



## ISTANBUL PRINCIPLES FOR CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

### 2 EMBODY GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY WHILE PROMOTING WOMEN AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Civil Society Organizations are effective as development actors when they promote and practise development cooperation embodying gender equity, reflecting women's concerns and experience, while supporting women's efforts to realize their individual and collective rights, participating as fully empowered actors in the development process.



Photo: Karen Women Organization

### Measuring the impact of feminist principles: Inter Pares

Inter Pares believes development involves not only the creation of wealth but the equitable distribution of that wealth, and most importantly, restructuring the social forces that generate and maintain inequality.

## CHALLENGE

Inter Pares is a feminist organization in both its politics and its structure. Internally, all full-time staff share the management of the organization, with a deep commitment to the principles of equal responsibility and equal salary, of working by consensus, and of nurturing women's leadership. Externally, Inter Pares relates to women as essential primary partners and colleagues integral to all of its work, and often supports women's autonomous organizing. The organization believes in its approach, whose value had been documented through multiple CIDA-funded evaluations; it had never, however, explicitly documented the connection between its recognized program results and its feminist values and approach.



## RESPONSE



Starting in 2009, Inter Pares undertook a two-year project to establish the influence of Inter Pares' feminist analysis and beliefs on the organization's co-management structure, methodology, and documented successes. The project documented the organization's own history, and assessed the usefulness of feminist analysis to the mandate of Inter Pares through the following questions:

- How does Inter Pares integrate its feminist analysis into its practice?
- What is the relationship between Inter Pares' internal daily feminist practice and the ways in which it works externally with counterparts?
- How does the way Inter Pares work relate to the results that have been noted by counterparts and documented in evaluations?

The project consisted of interviews with current and previous staff, collaborators from around the world, funders, and members of the board. It also included an extensive review of the institution's archives to document evolving trends. The project studied both external and internal dimensions of issues that were relevant to feminist analysis, from Inter Pares' policy on consensus-building to issues of work-life balance due to the intensive co-management structure. Other external issues included the nature of North-South collaborations and how best to navigate funding relationships in otherwise egalitarian relationships.

# LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

Because of the nature of the project, discussion and conflict were both expected and welcomed. Inter Pares took the view that friction was an integral part of the process, helping to represent all views and identify any gaps in perspectives.



Overall, the research affirmed the validity of Inter Pares' feminist approach and methodology as an asset that "has strengthened [the organization's] work on gender and women's rights, bringing an understanding of the complex and structural barriers to women's equality and the need for systemic change. ... Adopting a structural feminist analysis [also] has shaped [its] understanding of social change [generally]." The feminist practices led to "innovative and responsive programs that are flexible and dynamic, and that reflect the needs and aspirations of those with whom [Inter Pares] work[s]." One example documented in the report is the organization's Burma program, which supports locally led civil society groups in a flexible manner that adapts to the country's rapidly evolving context; a key impact is the strengthening of the Burmese women's movement, which is now a central actor in the struggle for democracy and human rights.

Several areas were flagged for continued discussion and exploration, including internal power dynamics, as well as the effectiveness of other co-management systems in comparison to the one in practice at Inter Pares.

## MAINSTREAMING/KNOWLEDGE SHARING



The report has been shared with project participants, funders, counterparts, and individuals having indicated an interest in the project (including academics and financial supporters). It is also available through the organization's website, and has been shared through a blog that focuses on democratic workplaces ([organizationunbound.org](http://organizationunbound.org)).

## NEXT STEPS

The research highlighted that an important discussion needs to occur among development organizations and funders around the worth of a "process-oriented" approach to development (such the type pursued by Inter Pares) versus the "results-oriented" paradigm, which is the mainstream.



## FURTHER INFORMATION

"Does it Work? Feminist Analysis and Practice at Inter Pares"  
<http://www.interpares.ca/en/publications/pdf/Doesitwork.pdf>