

with a discussion of the strategies for Canadian women seeking to advance the cause of women's human rights.

“Discourses, Dollars and Feminist Dilemmas: A UPCD Tier 2 Project on Prostitution in the Philippines”

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Funded as one of the partnership programs of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development (UPCD) program administered by the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC) provides opportunities for Canadian academics to initiate and direct a development project in their area of research expertise. The UPCD program which provides five-year funding for universities is divided into two tiers, depending on the amount of the grant awarded. For Canadian feminist scholars wanting to ameliorate the hardships faced by women abroad, the UPCD program can be a vehicle facilitating their direct involvement in making a difference in the lives of women in other countries. This paper outlines a UPCD Tier 2 project on prostitution in Angeles City, Philippines, and examines the challenges inherent in such a project: facing a discourse that revolves around alleviating poverty, and not sexual exploitation, facing dollars that are limited and constrained by strict guidelines, and facing feminist dilemmas that are numerous and fundamental. At the same time, the paper argues that the space created by, and within, the project, although small, is significant enough to warrant not only action, but optimism, in helping prostituted women in the Philippines.

The paper begins with a discussion of Canadian official development assistance (ODA) policy and the discourse around poverty alleviation. Although scholars have long pointed out that ODA is more about serving the interests of donors as opposed to recipients, resulting in the maintenance of a liberal capitalist system, we argue that the focus on class as opposed to gender as the driving force in the disbursement of aid monies becomes particularly problematic for prostitutes in Angeles City. We then move on to a specific discussion of the UPCD Tier 2 program and the role of universities and scholars in development projects. Here, we highlight the opportunities and pitfalls created by human resource development (HRD) strategies and the focus on “capacity building” over overseas partner institutions. Because of the constraints of the UPCD Tier 2 guidelines, the project is actually indirectly helping the prostituted women in the Philippines. Finally, we discuss the project and ground the discussion on feminist dilemmas of working within the system as opposed to working from outside. Are we, and the women's groups with whom we work, in danger of co-optation by the state? Given that, for example, we are working with the Philippine National Police, are we in danger of legitimizing one of the main actors to benefit from and protect the sex trade industry in the Philippines? Are we simply making the police and judges more effective in arresting and prosecuting prostitutes? We end on an optimistic note because as feminists (re)write Canadian foreign policy, we become aware of the premises underlying not only what we read as policy, but also what we know as practice in the way that women organize for change.