships that construct a woman's sense of self and selfhood, and security in a community, it is likely to be an integral part of their subjectivity the very stuff of which consciousness is made so we may find that women refuse to dissent because the cost of dissent are high or we may be fine that they simply do not recognize these arrangements as unjust.

These are simply traditional arrangements which are part of what Bourdieu describes as doxa so naturalized that they go unquestioned. If this is the case, how would it be possible for women in these kinds of contexts to recognize and deal with injustice without devaluing in some way the relationships that mean a great deal to them.

So, for me, one way out of this conundrum is provided by the work of Seyla Benhabib and what she points out using Habermas' ideals of justice is that social relationships are important in the construction of identity and consciousness—that we've all become who we are through the social relationships of which we are a part [of]—but simply acknowledging the importance of social relationships in our lives, doesn't then require us to critically accept them. However, embedded we may be in the ascribed relationships of our lives, it is, in principle, possible for us to gain some kind of a reflexive distance from these relationships to become both observer and participant of these relationships. To be able to ask ourselves are these relationships fair, and that does not mean throwing out these relationships wholesale, but asking what aspects of these relationships do we want to hold on to, and what aspects do we want to change. Of course, part of the conundrum still remains. These ideas about agency, about choice, about reflection, which are central to the kind of empowerment in gender justice I'm talking about, but we still need to deal with the fact that the nature of injustice means that such agency is denied, and the capacities to do the to renegotiate and dissent are unequally distributed. Now, when this discrimination is so deep rooted and so much a part of people's socialization, it is unlikely that this capacity will be built from within the community.

This is where it may be that external agents can have a role to play, not to dictate what kind of justice we should be looking for but to open up the space and possibility for people to acquire the ability to ask these questions—that is what I have tried to do in my research—what I've tried to do is to look at organizations in Bangladesh and India that are development NGOs, but are committed to trying to build the kind of capacity that I'm talking about; to empower and to enable people to find their own models of gender justice.

Now, I've done quantitative work on these studies, and so that is available. These studies have been carried out over since 2005 to 2017 in different parts of Bangladesh and in India. If you're interested in the quantitative studies they're there in the references at the back, but I'm going to really focus on the qualitative research because I find that how people talk about their lives; gives us a very powerful insight to how change happens and how change happens at the level that I'm really interested—in which is the level of consciousness of cognition.

If you are born to think that you are inferior, and let us remember that South Asia is a place where girls are born to be recognized as lesser beings, they die in larger numbers, they are aborted in larger numbers; there is no question that we come from a society where patriarchy is fairly oppressive.

If that is the case, how do you come to a stage where you start asking questions about this? If you, from the day you're born, this is what you are told, how do you challenge this, and if you are someone very poor and you don't have education, and you don't have access to the larger world around you, how does this change come about?

So, my research has been very much about organizations that that try and work on this and they will work within as groups; organizing in some cases. I will say in Bangladesh it is BRAC people—lost the largest energy on the world. Nijera Kori, which works with both landless men and women; BRAC works with mainly women; Samata which works with men and women; and Saptagram which was my mother's organization which works with mainly landless women; and In India, in PRADAN which has been in existence since 1983, in the area that we did our research with people from PRADAN, who have been working in that area for a long time, and that were troubled by some of the gender injustices they saw. In that area, PRADAN has been there only for five years, so, we have to remember the changes that we're talking about took place over a fairly short period.

These other organizations have been going since the late 70s. A number of them have disappeared for reasons we can discuss in the in the question time, but Nijera Kori still remains, and BRAC still remains. What all of these organizations share in common, is apart from the group-based approach, is a material of resource distributions.

In the case of BRAC is a kind of classic, micro-credits. In the other, is much more savings-led. Groups meet on a regular basis, agree to save, and pool their funds, and to lend to each other. In the Indian case, the government has a poverty deviation program, and so groups are often linked to government poverty land lending.

The other thing these organizations have in common is that they put a great deal of emphasis on what they call 'training'. Training is a very anodyne term for what is going on. So, certainly Nijera Kori, BRAC in the early days, Samata, and Saptagram, all derived their trading from the popular education model of Paulo Freire.

I mean I once met someone from Mexico. I think an ambassador. I said the most important export from Mexico, no Brazil is the work of Freire. You know, it has really traveled across the world. It has been adapted, indigenized, but this idea of popular education as a way of confronting your own problems through education has been very powerful.

PRADAN was very much focused on livelihoods and I was one of the people that one of the first people to evaluate it as an outsider in early 2006. What came as a surprise to them, is although their livelihoods aspects of their program [were] quite successful, women were not particularly empowered.

The kinds of what you expected to find, you know that there would be making more decisions, there would be less violence—that was not happening. So, PRADAN, over the years, has now sort of changed its strategy. It's worked with the feminist organization called Jagori in India. It's adopted with its own workers, something called narrative therapy, which is a way where people share their life stories, and that's used in the same way of consciousness, raising to put down has a slightly different approach. All of these organizations are very interested in linking these groups; making them aware of their rights as citizens, but also linking them up to forums which will allow them to challenge the way citizenship is being implemented or defined.

So, that Ruth Lister's status and practice is a very useful one for looking at their strategies. Now, I'm going to look at a number of different pathways through which change has taken place. The first of course, is the material one. What is very interesting is these organizations, because they were providing material resources to women, had to take account of the resistance of men within the community.

You know why? When the resources being given to the men, the women found the prospect attractive. First, it would reduce their own dependency on the men in the households. Secondly, it would reduce the class dependency; a lot of them were having to do wage labor for rich landlords and so on. So, having some money of your own to set up your own enterprises, into your livelihoods, meant a degree of freedom from the dependencies of class.

As one woman said, "I don't have to go to a rich person's house. I don't have to give two hoots for the rich". It really made her feel that wage labor they depended on, had now certain alternatives. In the case of PRADAN, they made a real effort to include men in their livelihoods training. Because while government of India also organizes self-help groups of the kind that PRADAN does, men are not as resistant to the government because with the government comes many resources and benefits. With

the NGOs, they think, why are they taking women away from the housework? What are we getting in return? But as the lending program, savings program started to take shape, they found that they were benefiting. So, little by little, male resistance also started to go down.

There was quite a pragmatic reason for getting men fairly well involved. These material resources both provided incentives for people to come together, and meet on a regular basis. Obviously, material deficits were very important, but it also gave them a respite from livelihood insecurity.

They didn't have to worry every day about what they were going to eat the next day, and allowed them the space to think about the larger picture. This is the cognitive training that I talked about. Of course, there's a Freirean popular education, there's a theater, role play, cultural events, songs, you know, the whole South Asian repertoire, and a glow with practical knowledge. You know about health, family planning, clean water, sanitation, which all NGOs provide. They also put a lot of emphasis on becoming a person, having your person recognized, finding a voice, challenging the devaluation of women's unpaid work, questioning discriminatory practices, and so on. Also, through their discussions, we start to get a sense of how society used to be right when these organizations first came in.

One woman told us that "we had no knowledge before. The Village Elder said, we thought was the truth. We never protested, even though there was a lot of injustice. We were afraid of the chairman, afraid of village leaders-afraid". So, when we talk about earlier, why are people silent, here are some answers.

They were afraid to speak, and as one woman said, "we didn't even realize we were human". They're talking about the 70s which is when these organizations first started. Of course, for those who had to work, earn a living, there was no time to think of anything. They went in. They worked. They came home. They ate. They slept. When we look at [the slides], there are some quotes there which you can look at later.

When we look at what women in PRADAN talked about here too, they spoke of the early meetings, about sharing experiences. Now, when we talk to men in the community, they talked about injustice as the treatment they got as a marginalized community from the larger society. Because Adivasis are the poorest and the most marginalized, regarded as somehow jungle people, without civilization, and so on, they had to encounter a great deal of abuse.

Okay, a great deal of abuse from people around them, and they were very aware, the Adivasis themselves see themselves as a first nation, people who were first occupants of this part of the world, and who were pushed by later invaders into the hills and mountains, they also talked about injustice within their own community.

Because certain people within the Gond community were given land by the British, they have remained quite rich. They are amongst those along with the Hindu upper caste who hire people as laborers. What they didn't acknowledge was gender injustice. They felt that if women didn't go to school, it's because they didn't do very well; they weren't as clever as their brothers. After all, it was their job to do the work, and so on, and so forth.

Now, women also recognized the injustice of the outside world, and they also saw the inequalities within the community. But they spoke very eloquently about the injustices that they faced as women. So, it's important to recognize that while you know it's the story of the minority within minorities, when we look at Adivasi communities, as a minority, we should not assume that they're internally harmonious.

Adivasi patriarchy also exists, and the issues that these women talked about was overwork. While the rest of India has very low levels of labor force, participation especially the higher castes, Adivasi's women have the largest, the highest, labor force participation. Mainly, in agricultural labor, or first processing for forest produce, but the work didn't end in the fields. They came home, and they worked. So, for them—the women in Bangladesh—it was overwork. [It] meant they didn't have the education that some of the men had. It meant also that when they grew up, that work continued.

It talked also about violence. That is because while Adivasi communities have a tradition of alcohol, of liquor, on special occasions [since] it's a part of ceremonials, as they have become more and more marginalized, alcoholism has become a huge problem in the Adivasi community. This has been picked up by national statistics, but it was also picked up by these women.

There was no way for them to go with their complaints about alcoholism. So, you had a woman saying, I was only born in order to go and clean other people's dishes. A man might throw his wife out, and that your parents will tell you to stay with them. Then, one woman said I was so scared of men, I had to leave the room. If a man came in, I couldn't be there to be with them. I'm still afraid of my community. There's still a lot of pressure, and oppression now. Men live free of tension, but for women, tension is in everyday reality.

My next slide... Because, the Bangladesh people were talking about changes from the 70s and 80s, PRADAN had only been in this area for about five years. So, the changes that came about were very fresh in the minds of the women we spoke to. They were very eloquent about the changes that had come about in their lives and in their minds, as a part of their regular meetings that they have with PRADAN.

I quoted one a woman talking about the first meeting. She said, “[T]hey asked us to share experiences from our childhood ‘til now to speak of all the painful things that had happened to us. It was very frightening; we were very quiet. I was very scared and I kept my mouth closed. All of us did. My heart was beating so fast and I was feeling so strange. I had never been asked to speak like this. We continue to be quiet and then slowly, one by one, we started to speak. I was the last one. I remember saying a few things about my childhood. It was a frightening experience. It has become a lot easier for me now—compared to earlier, when I was wondering constantly [if what] I was saying was right or wrong”, and the other one who said that literally it helped her to find her voice.

She said there's great deal of and I really found these quotes, these things, that people said very powerful about how change happens at a level that we don't observe. So, this woman said there's a lot of difference between hearing with your own ears, and seeing with your own eyes. I may have heard and known many things before, but when I came to the meeting, and I saw with my own eyes and heard what they were saying for myself, it was different. This is how I built my understanding of things. I was still not shouting at the top of my lungs, but I was slowly and softly speaking to one or two people. As well as speaking to the group, just whispering my thoughts. Slowly, my fear started to fade away but I've got a mind that says to me now, it is time to speak, you have to speak. I haven't spoken much, but slowly I'm starting to. At home, also I keep asking myself and practicing how to say things, and then I go to the meeting and I speak. If it's incorrect, I improve.

So, you can see kind of process by which and these are women who do not have any education, who don't go outside their community very much. We didn't hear that kind of eloquence from the people in Bangladesh, but I think whatever that happened to them happened a long time ago.

This is happening really since after 2013. So, what we also see through this kind of cognitive changes is the journey towards citizenship. In the Bangladesh NGOs, the people that we talked to there, was a lot of theater. In the beginning, a lot of emphasis on unpaid work, and being given value.

They weren't saying, we don't want to do unpaid work; they were saying, give it value. So, they say, we want to send the message. We both have to work together. Wives don't just sit at home, while their husbands work outside. We take care of the cattle, do the housework, we look after children. If a husband comes home, and lends a helping hand, he will be supporting her.

Then, someone said, I learned to stand on my own feet. I've learned about our rights. I've learned to have the same rights as my husband. I didn't have rights earlier, and I can't say I have them now, but I know what they are. I can teach my children. Whether I get my rights or not, I can still demand them. So again, we found, I won't go through them, but these to me are powerful testimonies of the way people come to an arrival, not just of their personhood, but the fact that they have rights; they are citizens of their country.

Similarly, with PRADAN, you had, I could not talk to people. I couldn't go anywhere. My thinking has changed now. I feel like talking and engaging meetings, even if I only make one point, at least, I make it. I can now sit with the Siyan (which are the elders). When there are elders around, people tell you, do not talk too much. The elders dominate the community right, the community governance structures. But now if something is wrong, I will speak up.

Then, some bitterness you know the rules are made by men, by male elders everywhere. I really like this quote, "everywhere, the government talks of men and women being equal, and sons and daughters being treated the same *"ek samman"*. They say daughters must have equal rights with sons. Nobody says women should have equal rights with men, or wives should have the same right as husbands. I've never heard this when they talk of rights. They never talk of equal rights for wives". What they're saying is the government is very happy to talk about you, treat your sons and daughters similarly, but the government doesn't say husband and wife should be treated similarly.

There was another woman who gave a very succinct summary of how she saw men in her community using power. She said when men say the wrong things, they prove them right. When they say the right things, they are right anyway. So, they're always right.

On the other hand, when women say the right things, the men prove them wrong. When women say the wrong things, well of course, they're wrong. Women are always wrong. These are smart ladies and they kind of got the point fairly quickly, but these processes were real turning points in their lives. It gave them the courage to participate and it was their relationships along with the training that was a very important part of the change.

This group-based solidarity was purposely nurtured by these organizations. Of course, material incentives helped, but it was sharing life experiences and seeking solutions to everyday problems that came together. As one person said, if we met every two months these relationships would not be so alive.

You hear them talking about how Nijera Kori organizes groups of landless men and women and then federates them into a landless organization. So, often you don't hear about Nijera Kori in a village but you hear of the landless organizations. Amongst the Gond community, as well and a lot of them said you know we all knew each other after all these groups are formed within villages of neighbors and families. We knew each other before, but coming together in these kinds of groups has changed our relationships to each other. These are very different kinds of relationships.

They began to realize and I think what they also began to realize, it was the power of the collective. So, even though the initial interactions were going with someone to the hospital, or helping them out in their fields, personal favors that they may not have done before, they also began to realize that what they were forging, are the power of its own.

This one person said that in the past, there were so many barriers—religious people would come and try and stop us. This is in Bangladesh; they said wives and daughters don't go into the field, crops don't grow if women go into the field, but how many of them are there? We have the numbers. How did our prime minister, female prime minister, female opposition leader, become rulers in the country? Through us, without our power, they have without our sport they have no power.

Another said, and in Bangladesh, you know when you teach people, you often teach them through slogans. So, you know the slogan around educating a child, is you have eyes, but you cannot see. So, you go and talk about education and they'll say we have eyes but we cannot see.

So, in this organization, they say one stick can be broken, but a bundle of sticks can't; that was a metaphor for the strength of numbers. You hear it, you have no value on your own, you need to struggle, you need to be united.

Amongst the PRADAN members we found, we got to listen to many things. If [you] go alone to the officials, nobody listens to us. They make us come back again and again, but if we go as a group, people listen.

Now obviously, these group, it's not without problems. Sometimes, groups broke down, dissolved, people try to take too much power, but there was enough of a sense of unity and this is across India as well. This is not just PRADAN, but there are organizations making self-help groups across India. The quantitative data tells us that they are quite effective in some of this.

Also, these groups expanded their networks beyond the immediate group. They were now traveling. They were now going to talk to the local officials. They were moving out of the boundaries of the community far more, and seeing the world from themselves.

Then we have citizenship as practice as legal activism. We didn't see this much in PRADAN, but certainly Nijera Kori, Samata, Saptagram, put a huge effort into training people about the law. This is the citizenship as status, and as practice. They taught them what their rights were.

One woman talked about how important learning arbitration was. This sounds like a sort of elite, middle class woman talking, but they said that before they went for this arbitration, they resolved conflict by screaming at each other. Arbitration taught them a way of listening, and so, she said we learned how to do arbitration in disputes.

If a husband is beating the living daylight of his wife, five of us women go there and warn him not to make trouble. We took this many for arbitration, that's why we're able to talk like this. I couldn't have done this earlier. I wouldn't have had the courage. Now, it's 100 people are sitting together, I can go and have my say.

BRAC has given up the kind of conscientization mode, but it has legal training, it has legal advisory groups, and it provides legal support. So, mainly in BRAC, it's mainly about gender issues, dowry,

remarriage, wife beating. They said that the wider community had begun to recognize what these groups were being able to do.

So, in Bangladesh, as a traditional arbitration council is dominated by the rich landlords, called the shalish. So, now these NGOs would start up their own shalish. Because it was not loaded against the poor, poor people could go to the NGOs and look for justice. This would be the group's shalish. If they declared that some landlord was guilty, it often had an effect, because that landlord did not want to alienate his pool of laborers. So, if a whole group of people went to a landlord and said 'you misbehaved', they did take notice.

I did ask why should a landlord listen to you and people, because we are their neighborhoods. It's not that easy-to-get labor all the time so what that was doing is that these people were becoming seen as an alternative leadership within the villages. People were going to them, for consulting them, going to them for justice for arbitration, and they themselves were participating in the traditional village councils and trying to make sure that they were fairer.

One thing that took me a long time to understand in these interviews is people were constantly referring to what you could call the 'procedures and paraphernalia of citizenship'. They were constantly referring to having agendas, taking records of meetings, presentations of memos, filing a petition, measuring, and documentation to backup claims, knowing how to claim entitlements, consulting policy documents; there was a constant reference.

I realized, in the end, this was the performance of the real performance of citizenship. This is what people who take their rights for granted. These are the bureaucratic procedures that they know about, and what they were telling us, is this is how we conduct ourselves. We take competitions, we look up the law, we study the case book, and so on.

We did find the same degree of legal activism amongst the PRADAN groups. I don't think PRADAN puts that much effort, and it could be because of the complication introduced by the fact that Adivasi groups, the Gond community included, is granted a degree of self-governance by the Indian government in recognition of their special status, as a protective group.

Because the Adivasis have been on the receiving end of so much harassment by the larger public, in 2010, they decided to codify the Gond norms. So, the fluidity that there was in earlier interpretation of norms was disappearing as it was now becoming codified. What we also found is that men were far more anxious to protect the boundaries of the community than women because the special protections they got were dependent on having strong Adivasi community. Women, on the other hand, felt that they might fare better—I'm not saying that the government of India is perfect, right—but it said that it might be fare better, if they could also take legal recourse to the national legislation. They pointed out that they got equal wages on the national employment guarantee scheme from the government but then they had to come home and do all the housework while the men went to sleep.

They were also angry that if there was a sexual assault of the child, the self-help groups wanted to take it to the police, but the elders of the community felt that it would jeopardize the reputation of the community. So, they also found that they were not able to go anywhere outside of the community to look for justice. They were much less in on maintaining the boundaries of the Gond community than the men.



Then, we found a lot of collective action around in the economic domain. Nijera Kori and Samata began with land rights. The government gives land rights around unused land, unclean land, to the work. It brought them into direct confrontation with landlords. Landlords would have their own muscle men, and people did get killed.

More recently, these land-grabbing situations don't rely on muscle power, they rely on false litigation. You take out the case against a landless person, and it's nothing to do with what they're doing around land. It'll be about rape or criminal behavior, avoiding taxes, or some other thing, but it will keep that person tied up in cases for a long time. So, the savings that these organizations had played a very important role in in helping them meet the challenges. Then, of course, you had bargaining around wages and so on.

You had efforts to get landlords to be fairer to people. People would take action, not only for their own members, but also from people outside. Then, you had the struggles in the policy domain. In the Gond community, the self-help groups, in PRADAN groups, the big economic issue that they took up was trying to stop illegal logging of forest land. Because all these big commercial loggers would come and cut down the forests on which they depended for their livelihoods, it also took the form of trying to make sure that they got their wages on time from employment [inaudible] scheme.

There was not as much of the kind of economic struggles. There were struggles in the policy domain of trying to make sure that government safety nets programs were properly distributed that teachers went to school, attended school. The doctors were not getting overly expensive. Medicines and all of this you heard the discussion, about rights. As citizens of Bangladesh, we have a right to food, clothing, shelter; it is the state's responsibility to provide it. Before, we did not get proper treatment in the union clinics, but now we try and make sure that doctors arrive.

PRADAN collective actions were very often around campaigns that the government had initiated. So, there was a lot of a thing around open defecation being an unhealthy practice. This was something that the Modi government had taken up.

The government had also taken up issues of alcoholism and violence. So, a lot of PRADAN members who had already been involved with issues around alcohol and violence were extremely active. But we didn't see that many other forms of collective action. We did see that both men and women in the Gond Community were very keen that children went to school. There was a lot of effort put into proper schooling and proper education.

Here it was the SHGs (self-help group) that provided the leadership. In terms of local governance, initially, it had really been about engaging with locally elected officials, but since 1997, it has been possible for women to stand for elections. You found a lot of NGOs, including the ones that we've talked about, putting women forward, or campaigning in political moments, getting elected. In fact, in 1996 the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) government which is closer to the Islamic forces, was soundly defeated.

It was said that it was the women from the NGOs because over 80% of women voted. It was a woman from the NGOs that managed to topple that government and that period had seen a lot. In fact, I think Yunus said, this was a professor, Yunus said this was an election that was won by Grassroots women.

In PRADAN, the government has also recognized the representation of women in elected bodies. So, you did find women in elected bodies, but not in the community bodies that determine norms and

governance for the local community. Because the community bodies have traditionally been run by the elders, and have traditionally excluded women, it is quite hard still for women to participate in these bodies. Unlike Bangladesh where you don't have this kind of dual citizenship of being a Bengali and something else, and that was true Hindus as well, in the complication in the [inaudible], is that you had the government official bodies and that you had the community bodies. It was easier for the government to influence what happens in the government bodies and much harder.

Women found it very difficult to enter into the community level bodies, so true that women went to the official bodies that they talked a great deal. Even there are elders around, they would talk, but one very significant fact that came out of the PRADAN study is very few women said that they used these forums to question community norms. They didn't raise their voices about the things that they complained to us about. So, what I think I would say that we get out of these studies, and putting these studies together, is an answer to the question that I raised earlier; how was it possible?

But I go on to that, I wanted to say also there were very clear limits. So, the kind of changes that these groups were willing to take on. Slightly different in Bangladesh, Men and women would mobilize collectively about violence against women, in the home, about dowry, but when they went home, they would take dowry. They would still give and take dowry, when they went home and if they had a violent husband, yes, they looked to their other groups for support but they didn't walk out on that violent husband. So, it seemed that in Bangladesh marriage still remains a very central source of security in women's lives. It isn't possible for them to walk out of a marriage, and set up their own household. They would make compromises within the household that they appeared not to want to make when they were speaking in public. So, there was a kind of a willingness to put up with certain things.

In PRADAN, the Gond community it seemed that women were not willing to take on patriarchy within the community, except for the issue of violence. Yes, they did. The complaints would be about school teachers, about loggers, about the external community. You have to ask yourself if you fall out with your community, and you belong to a marginalized community, where do you go? You exit into a world, where you and your entire community is regarded as lesser. So, there is a limit to how much women would be willing to take on patriarchy within the community.

One of the things that we recommended to PRADAN, is these women have led on issues that are of interest to the community, right—logging, illegal logging, teachers, government misbehavior—if they could continue to do that, it would help to be seen as leaders in the community.

Maybe, they could get some of the men within the community to ally with them, to start to talk about patriarchal structures within the community. It is true that in both Bangladesh and in Jharkhand, you did get individual men whose minds were changing. We saw that much more in Bangladesh because the whole struggle has been going on for a lot longer in Bangladesh. You saw it as well in the case of PRADAN.

To go back to my earlier point about individual versus relativist, you know the abstract universal versus the particularist, I wouldn't say that any of the women that we talked to had come close to the full internalization of cultural norms. So much so that that may have been the case in the past, but neither were they turning their backs on the familial roles that they had been ascribed.

What they thought was to negotiate these rules in ways that respected the contributions that they were making to the family, the unpaid work that they did that gave them a voice in family affairs. That expanded their options beyond the family, and that questions men's arbitrary use of violence. So, while

the varying efforts of women in Bangladesh and Jharkhand to renegotiate rather than reject patriarchal structures, it raises important questions about the universality of values of individual rights and personal choice. They also throw out on the ideas of justice that are grounded in some unchanging and internally coherent notion of community.

If liberal arguments are based on a false universalism, the notion of cultural relativism is based on equally false essentialism. Both need to be historically grounded, and so, in listening to the voices of women who protest against unfairness of the patriarchal structures as they have experienced them, we don't have to choose between some authentic local voice and some important western feminism; these are voices of protest grounded in local experience, articulated in local idioms, in societies that are not hermetically sealed off from the rest of the world, thank you.

[Question and Answer Portion]

Dr. Andrea Paras:

Great, thank you so much, Naila. We now have about a good 30 minutes, at least for a question and answer. So, time for good conversation. When you ask your question, I'll ask you to introduce yourself, and then ask briefly, ask your question. Keep it as succinct as possible. We'll start with a question from anybody in the room, and then I'll turn to Erin for a question from our online audience. So yes, right at the back, and sorry, we're going to give the microphone.

Dr. Andrea Paras

We'll take another question from online.

Dr. Erin Nelson

There's another question online about how far has the caste system in India changed or been challenged over the past years in ways that have empowered women?

Dr. Naila Kabeer

Caste?

Dr. Erin Nelson

Yeah, to what extent has the caste system been challenged or changed in ways that have empowered women?

Dr. Naila Kabeer

Well, we have Sharada here. You know, first of all, the studies that I do on social mobilization on building empowerment from the bottom, has not focused on caste-based groups. None of the caste-based groups it's really to the lens of the labor market, right?

So, I can tell you lots about how caste-structures labor markets and you know prevents people from breaking out of ascribed occupations and so on, but I don't think and I don't know if Sharada would like to. It's not a question I can answer.

Dr. Andrea Paras

We'll take a question from Sharada and maybe a comment.

Dr. Naila Kabeer

If she can get her mask off.

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan

Yeah, I think I can. I'm Sharada Srinivasan. Yes, if I am invited to give the Hopper Lecture, I can talk about caste and women's status. I think the caste structure doesn't intuitively or organically benefit women. Women in lower caste, of course, enjoy a relatively better status compared to women in the so-called upper caste. But there's been a great deal of caste mobility, which has actually helped both men and women right. So, I'll just stop at that, I want to keep the focus on Naila and what she has to say.

I want to go back to Mary Anne's question around men being involved in and as agents of gender equality. In your work spanning over the four decades, working on women's empowerment, and gender equality, and also working on development organizations as key to fostering these changes, shouldn't men be involved in a more deliberate way?

Like the way we are engaging women in a very deliberate way, to bring about changes? Because I mean I think I started like you, of course several years later working that—

Dr. Naila Kabeer

Not that many years later!

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan

Working with women and still believing that and focusing on women as key agents, right but I think at this point I'm also thinking that, so what responsibility to do men have towards gender equality, and how do we as external agents create that space for men to be engaged in contributing to gender equality?

So, I would very much want you to answer that question. The sort of a footnote that I have that is a you know a very easy question is Reversed Realities which was done in early 1990s, was a fantastic textbook for me and for a lot of students that I taught in gender and development.

Because I think it effectively brought together economics, gender, and ethnography right these three words that you span, that you bring together so beautifully in that work. Of course, it's out of print. So, we can't we can't even say, 'okay students take this book'.

I still have my own copy. Are we going to see any edition of that or any version of that because I think we sorely miss a gender and development textbook from a global south perspective which is not a reader, right? That's where I think works like the Reversed Realities is totally best.

Dr. Naila Kabeer

Okay, thank you very much. I think on the second question, I think the world has become so much more complicated that it would be a real monumental task, but I want to go back to the first question.

I want you to remember that actually at least two of these organizations worked with both men and women, right? The question is why do so many of these organizations choose to work with women? On microfinance, we know, and we're not talking about microfinance; we're talking about this social mobilization.

I think the early organizations actually did work. So, along with Nijera Kori, Samata, there was Proshika, there were others. I have no problem in saying we have to work with men. I have no problem my problem, is why didn't they? I think they didn't because men have many more options. So, how do you motivate them to come, and meet on a regular basis, to go into consciousness raising?

Nijera Kori and Samata managed to get started with men because of land. The land issue brought men together. Everyone continues to work with men. I think people find it easier to work with men. It is hard to try and get men. You can get men to take on class issues but it's much harder to get them to seriously take on you know their own patriarchal values, and patriarchal values around them.

I think the strategy is if we can get enough women to articulate these things, maybe change will happen. What I will say is I'm now talking as a part of another piece of research, I'm talking to men and women in Bangladesh in different parts of the country, and they all agree that women are more empowered than they ever were.

In fact, they have a say in who they marry, dowry continues but there's a lot of things, where they disagree is this a good thing or a bad thing? There are many people who will say, women are much more empowered than they were. Now they're calling all the shots. Men have become the victimized group. Then, there are others that will say I am so glad my daughter does not, a father will say I'm so much glad my daughter does not have to go but my wife had to go through, my mother had to go through.

So, it's acknowledgment of change and there was acknowledgment that that change has involved women exercising greater agency than they did before. But, you know, there has been a rise of Orthodox Islam. One of the really sad things that has happened is that microfinance has now taken over.

These social mobilizations, so financial sustainability, microfinance, it's taken over. Microfinance does not offer an image of justice that those organizations did. What you've got now are the Islamic organizations offering their image of justice and no one to counter them. So, I think some of the negative views about what's going on is partly from a religious point of view, partly from a patriarchal point of view. But I am surprised at how many people feel that there has been quite a lot of positive change in in the country. I think these organizations had some hard to play in them.

Dr. Andrea Paras:

We'll take another online question and then the next in-person question is from Taelor. I'm still collecting questions.

Dr. Erin Nelson:

So, the next online question is, what broader political project for feminism could be built upon this analysis of struggles on the margin that you've described this evening?

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

I didn't understand that.

Dr. Erin Nelson:

Is there a broader feminist political project that could be built upon what you've described tonight which the person asking the question refers to as sort of struggles from the margin?

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

I think there is a large political project that we have to take very seriously, and that is building collective action across the world. Whatever forms it takes, it can take a form of trade unions, it could take the form whatever, but really to counter some of the backlash against feminism to come to the closing up of civil society space you need people to come together in large numbers men and women.

I think what the message I feel that I take away from what I've the studies have been doing is the importance of that struggle being based on people's own ideas about what a just society looks like. One of the things I really like about Amartya Sen work many things I like you know what he feels is wrong with Rawlsian ideas about justice is about is it's talking about ideal arrangements—what are the ideal arrangements?

Whereas I think, what these kinds of studies tell us, is you start with injustice rather than having an ideal bottle of justice this we must now put it into place, you start with what people think is unjust in their lives because that is what will motivate to come together and to struggle. I think it's about it's about defining a future that takes off from the present but if you take different forms obviously, if you're working in a factory, if you're working in universities.

I actually did some work for the Swedish government and one of the distinctions that came to me when I was looking at the literature was the difference between a pragmatic (no), and a strategic idealism and a strategic pragmatism.

A strategic idealism is when you paint a vision of society and you say this is not good enough, we haven't got there. I don't find that very helpful because we don't know how to get there. I think the strategic pragmatism is one that starts from where you are and then builds you know in the most just way possible.

Dr. Andrea Paras:

Remember to briefly introduce yourself before your question

Taelor Reid:

Hi, we met yesterday but I'm Taelor. I'm doing my masters.

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

You asked me a question!

Taelor Reid:

Yes, I did, and I'm back to ask another question. I'm doing my Master's in Political Science and International Development. Thank you again for speaking with us. The new question I have for you is do you think that pursuing gender justice in such a way in communities with traditionally patriarchal structures could actually result in creating fractures within those communities? If so,

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

Would result in?

Taelor Reid:

Result in creating like fractures within the communities.

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

Because?

Taelor Reid:

Because of resistance with people, between people, who don't really want to see that kind of equality. If so, how would we go about fixing those fractures?

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

How do we go fixing those structures?

Taelor Reid:

Yeah.

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

I think I'm some kind of... I don't know. I don't think any struggle for justice has passed through a very smooth pathway right. Nobody gives up power. Even very poor people whom this is the only power they have. I'm not going to give it up easily. So, there is going to be conflict.

I think that's kind of inevitable. The problem is that when we're talking about gender relationships within the family, within the home, or within the community—oh, let's forget the community—let's just talk about the family, the costs of conflict are far more personal, or far more difficult than let us say class conflict.

Whether it's an employer that you're up against, or a landlord, there can be confrontation. People will live with that confrontation. When we look at the Gond community, and we're asking women to speak

out within a community, that is quite closely knit, but it's also amongst the most marginalized, then you don't want those fractures, right?

Those people do not want those fractures and that's why we took what we thought was a pragmatic approach. Let's take a two-pronged approach, you become leaders in the community, and through that leadership you win people over. So, I think the kind of conflicts that you are talking about and fractures you have to decide is this a conflict that reflects something very deep and non-negotiable, or is this some kind of fraction conflict that we can work our way around; we can find our way through?

There are certain conflicts you're willing to put up with because you know that in the end, things might get resolved. I'll give you an example. Across my research, I often found women making a distinction between the forms of male violence they encountered in the home. Sometimes, it was because of frustration. They think men sometimes I think it's this is a guy, he's got a bad character right, and there's very different attitudes towards men who they felt there was a shared oppression. These guys are not being able to fulfill their role as a breadwinner or what they do is they beat up the women and children.

Those people they felt were so not movable. I guess one I would say that all of this is highly political right? These are political strategies and political options and trade-offs that one is making especially if you're working in a group. Then, you have to ask, are these fractures reflective of such deep resistance that we'll never get over it, or are these fractures evidence of the first reaction to change? Then, you have to decide what you want to do about it? Does that make sense.

Dr. Andrea Paras:

Okay, we're gonna go to the next question to the next person in the room, and that is you over there. So, please introduce yourself.

Marsha Hinds Myrie:

Thank you very much. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Marsha Haynes Marie. I'm the President's Postdoctoral Fellow with a research interest in Gender and Women's Leadership. I wanted to thank you for your talk. This was very stimulating for me.

You talked a little bit about the international community and the rule and the benefits. I wanted to hear you talk a little bit more about what you think or how you think the international community can be mobilized to assist the grassroots movements.

I also wanted you to reflect, if possible, on the challenges of that type of model, because we know that that has led for example to NGO-ization sometimes of these grassroots movement in a way that has not allowed them to stay connected to the work on the ground. Where can I find these thoughts and ideas as a paper or a book is the second question. If I had to connect to your work, where would I find like?

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

There's a reference list at the back!



Marsha Hinds Myrie:

That's what I wanted to ask, could you please show me the reference list that you spoke to?

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

Well, it has some of my papers and it has some of the papers of the people that I drew on. Yeah, okay! International communities, recently I was talking to a group, we have these Atlantic Fellowships at LSC, and it's a lot of practitioners, activists, etc.

There was someone called Nicolette Naylor, I think she with Ford Foundation South Africa. In that conversation, we found something quite interesting. It may not speak exactly to the point you're making but if your point reminded me of that and about the NGO-ization.

We find that right-wing philanthropists give money to right-wing movements with no conditionalities. They can trust the right-wing movement to do the need whereas progressive philanthropists and donors etc. put a huge amount of—they do not have the trust in these organizations.

Now, obviously you can't trust every organization, but you can look at people's track record and not bind them up in all this kind of proposals and monitoring. That's when the NGO-ization comes. You have to be a very smart organization to be able to take that funding but continue to do the work that you wanted to do.

I think what happened in Bangladesh, I told you that a lot of these organizations didn't work very well, my mother's organization which I never studied while she was alive because there was no way I was going to be able to be critical if I wanted to be.

She died in 2000, and I didn't wait for her to die but when she died in 2000, I thought I'd like to see what that organized that was great organization. It turned to microfinance, because there was no funding. I think one of the things that happened with these organizations is and it's a point I made to you, and to you—I think, is that people who build movements are not good managers. So, a lot of these organizations were built by movement builders who wanted to mobilize etc. but then they had to become managers. They did not do well and the microfinance people are good managers. They know how to manage money; they're very much more professional.

So, I guess, how does one prevent the kind of projectization of? I think one is to avoid projectization. If you believe in an organization then give them go funding, and hold them accountable. I don't think there's any problems about that, but to try and ask them to go from five-year plan to five-year plan means there's no way of planning for the future or there's no security. But this business is a right-wing philanthropist, I find that very fascinating; you don't ask any questions, you just give them money and then they go and be extremely right-wing all over the place.

Dr. Andrea Paras:

So, we have time for two more questions. We're going to take them at the same time, one last online question and then one final question. [inaudible] First, the online question.

Dr. Erin Nelson:

So, the online question I'll ask is if you could expand a little bit on this idea of doxa that you talked about, and also talk a little bit about how we might be able to combat it with people at a younger age?

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

How we are able to?

Dr. Erin Nelson:

Challenge it or combat it at a younger age.

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

Well, doxa is of course from Bourdieu and it's his way of capturing the fact that there are realms of our lives that we are born into we take for granted. We just think this is the way the world is. We never question it. He sees the movement out of doxa occurs when you open up those norms and customs and traditions to discourse. It becomes open for debate, right? So, it comes out of the realm of the unquestioned, into a realm where we can discuss it. This is what these people are doing there. When you tell us, them to tell their life stories and they start to realize how many of their life stories involve so many injustices, it becomes less of a matter of doxa and more of a matter of arbitrary use of power.

The idea of doxa always seems to be associated with the global south and poorer people etc., but I remember after the fall of the Soviet Union, Alan Greensburg, the guy in charge of the U.S treasury, made a statement and I used it. He said, we thought we could go into Russia and build markets, that there was something natural about markets right there. This is doxa; this guy has an unquestioning belief in the spontaneity and naturalness of markets.

In terms of the other part of the question, how do younger people—I think younger people, are less trapped in a kind of doxa, because the world is all changing. They're so connected, but I think they are trapped in a in a desire to conform. I think these media images and these influencers and all of that, it's all about conformity—idealized images—of what it is to be a man and a woman or whatever. I think I would really encourage them to be non-conformist and to go against the tide.

Dr. Helen Hambly:

I'm Helen Hambly. I'm a Professor in the Ontario Agricultural College. I have kind of a two-part question; the first is from our perspective in Capacity Development, you know, working with individuals and organizations isn't enough. These organizations have to be networked so I was wondering whether you saw any evidence of the four organizations, for instance, in Bangladesh, actually working together to create that systemic change for gender justice? That was the first part of the question.

Then, the second one actually relates a little bit to the last point that you just made. But on a positive slant, popular education now has transformed through digital technologies. So, even narrative techniques have opportunities in the digital sphere that weren't realized in interpersonal or group communication including anonymity and avatars.

Being able to consent to participate digitally, which you wouldn't be able to do in in public, right especially in a very religious or cost-effective way. So, I was just wondering whether or not you sought any evidence of given what's been occurring in the last sort of five ten years in in South Asia, in countries like India and Bangladesh with digital technologies was actually opening up opportunities for gender justice? So, thanks!

Dr. Naila Kabeer:

On the first question, I wouldn't say that they federated, but I would say they cooperated. So, when they were huge mobilizations all these organizations got together, and they marched or they demonstrated and so on.

Very often, around issues of violence against women, that's one thing that always got people on the street, but also in campaigning for the right candidate and so on. There it was, people don't know each other. They know each other, they come from—Bangladesh is a large country, but the middle class is not that large. So, yes there was cooperation, and they learned from each other. They shared lessons.

On the digital side, I have not been aware of it being used in the way that you describe it. I mean I've been aware of it being used in terms of digital money and cash transfers and all of that stuff, but not to

and not in the countryside, much more in in urban areas, I know that Facebook and these kinds of media have been used to express protest.

We had one of the nicest, not nicest, but most inspiring demonstrations when school children started to try and demonstrate against traffic violations that is a real source of danger. I think for a long time they really held up Bangladesh, the city.

I know that, but you see one of the things that happens has happened in both India and Bangladesh is the extent to which the state is intervening in digital security laws who can say what. So, there's a lot of self-censorship. The potential I think is not being fully realized. We have increasingly severe punishments for people who say the wrong thing on social media, so yeah.

Dr. Andrea Paras:

Well, Dr. Kabeer, thank you so much for inspiring us, for joining us here today, and will you all join me in thanking Dr. Kabeer for her talk.