



Stanford eCorner

The Universality of Human Rights

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/225/The-Universality-of-Human-Rights>

Ramdas answers the questions, "How to approach womens' rights in other countries, without seeming an activist?"; "What are the universalities of human rights?" GFW has found that women in their respective countries are extremely good judges of what issues are most important, what risks are involved, and the best ways to address these problems without creating direct confrontation or conflict. They often fund groups of women, rather than individuals. Women's issues that are the most controversial around the world include: lesbian rights, reproductive health, abortion rights.



Transcript

It's interesting to me that in the context of particularly discussing women's rights there are so many barriers that get thrown up immediately, including the ones that say well, but you're interfering with their culture. I think that one of the frameworks that the Global Fund uses to try and understand that and to try and locate that discussion is to think about the universality of human rights which is really something that I think many different nations in many different parts of the world came together to agree on and had a broad consensus on. Yes, one has to be sensitive to and appreciate the nuances and the differences in culture but I think it is all too often that we see culture being used as an excuse for continued discrimination on the basis of race or gender or cast or ethnicity. Our experience has been that women are extraordinarily good judges of the constraints within which they take these risks. I think Afghan women are perhaps the best example of this. The Global Fund for Women had been working inside of Afghanistan and with Afghan women refugees in Pakistan from 1991, so long before we suddenly woke up to the fact that there was gender apartheid going on in a country that we paid very little attention to for many, many years. What Afghan women did in the context of the six years under the Taliban but also for years before that was to be very strategic in the battles that they chose to fight. They chose to fight battles that they felt both they could win but also battles that they thought would not put them into kind of a direct confrontation cause with sort of the powers that be, whether those were religious authorities or the government in a particular moment of time. I think we've seen that in many other instances. In Uganda, for example, the struggle against HIV/AIDS, women's groups have been incredibly sophisticated about including men in their outreach efforts, having discussions that are inclusive of men that talk about notions of sexuality, masculinity and femininity, how power is shared, what men aspire to for their daughters, broadening the discussion.

So again, I think the model in many ways is very different than the one people have come to associate with the feminist movement in the west. In many ways, I think women in developing countries are much more sophisticated about finding ways in which they can be both more inclusive and also find issues that are not as directly confrontational. That said, many of these women take huge risks and do put themselves in the line of considerable opposition, and that is particularly true for the more controversial kinds of issues; work on lesbian rights, for example, in many different parts of the world can get you thrown in prison for just saying the name, saying the word. Work on issues of reproductive health and abortion rights in places like Latin America have been very, very difficult. And so it's not as though there isn't any backlash but I think from our perspective also making grants to groups of women rather than individuals helps address that.