



Holidays 2016

Dear Gender Action Supporters and Would-be Supporters,

This year's highlight is a long-sought improvement on gender issues at the International Monetary Fund. Thirty years ago the IMF's Managing Director, Michelle Camdessus, invited me to present my take on IMF programs. I critiqued the IMF for requiring the world's poorest countries to cut public spending that hit women, who constitute the majority of the poor, hardest. At that time, my pleas to protect social spending fell on deaf ears.

Fast forward to 2014 and my publication, the "IMF & Gender: A Long Way to Go". In it I critiqued IMF gender research that focused unilaterally on employing women to stimulate economic growth without complementarily upholding women's and men's equal rights. This month the IMF's first feminist Managing Director, Christine Lagarde, combined the moral imperative of women's and men's equal rights with the economic argument of women contributing to growth, as Gender Action urged. In a milestone speech, Lagarde proclaimed that women's rights are unassailable! What's more the IMF is starting to practice what it preaches: It is beginning to promote gender equal laws, subsidized childcare, and paid parental leave for both moms and dads. The IMF is becoming the gender role model for other International Financial Institutions. Lagarde called on men who claim they are feminists to behave like feminists!

Still these are merely first steps since many IMF loan requirements continue to harm lives of poor people, especially women, through requiring subsidy reductions, public spending cutbacks and tax regimes which increase women's unpaid burden.

Other progress we can celebrate is the creation of two new World Bank task forces, one addressing Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI), the other Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Task forces are first but important steps toward moving the needle.

The SOGI task force originates from Gender Action campaigning over several years with LGBT and transgender partners worldwide to end discrimination they experienced in World Bank investments. We persuaded the Bank to establish a SOGI task force, allocate funds and hire LGBT experts, all to ensure that Bank investments do not discriminate against gay and trans folk.

The origin of the World Bank GBV task force is less glorious: Last year workers constructing a Bank-financed highway in Uganda abducted and raped young girls. Nine pregnant girls had to drop out of school. Widespread negative publicity forced the Bank to cancel the project and create a task force charged with recommending how to prevent GBV in Bank investments. This is a significant step since GBV pervades Bank infrastructure projects. My previous holiday letters reported that Gender Action fieldwork exposed that Bank-financed oil and gas pipelines caused women farmers to lose farmland to pipeline construction, pushing some of them into sex work to survive. In addition, domestic violence, unwanted pregnancies, sexually-transmitted diseases and stillbirths soared, the latter from inevitable pipeline leaks. Let's celebrate that the Bank's new GBV task force will contribute to ending these tragic gender outcomes.

Looking ahead we hope for victory in this challenging situation: This year I worked with Abimbola Oshobe, a Nigerian woman whose life was upturned when a World Bank-financed urban renewal project bulldozed her Lagos home and business without notice. Abimbola, 57 and a mother of four, grew up in, married, and established a thriving soda drink business in a Lagos slum.

Although the Bank project promised to upgrade nine Lagos slums, instead residents were evicted without consultation, warning or compensation, and left homeless in crowded, dangerous Lagos. Following eviction Abimbola slept outdoors on cartons atop rubble. Now she sleeps on an office chair. Abimbola's eviction separated her from her spouse and four children who had to drop out of school when destruction of her business swallowed her kids' school fees. The bulldozing caused a few of Abimbola's neighbors to die from malnutrition; a few evicted women to become sex workers to survive; and one mother to lose her newborn triplets after eviction caused her to suffer a mental breakdown and desertion by her husband.

But Abimbola's homelessness transformed her into an activist. She is helping other slum-dwellers, especially women. She takes rape victims including young girls to treatment centers.

This year I had the privilege to accompany Abimbola to meetings at the World Bank. She appealed for a renewed Lagos project investigation by the Bank accountability mechanism called the Inspection Panel. So far the Panel has failed Lagos' destitute evictees who continue to live as squatters. To help Abimbola and other Lagos evictees, Gender Action is continuing to pressure the Bank to provide fair compensation to the survivors.

The world increasingly abounds with many wonderful women's rights organizations. What distinguishes Gender Action is our unique role motivating taxpayer-funded development banks to uphold women's and men's equal rights in their investments.

This important work depends on your support! [Please contribute](#) by clicking genderaction.org's "Donate Here" button or mailing a check to Gender Action, 925 H Street NW, Suite 410, Washington DC 20001.

Thanks for your support and Happy Holidays!

Warm regards,

Elaine Zuckerman
President