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*Front cover: Delegates at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995*

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Human life takes place amid a complex mesh of social and economic relationships between people which are profoundly unequal. Throughout the world, the diversity among people determines their relative power to make decisions and command resources. This collection of articles considers what diversity and difference are, why they are important for development organisations, and what the impact would be for development programmes if they took up the challenges of working with a diversity 'lens'.

Development organisations, including international legal bodies, the UN, and international financial institutions (IFIs) have – in rhetoric at least – signed up to a vision of human development in which all women, men, and children – regardless of age, class, creed, sexual orientation, caste, and so on – have their moral right to equality, dignity, and respect upheld. In this vision, diversity means recognising and valuing the positive qualities and differences that distinguish people from each other, while not shying away from challenging inequality and abuse. Critically, it means recognising difference, but also recognising our common humanity.

What is diversity?

The terminology used to discuss difference between individuals and groups is not neutral, but value-laden, and language must therefore be used carefully if it is not to entrench inequality.

Diversity is often conceptualised in two dimensions: primary diversity and secondary diversity. Primary diversity arises from characteristics that people cannot change: sex, race or ethnicity, age, physical abilities and qualities, and sexual orientation. Secondary diversity arises from characteristics that can be changed. They include people’s class, religion, nationality and place of residence, educational background, marital status, and position in the family. Obviously, these distinctions between dimensions of diversity are crude, and do not hold in every case. For example, disability is not always unchangeable: an accident may leave a person temporarily disabled.

Some primary dimensions of diversity arise from a mixture of biological characteristics which change what people can do and superficial differences which have no bearing on people’s capabilities. Adult women and men have different roles in biological reproduction, in addition to the different ‘gender roles’ which they are ascribed by society. Inequality between women and men is often explained with reference to the ‘natural’ differences between the sexes. In contrast, some primary dimensions of diversity arise from purely superficial differences. For example, people of different ‘races’ are distinguished from each other only by superficial bodily variations.
People of different races are ascribed different roles in society not because they are inherently better suited for some tasks, but because political, social, and economic systems promote the interests of one race over others.

Diversity is described using sets of terms: for example, ‘male’ and ‘female’. Sometimes there are more than two terms to describe differences: if you are describing someone in terms of their religion, many different religions exist. However, the fact that human societies are unequal and tend to favour one group over others leads to a tendency to reduce these sets of terms to a crude opposing pair. One term describes the dominant group, which is seen as the norm, and the other describes the sub-dominant group, which is seen as a deviation from the norm: for example, men or women, Christian or non-Christian, white or black, rich or poor, young or old, able-bodied or disabled.

Moving beyond ‘one-dimensional’ diversity

How has development dealt with diversity to date? Until recently, development policy and practice have tended to identify ‘beneficiaries’ using broad categories. Many grassroots development approaches continue to target ‘the community’, and ‘poor people’. From the 1970s, participatory planning methods did much to expose unequal power relations between development professionals and the communities they profess to help. However, it is all too easy to get excited about challenging one unequal relationship and, in the process, ignore others. Evidence has been accumulating for thirty years to show that ‘the community’ is not homogeneous or completely harmonious; in fact, co-operation, competition, and conflict exist side-by-side, as different people attempt to secure enough to live on.

Participatory methods have concealed much about unequal power between women and men within communities, while revealing inequality among different stakeholders in the development process. In addition, admonishments to development workers to respect communities have misfired and led to uncritical cultural relativism among many expatriate development workers: ‘the very processes that appear so inclusive and transformative may turn out to be supportive of a status quo which is highly inequitable for women’ (Cornwall 2001, 1).

Since the UN Decade for Women 1975–1985, path-breaking work has taken place to understand and address gender as an aspect of difference that affects the rights of women and of human development in general. Gendered approaches to development have challenged development organisations to meet the interests and needs of women as well as men. From birth, girl children are marked out, through their female bodies, for socialisation into ‘feminine’ attributes and activities. This difference in role is iteratively linked to markedly unequal access to decision making and resources. Methods of development planning, implementation, and impact assessment, which enable development planners to focus on meeting the interests and needs of both women and men within communities, are obviously critical. A range of gender-analysis frameworks has emerged from the experience of individuals and organisations working to promote women’s equality (see March et al. 1999).

However, the majority of gender-analysis frameworks focus on gender relations only. These are weak in relation to their ability to understand other aspects of difference which exist between human beings. Obviously, gender is not the only dimension of difference which exists between people. Each woman, man, or child possesses multiple dimensions of diversity. For example, a single human being may be female, black, Christian, middle-class, heterosexual, and HIV-positive. Some of these dimensions of diversity will place her in an inferior position, in contrast to people in the
‘opposite’ group. Other dimensions will place the same woman in a position of advantage, in relation to people in the opposite group. To make things even more complex, in some situations you may experience disadvantage based on a particular aspect of difference, while in other situations the same aspect of difference will give you the advantage.2

Challenges for development

Understanding diversity in all its complexity is very important, because, as Ranjani K. Murthy and Dorine Plantenga say in their articles in this issue, it has serious implications for activists engaged in coalition building as a means to address marginalisation and poverty. It also affects the way in which governments and non-government organisations (NGOs) work with community members. Whether development planners are focusing on ‘the community’ or ‘women’, they are assuming solidarity between individuals and groupings which have as much to divide them as they have to unite them. This insight is critical for development workers who espouse transformationary methods of empowerment, which emphasise the role of collectives in educating individuals about oppression (Freire 1974), and challenging discriminatory institutions through co-operative ways of working (see Eade and Williams 1994).

Participatory methods are currently attracting interest from international agencies, as a way of involving diverse people living in poverty in national-level plans to eradicate poverty. In the past fifteen years, new understandings of the correlation between economic want and social and political marginalisation have evolved. There is currently an unprecedented consensus on the part of a diverse range of stakeholders (from IFIs through to community-based organisations) that human development depends on the equal participation of all women and men in decisions which shape their future. Without this equal participation in government at all levels, the interests of hitherto marginalised groups will not be taken up, and poverty and inequality will be perpetuated.

Dereje Wordofa focuses his article in this collection on the process of examining patterns of diversity and deprivation for Uganda’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The process that led up to the writing of the paper promoted the participation of groups who are not normally heard in the political process, due to gender, ethnicity, and other aspects of social diversity.

What would diversity-sensitive development look like?

Taking diversity into account makes development planning much harder, because it means organisations have to move beyond generalisations about women or ethnic minorities. This could lead us along many different paths. The first possible path to follow is that of development programmes paying more attention to understanding social dynamics within groups which may lead to division and conflict, and planning for this. Some work on women’s rights has begun to take into account the challenges that this work poses to men. A typical response is that projects include plans to address and contain male retaliations and violence.

A second path is that of development work moving beyond trying to focus on one aspect of diversity. In practice, this has led to work which focuses on two dimensions: for example, gender and disability, or gender and race. Some analyses suggest that disabled women, or women in ethnic minorities, face ‘double disadvantage’, while others reject this idea because it creates a negative stereotype of a group which is
passive and has special needs. In fact, women activists are working to address the issues that arise from their positioning at the 'intersection' (Crenshaw 1991) of gender and other kinds of diversity. In her article, Ranjani K. Murthy makes suggestions of approaches to work with grassroots women.

Also in this issue, Gulshun Rehman and Aisha Gill discuss the work of Newham Asian Women's Project to meet the needs of Asian women facing domestic violence in the UK. Since the 1970s and 1980s, excluded and marginalised communities have organised at the local and grassroots levels in the UK. The aim is to provide a range of services which meet women’s gender needs and their needs as members of racial minorities, to embark on advocacy which promotes empowerment, and to lead and direct community-development initiatives designed to improve Asian women's social, political, and economic status.

In contrast, Cindy Lewis of Mobility International USA focuses on the work of women living with disabilities in developing-country contexts. Her article highlights the challenges faced by women with disabilities to their marginalisation from international analyses and debates on the role of microfinance services in empowering women and alleviating poverty. Cindy Lewis's article illustrates that people do not experience each dimension of difference separately. Instead, the effects of all the dimensions combine. This point has also been made by feminist activists, and women who distance themselves from the word ‘feminist’, from non-Western contexts. “Race” does not simply make the experience of women’s subordination greater. It qualitatively changes the nature of that subordination’ (Maynard 1994, 13).

Race, ethnicity, and diversity

Gender and development research and activism has been much criticised for being dominated by white Western women, and a white Western-biased notion of feminism, which ignores the analyses and struggles of non-Western women: ‘A recurrent criticism of white feminism from its inception ... is that white women feminists have considered their experience of womanhood in their culture as the prototypic female experience and have used it to define feminism’ (Oyewumi 2001, 1). Feminism, which is often alleged to be a white Western invention, in fact has roots in other areas of the world – for example, there was a thriving women's movement in India before the colonial period. However, race-based inequality has made non-Western feminisms ‘subordinate’, in the sense that they have been largely disregarded by the international community.

Gender and development has its beginnings in the mid-1970s, when data presented by (predominantly Western) researchers in international development institutions confirmed that development interventions were planned without looking at the reality of life for women in developing countries. Consequently, development was worsening the economic, political, and social situation of women. Baseline analysis and project planning should start from an accurate analysis of women’s economic, political, and social roles, in all their variety and difference, and support and strengthen these roles to ensure outcomes that would benefit women as well as men.

However, the ‘discovery’ of the negative impact of development on women in the 1970s came long after women in developing countries themselves had started to protest. The fact that messages about the negative impact of development on women were only ‘heard’ in development agencies when they had been taken up and promoted by white Western women speaks volumes about the
extent to which those analyses challenged development organisations to examine their own role in perpetuating poverty and marginalisation. Rather than being part of the solution, most development agencies were part of the problem. It was much more comfortable to 'mainstream gender', in the sense of replacing gender-blind analyses with an analysis which blamed men and gender relations for all the issues challenging women in developing countries.

Southern writers and activists rejected, first, the idea that gender-related discrimination was more important than other dimensions of difference, and second, the idea that each form of discrimination can be understood in isolation from the others. In fact, women’s growing poverty and marginalisation from decision making is not a result of male domination of women, pure and simple. Instead, it results from gender-based discrimination as it plays out in the home, in markets (through global patterns of economic inequality), and in political relations (including post-colonial international relations).

In her article, Everjoice Win of ActionAid International discusses the evolution of the women’s movement in Zimbabwe, and the challenges associated with building a genuine and sustainable coalition between many different interest groups. Everjoice Win highlights the fact that what she calls ‘development-speak’ has blurred political differences between individuals and organisations which exist on grounds of class, race, rural or urban base, and so on. If the differences between parts of the women’s movement can be named and debated, there is hope that women’s organisations can coalesce around shared aims.

**Distinguishing women’s interests from gender interests**

Everjoice Win’s article gives a good example of what happens when women’s interests are confused with women’s gender interests (Molyneux 1985). Maxine Molyneux originally developed the concept of gender interests to describe the interests that women share due to their biological sex and gender identity in a particular society. She made it clear in her original discussion that particular women possess interests according to class, age, caste, and so on, in addition to their gender interests. These interests can actually clash with each other. The economist Nancy Folbre makes the same point in an analysis of what she calls the ‘structures of constraint’ – that is, the social structures which shape the choices of different social groups. Individuals are members of many different groups: ‘All ... individuals ... make decisions shaped by divided loyalties as well as competing interests. They are forced to think about how much they care about the welfare of their nation, their race, their class, their gender, their age group, as well as general principles of justice and fair play’ (Folbre 1994, 69).

Unfortunately, most who use the concept of ‘gender needs’ (part of a gender planning framework which Caroline Moser subsequently derived from Molyneux’s work in 1993) do not focus on the implications of this distinction between gender interests and women’s interests. Nancy Folbre’s work is not aimed at development practitioners, and few have encountered her work. But the point that both these writers make – that women’s interests extend far beyond the gender interests which they share with other women – has significant implications for development organisations which promote collective ways of working among women, and aim to support women to challenge gender inequality. Individual women are likely to identify with other women only on
specific issues. As members of ethnic groups, as members of a particular generation, or as people living in poverty, women will have many interests which are distinct from those of other women. Depending on their context, they may feel that interests they share with their menfolk should be prioritised over their gender interests.

Collective versus individual rights

One month before the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001, the long-awaited UN World Conference Against Racism, Race Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance took place in Durban, South Africa. The conference called for development organisations to address inequality arising from race and ethnicity, and challenged them to adopt an intersectional analysis that relates race inequality to other forms of inequality. Since the conference, the global ‘war on terror’ and terrorist actions in various locations have spawned renewed assertions of political, cultural, and religious differences. These are challenging universal notions of human rights, and notions of multiculturalism and peaceful co-existence are under fire.

In their article, Koos Kingma and Liesbeth van der Hoogte report on the process and findings of a workshop in Latin America which focused on diversity and development work with indigenous women. They focus in particular on the tensions between collective and individual rights. They conclude that ‘Indigenous women should be supported in this challenge, to defend and respect their rights and so fight the twin challenges of cultural relativism on the part of development agencies, and growing fundamentalism within their communities’ (this issue, 55). Koos Kingma and Liesbeth van der Hoogte work for Novib, which, as a member of the Oxfam International family of international development NGOs, supports community-development work which addresses poverty and suffering from a rights-based perspective. It identifies the right to equality on the basis of gender and diversity as a basic human right.

Practising as we preach: diversity in organisations

The rewards of considering diversity in programme design and implementation would be a much-improved impact on poverty and social marginalisation. But there are also other reasons for development organisations to address diversity. In her article, Bimla Ojelay-Surtees of Oxfam GB distinguishes rationales for development organisations to address diversity from an organisational development perspective. First come arguments based on justice and equality, and a commitment to non-discrimination. Obviously, organisations need to comply with national legislation on equal opportunities and non-discrimination, where this exists. There is also a moral onus on organisations which promote social change in the outside world to ensure that their own houses are in order.

In addition, current research indicates that there is a compelling business case to be made for both non-profit and commercial organisations to ensure that their workforce reflects the social diversity of the localities in which they operate. Ensuring that an organisation attracts diverse job applicants means a bigger pool of talented people to choose from. In addition, diversity in the workforce makes for successful organisations, because it creates policies and strategies out of the ideas of a workforce which has a range of different experiences and skills. This leads to creative thinking. Of course, this rationale links back to the issue of improving the impact of development programmes on poverty and marginalisation – diversity in the workforce is essential, if high quality development work is to be done with marginalised and minority groups.
Dorine Plantenga, who has worked on gender training for many years, has contributed an article here which draws on lessons learned in training sessions to suggest ways of promoting a truly multicultural environment, which respects the equal rights and talents of all staff. Just as diversity divides the communities in which development organisations work, it divides colleagues working for these organisations. Research into institutions and organisational transformation has shown that every organisation has an underlying culture which reflects power relations in surrounding society. Organisational transformation depends upon realising this, and challenging it in every way possible.

Transforming the culture is linked closely to transforming the profile of the workforce, since people outside the dominant group will not be comfortable working for an organisation which does not reflect their experience and represent their interests, and the organisation will not value the contribution they can make. Hence, development organisations need to consciously challenge discrimination on grounds of race and sex (and other forms of prejudice) in their own organisations. Only by doing this will they ensure that their development programmes further the rights of marginalised people in developing countries.

Challenges for the future

The small number of articles in this collection can only scratch the surface of this vast subject. Yet beginning to understand diversity is essential for our work. Addressing social and political marginalisation requires a mature and complex understanding of the factors that marginalise particular individuals and groups. Improving development policy and practice means understanding inequality in a complex way, and developing ways of working which acknowledge difference, rather than suppressing it. This has serious implications for the methods we use in our work with communities. It also means practising as we preach, by transforming our own organisational cultures. This entails confronting issues of power and inequality, acknowledging racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination, and making development organisations a comfortable place to be for all.

The concept of diversity should encompass acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognising our individual differences. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other, moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

Notes

1 Some frameworks can be adjusted to bring other aspects of diversity into focus, however — for example, the Gender Analysis Matrix (Parker 1993).
2 ‘Positive action’ approaches to recruiting marginalised groups into organisations are an example of a policy which gives an advantage to a previously disadvantaged group. The end goal here, of course, is equal opportunity and equal representation.
3 ‘Structures of constraint’ are defined by Nancy Folbre as: ‘sets of asset distributions, rules, norms, and preferences that empower given social groups. These structures locate certain boundaries of choice, but do not assign individuals to a single position based on ownership of productive assets. People occupy multiple, often contradictory positions, because they belong to multiple groups.’ (1994, 51).
4 Other aspects of diversity have been addressed in past collections, and it is planned to explore them more in future.
References


Organisational strategy in India and diverse identities of women: bridging the gap

Ranjani K. Murthy

Some differences among Indian women are well known—for example, those based on class, ethnicity, caste, and religion. There is also a range of other differences—arising from marital status, position within the family, the sex of a woman’s children, whether she has a disability—which are less widely noted. There is little written about the challenges posed by differences among Indian women for organising women at the grassroots. Various reasons exist for this. This article is a small effort to bridge the gap in the literature, in the hope that more will follow on this theme.

Many have pointed out how caste, class, and gender interweave in India, shaping the work women can do, the resources they can access, and the power they have in society (for example, Kannabiran 1996). These differences place groups of women in opposition to other groups. For example, Dalit women1 and labouring class women (not all labouring class women are Dalits, and vice versa), whose households have had land legally allotted to them by the government but do not as yet possess the land, may clash with upper-caste landed women, whose households have encroached on the land in question. The payment of minimum or equal wages is another point of contestation between women from different classes and castes. In these issues, the interests of women from the landed upper castes are similar to the men in their castes, and opposed to Dalit and labouring women.

Religion is another aspect of diversity which creates differences among women. How these differences play out is a highly complex issue, and cannot be generalised. A specific example comes from the conflicts in interest between women from Muslim and Hindu communities. Some of these conflicts arise out of the occupational differences between Muslims and Hindus: a greater proportion of Muslims than Hindus are engaged in trading occupations. At times, this gives rise to conflict over the terms of trade: in particular, regarding profit margins, the timing of payments, and so on. Often, the traders are men, while the sex of the sellers varies according to the trade. In conflicts over trade, women tend to align with their husbands, rather than with the other women. At community level, conflicts related to religion have arisen over the last 15 years as a result of the rise of right-wing Hindu movements in India. For example, the far right has used accusations that Muslims have built mosques by destroying Hindu temples to inflame communal conflicts. Although Muslim women have been raped and hurt in such conflicts, some Hindu women have aligned themselves with right-
wing Hindu forces, and at times have even perpetrated violence.

Conflicts between tribal and non-tribal women are not uncommon. Tribal communities often reside in separate locations from non-tribal communities. However, the traders, moneylenders, and forest guards who operate in tribal areas are mainly men from non-tribal communities. When conflicts arise between them and tribal people, women align with their own men, rather than across the tribal/non-tribal divide.

Moving beyond the issues of identity that are relatively well known, two key aspects of diversity among women are marital status, and their position in the family. Those in more powerful positions in the family often perpetrate abuses against less powerful women, carrying and perpetuating the ideas and practices of the patriarchal system in which they live.

While there has been some analysis of the status of widows in India compared with married women, there has been much less research on the comparative status of married women, deserted women, divorced women, and women who have been forced for economic or social reasons to remain unmarried. Depending on their position in the extended family, women have different amounts of access to power, and are allocated different work.

Most single women have a low social status outside the family. If they head a nuclear family, they obviously have considerable status within that family. However, they may occupy a low status in their extended family. Widows and deserted and divorced women often come into conflict with the marital family over rights to their late or ex-husband’s property. In these situations many mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law will support their male relatives.

Mothers have a higher status than daughters; mothers-in-law have a higher status than daughters-in-law in the early years of marriage; and husbands’ sisters have a higher status than their brothers’ wives. Mothers of sons have more status, and therefore more power, than mothers of daughters. Interests of mothers and daughters, and mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, often differ over the younger women’s freedom to go outside the house and interact socially. Other clashes can occur over the division of domestic work, over family size, and even over the amount of dowry. The interests of wives in the relatively small number of polygamous marriages very often clash. The first wife has property rights, but the second does not. One wife may be favoured by the husband over the other wife because of her beauty, the fact that her mother-in-law likes her personality, or the fact that she has borne sons.

As suggested above, age cross-cuts gender identity and position in the family and renders younger women open to abuse. Evidence shows that young women between the ages of 21 and 25 are less represented in self-help groups than women in the age group 26 to 55 (Murthy, Raju, and Kamath 2002; IFAD and TNCDW 1999). This is partly because younger women may be pregnant or looking after young children, without older children to call upon to assist them, as older women have. In some cases, it can also be because mothers-in-law do not allow their daughters-in-law to join such groups. In one village in Gorakhpur district, Uttar Pradesh, I asked a mother-in-law why her daughter-in-law was not in the group. She replied, ‘What is the need for her to join, when I am in the group? Somebody has to be there to cook in the house when I attend meetings and training programmes’. Government and NGO strategies on gender that focus only on relations between women and men are inadequate to explain or address this.

The next section briefly maps the Indian context regarding the development approaches of the State and of NGOs. I then critique the dominant approach – self-help groups focusing on savings and microcredit – from a diversity perspective.
The context: government and NGO responses to gender issues in India

The State
The focus of the Indian government, over decades, has been on the development of economically poor sections of the population, and on Dalit and tribal peoples. In the initial years after independence, the government also promoted several welfare programmes for the development of women, in particular maternal and child health programmes.

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women of 2001 observes that ‘from the fifth Five-year Plan (1974 to 1978), there has been a marked shift in the approach to women’s issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognised as the central issue in determining the status of women’ (Government of India 2001, 1). Mainstreaming a gender perspective into women’s development within policies, programmes, and systems is one of the policy prescriptions for the empowerment of women. This prescription is to be put into operation through legal reform, setting quotas for women in decision making (including in local government); through sensitisation of leaders and the general public to gender issues; and through economic and social programmes to address the specific needs of women relating to gender inequality.

Actions that have been taken to put the policy into practice include the setting up of national and state councils, which have a responsibility to oversee the policy, and the strengthening of national and state commissions, social-welfare boards, and national and state resource centres for women. The policy states that ‘women will be helped by government through its programme to organise and strengthen them into self-help groups at the anganwadi/village/town level. The women’s groups will be helped to institutionalise themselves into registered societies, and to federate at the panchayat/municipal level’ (ibid., 11).

These self-help groups have been formed, in the main, around savings and credit, with a focus on poor women. Typically, they later branch off into other types of interventions. The older groups, which were formed in the late 1980s and 1990s under the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas scheme, have now come under the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) scheme, and are essentially savings and credit self-help groups. Since 2003, 1.47m thrift and credit self-help groups have been formed under the SGSY scheme, and perhaps an equal number under other government programmes, with the majority focusing exclusively on poor women.

In terms of diversity, there are quotas for Dalit and tribal groups, and, recently quotas have been set up for women who head households, and disabled women. It is rare for quotas to be set for women from minority communities, elderly women, and adolescent girls. The World Bank is supporting the Rural Women’s Development and Empowerment Project in six states of India. One of the key strategies is to strengthen poor women’s thrift and savings groups (see World Bank 1997). While men’s savings and credit groups have also been formed under various government and World Bank schemes, they are fewer in number; groups consisting mainly of men tend to focus on community forestry and watershed issues. Overall, the numbers involved in these groups are fewer than the numbers of women involved in savings and credit self-help groups.

NGOs
Like the government, most Indian NGOs have focused on economic development with people in poverty, including Dalits and tribal people. Since the 1990s, many NGOs in India have formulated their own gender policies; partly due to pressure from donor agencies. Gender policies typically outline how the organisations will
further gender equity in the communities in which they work, as well as within their own organisations.

From the beginning, NGOs tended to adopt an approach to development that emphasised collective action. In the 1970s and early 1980s, popular approaches were to organise large groups of poor people, both men and women. These were called village *sangams*, or village development committees. In some cases, landless labourers were formed separately into unions. Towards the late 1980s, these large bodies were split up into small groups, as working with women and microcredit-based self-help groups became popular. Men tended either to be excluded from community-based organising, or to be relegated to organisations concerned with specific sectors that were stereotyped as male preserves, such as watershed development, agriculture, and forest protection. Meanwhile, self-help groups focusing on microcredit exclusively recruited women (see IWID 2003). By the late 1990s, the resources at the command of the women’s self-help groups had increased many times, and often overtaken the resources of the non-credit sectoral groups.

A critique of savings and microcredit from a diversity perspective

While both the Indian government and NGOs now widely espouse a commitment to women’s empowerment, the strategies that they have adopted have been largely influenced by the anti-poverty approach to working with women that emerged as part of the international efforts to integrate women into development during the 1970s and 1980s. This approach tends to conflate gender inequality with women’s poverty (Jackson 1995). In recent years, savings and credit self-help groups, which emphasise financial viability as their key aim, seem to have become almost the only way of organising poor women in both urban and rural areas of India. However, the impact of savings and microcredit on women’s empowerment is questionable, as has often been pointed out. The arguments will not be repeated here (see UNDP 2002), as my main concern is to understand how diversity among women affects savings and credit groups. First, non-poor women who may be oppressed in their lives are left out of this agenda. Second, these programmes conceptualise gender relations too narrowly, as differences between women and men. In fact, as we have seen from the earlier analysis of differences between women in India, gender identity and gender power relations affect relationships between women, as well as those between women and men.

A main emphasis on savings and microcredit within both government and NGO sectors has resulted in a situation where it is poor women who now bear the major burden of alleviating the poverty of their households. There has been no major change in the intra-household division of responsibility for domestic work and childcare (at best, men help out during group meetings). There seems to be little recognition of the gender-specific needs of men, or the role that men could play in furthering poverty alleviation or gender equality. In addition to increasing the work burden of poor women, and exposing them to the risk of male violence caused by changes to the gender division of labour outside the house, which threatens men’s status as heads of households, this limited strategy for development is founded on an assumption of unity among women.

Diversity among women limits their capacity to use savings and credit groups to alleviate poverty. Savings and credit groups tend to draw their members from a narrow target group of relatively poor women, who can be expected to repay, and who will not place the financial viability of the group in jeopardy. As a result, the savings and credit operations of many community
organisations have led to the exclusion or under-representation of elderly poor women, disabled women, single women, and landless labourers, who are typically extremely poor and not in a position to save or to repay their loans (IFAD and TNCDW 1999, Murthy, Raju, and Kamath 2002). Other groups which are excluded are migrant women, who leave the village during lean agricultural seasons, and hence cannot save regularly, women who have recently come to live in the village and who are not yet trusted by the long term residents, and unmarried girls who are seen as likely to leave the village on marriage. For example, until an evaluation mission pointed out this injustice in 1999, the Mahalir Thittam programme of the government of Tamil Nadu had a rule that only married women could join the programme, as unmarried girls might join and subsequently leave the group (IFAD and TCNDW 1999).

Poverty alleviation for women from socially subordinate groups depends on strategies which address marginalisation. For example, I have had discussions with women in single-sex self-help groups formed by a Tamil Nadu-based NGO. These discussions revealed that only one of the 60 self-help groups, a group which consists of female landless labourers, has taken up the issue of equal wages for women and men. The reason other groups have not taken up this issue is because there is diversity among women members. Some come from landless households, where wages are a critical issue, but others come from small-farming households. They are often the leaders of the groups and it is in their interests to keep wage levels low. Similarly, the issue of small-farming households encroaching on land which has been recently allocated to Dalits, tribal peoples, and other landless people is rarely addressed in the self-help groups, because women from small-farming households are members of the groups. Land encroachment by upper-caste landlords (male farmers with large land holdings, whose wives are not in the groups) is acted on more often.

Ensuring that there is equal representation of women from different groups, therefore, does not lead to the empowerment of women from the less powerful groups. Given the strong Dalit lobby which exists in the Indian parliament, as well as in civil society, Dalit women are often proportionately represented in self-help groups. This does not mean, however, that mixed groups of Dalits and non-Dalits take up the issues of discrimination and abuse of Dalits, for example, discrimination over access to water and pathways (Murthy, Raju, and Kamath 1999). In fact, discrimination continues to operate in subtle ways within the groups themselves. For example, under a programme in Tamil Nadu run as a collaboration between the government and an NGO, members of women’s groups have to wear similarly coloured and designed saris for federation meetings. In one intervention, diversity among women had led to non-Dalit women leaving their villages in their own saris, changing into the group’s ‘uniform’ sari before the federation meeting, drinking tea with their Dalit colleagues, and then changing clothes again and bathing to get rid of the pollution of rubbing shoulders with Dalit women (personal observation, Tamil Nadu, 2001). Some of the women who do this believe it is appropriate, while others believe it is wrong, but are afraid of reprisals from their community or their husbands if they do not comply.

Some women behave in ways that support and perpetuate patriarchy. An example I have encountered in Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka concerns efforts to abolish the practice of dowry. Here, the interests of women who have only (or mostly) daughters clash with the interests of women who have only (or mostly) sons. Despite the growth of women’s self-help groups, the practice of dowry has spread into communities in which it did not exist in the
past. However, at the same time, the incidence of wife beating had decreased in communities with self-help groups (Murthy and Govind 2004). When we asked why the groups have been more effective in addressing wife beating than they had been in addressing dowry, it was pointed out to us that only women who have mostly daughters agree that dowry should be combated, so the group does not address the issue.

Another example is a case study from Andhra Pradesh of a microfinance programme run by an NGO. There was a clash of interests between a woman member, who had recently been widowed, and her sister-in-law (also poor). The dispute concerned who was eligible to receive compensation from a life insurance company, since the man who had died had been insured through the programme. Similarly, in another district of the same state, some widows reported to me that they had clashed with male and female members of their late husbands' families over rights to property.

Conclusion: strategies for responding to diversity

While different positions in the family and different identities outside it do cause conflict among women, there is very little debate on diversity in organisations seeking to promote women's rights, because such differences and conflicts are seen as a betrayal of the feminist cause. Yet, in this article, I have argued that diversity needs to be recognised, debated, and addressed in community organisations, if programmes are to meet their goals of poverty alleviation and the empowerment of subordinate categories of women.

Gender training and capacity building given to women-only self-help groups tend to be inadequate to address issues of diversity within the groups, and the need to resolve conflict arising from diversity. In the case of the group mentioned above who could not advance on the issue of dowry, the gender training the members had did not help them move forwards because it had focused exclusively on women as victims of patriarchy, and had not taken into account women's roles as carriers of patriarchal ideas and beliefs. In another case, a women's federation formed by an NGO in Tamil Nadu faced a difficult issue when the group leader refused to consider the possibility that her son could have abused another group member's daughter. Bearing in mind that the group had been working to end violence in that village, the group members wanted her to resign from the group. The capacity-building programme they had received from the NGO had not brought home the issue of violence perpetrated by poor male members on women, in the sense that it had not equipped group members to respond in such a situation.

One organisational strategy to address these issues is to ensure that women living in a particular community have access to programmes which address gender-related poverty concerns, and other gender issues experienced by both poor and non-poor women. Sometimes, grassroots organisations may be required to offer such programmes; this strategy has been adopted by the Nagarike Seva Trust (NST), supported by Novib Oxfam Netherlands, in southern Karnataka. Self-help groups for poor women have been formed to address women's economic poverty, and parallel groups focus on broader sets of women's rights concerns; in particular, domestic violence, and reproductive rights. While this strategy has largely worked, not all poor women have opted to join the groups addressing women's rights, as they do not have time to attend meetings of both (NST 2003). The question may be asked: 'Why not bring the better-off women into credit-based self-help groups?'; but experience has shown that they tend to corner the loans!

Another response to diversity among poor women is to develop strategies to
enable different groups of women to join savings and credit groups. This can be done by modifying the rules, so as to allow women to join who cannot save at all, or who can save only small amounts. If this is done carefully and in moderation, it will not compromise the viability of the scheme. Flexible savings options, with the minimum amount being fixed to suit the needs of the very poor, and provision of additional savings by the relatively better-off, have been tried by some NGOs.

A strategy which respects the different needs and interests of women of different ages has been developed by Wishwa Women’s Service Society (WWSS) in southern Tamil Nadu, which is one of the partners of the UK-based organisation Womankind Worldwide. WWSS has promoted shops, often with a licence from the government, for supplying food grains, oil, and sugar. The shops generate enough profit to enable all the women to save. The older women ensure that the rations are distributed properly, while the middle-aged women travel to purchase rations, handle weights, and manage accounts (they also have a higher literacy level, on average, than the older women). In the process, older women – who are often marginalised from projects focusing on livelihoods and gender issues – are included in the programme.

Yet another approach that takes into account diversity among women on the basis of marital status, caste, and disability comes from the former South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme of UNDP, in Andhra Pradesh, India. In the Kurnool district of this state, separate organisations for single women were formed under this programme at Mandal level, to address their specific needs.9 These women continued to be members of self-help groups in their village which consisted mainly of married women. In the Mahboobnagar district of the same state, separate groups of Dalit and disabled women were formed at Mandal level, with equal representation of Dalit women and disabled women at leadership level (Murthy, Raju, and Kamath, with SAPAP team, 2002).

Finally, there is a need for analysis, training, and programme strategies in these organisations to raise awareness of diversity issues between women, and encourage people to address them. For example, during programme formulation, we need to analyse the diversities among women and identify their implications for poverty reduction and women’s empowerment. In gender training, we could use role-plays and case studies that explore situations in which women are seen to be complicit in actions which harm another woman’s interests. We need to be aware that women are not only victims of patriarchy, but they perpetuate patriarchy and subordinate other women.

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Notes

1 The term Dalit refers to oppressed
classes. Hindu Dalits come under the Scheduled List of the Indian government, and are referred to as ‘scheduled castes’.

2 The term ‘tribal’ refers to indigenous people. Those tribal communities who come under the Scheduled List of the government are referred as the ‘scheduled tribes’. There are some tribal communities who do not as yet figure in this list.


4 Anganwadi centres are childcare and nutrition centers for children under five. Normally, each village with over 60 children has an anganwadi center. Gram panchayat refers to the lowest level of local self-governance. It usually covers several villages.

5 See http://rural.nic.in/annual0203/chap-5.pdf

6 Community forestry groups have mainly been formed by the government under the Joint Forest Management scheme, with the objective of protecting the forest. Some groups have also emerged through the initiative of the communities themselves, and a few, initiated by the British, have survived from colonial times (Agarwal 2001). Watershed committees have been promoted by the government as part of its watershed development programme, with the objective of promoting people’s participation in planning, implementing, and monitoring the programme. In 2001, there were 36,000 Joint Forest Management groups, and a few thousand community forestry groups.

7 Microcredit programmes often recognise the differences between men and women, but not always the power relations between men and women. NGO efforts tend to recognise power dimensions more than government programmes do, but much depends on the gender sensitivity of the NGO leadership.

8 As women start bringing money into the household, there is often greater acceptance of the changes in the division of labour outside the household (Murthy, Raju, and Kamath 2002). However, this acceptance is at best unreliable, with a risk of male backlash when women act against social norms.

9 Mandal is the second level of local self-governance in Andhra Pradesh (it does not exist in all states).

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International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Tamil Nadu Corporation for the Development of


When sharing female identity is not enough: coalition building in the midst of political polarisation in Zimbabwe

Everjoice J. Win

This article examines diversity in the women's movement in Zimbabwe, focusing on the Women's Coalition, which was set up in 1999. It traces the development of the women's movement in relation to political developments in Zimbabwe, and highlights how the depoliticised language of development can obscure inequality between women, as well as between women and men, ethnic groups, and rural and urban people. The Women's Coalition emerged from an awareness that coalition building is necessary if civil society is to be a strong political force. But diversity of values and core beliefs must be acknowledged if coalitions are to operate effectively, and we must understand coalitions as political institutions which face internal and external challenges. How well a coalition navigates this political terrain influences its survival.

Since Zimbabwe's attainment of political independence in 1980, the women's movement of Zimbabwe has grown quantitatively and qualitatively. From a mere handful of small, local women's clubs focusing on the welfare needs of women, the movement now comprises a more diverse spectrum. Organisations today range from small clubs, co-operatives, and faith-based mothers' unions, to trade unions, professional groups, women's rights NGOs, and issue-based social movements of various kinds. Women in the movement differ in relation to age, marital status, religion, race, the issues on which our organisations focus, and our spheres of operation (rural or urban locations, national, community, or household-level work).

The last three to five years have seen major changes in the political situation in Zimbabwe. The emergence of specific movements aiming to overhaul Zimbabwe's constitution and the appearance of visible political opposition have been two important markers in this shift. Zimbabwe is currently a polarised nation, divided along party political lines – the ruling party versus the opposition. Any attempt by groups in civil society to raise issues such as human rights violations are understood (by government in most cases, the opposition itself in some, and even donors and the media) in relation to this polarisation. One is perceived as supporting one party and condemning the other.

In this article, I ask if the Zimbabwean women's movement can rise above the challenges of the current context, and coalesce once more around shared interests, with our sense of these interests made stronger by an awareness of the differences between us. In the past we relied on a simple assumption that as women, we share our entire identity. By analysing the struggles within the women's movement in Zimbabwe over the last three to five years, I argue that sharing a female identity is definitely not enough to build or sustain an effective coalition. How can we manage diversity and difference among us, particularly if we have different
values and core principles? How can we maintain a level of cohesion, but at the same time address the real political issues at stake for Zimbabwean women? And what is the price to be paid for confronting diversity?

**Mapping civil society since 1979**

This section gives some brief information about the political context in which coalitions and networks of women were formed and have attempted to operate in Zimbabwe. It is important to have this understanding at the back of our minds as we examine the challenges facing the women’s movement as it tries to build common platforms, particularly in the present context.

Kagoro (2003) has characterised the growth and development of civil society in Zimbabwe since 1979 as being divided into five distinct phases. He characterises the *first phase*, from 1979 to 1981, as a period dominated by welfare-oriented organisations. These mainly focused on meeting the practical needs of constituencies, which included poor black women in rural and urban areas. The *second phase*, from 1981 to 1986, continued similar activities under a new political dispensation. The post-liberation government attempted to rally the nation around its own ‘project’ of development. The new government focused on issues of mass appeal to the peasantry and working class, and used the language of transformation (Shivji 1991). Loosely translated, development was defined as the delivery of healthcare and education, road construction, the provision of water and sanitation, and increased productivity in agriculture. In short, development was seen as the delivery of visible products to the people.

In this era, the women’s movement grew. No tension seemed to exist between the goals of the government and the women’s movement. The movement was mobilised to support and deliver development: within the poor rural areas, it was the women’s organisations that got women together in income-generating projects, microcredit schemes, primary healthcare projects, adult literacy classes, and (in a few cases) legal literacy programmes. In the early 1980s, the women’s movement adopted positions similar to many other development organisations of the day, which can be characterised as: complementing government efforts; working only on development; working hand in hand; and not against the government. As Sachikonye notes, there was popular consent for the national development agenda. However, there was also a distinctive coercive element. In political terms, this translated into strong controls over emerging citizen formations such as the labour, student, and women’s movements (Sachikonye 1995).

Most civil-society organisations deliberately framed their demands through a non-combative, non-political discourse. Here, the women’s movement stood out. Language such as ‘we are here to enhance development for the family, not just for women’; ‘development is for everyone’; ‘gender is about men and women’, dominated popular discourse. This was the language of ‘gender and development’, which, with its non-threatening and depoliticised messages, provided the perfect language for the Zimbabwe context. Thus, it was not surprising that for many years, the government machinery responsible for women’s affairs organised activities around International Women’s Day.

There were, of course, a few groups in civil society which challenged ideas of national development that would benefit all. Among these were early feminist groups, such as the Women’s Action Group (WAG). WAG was formed in direct response to State-organised violations of women’s rights. In 1983, the government of Zimbabwe had launched Operation Clean Up, arresting thousands of women accused of prostitution. The idea behind this campaign was to
rid society of what the government saw as undesirable elements – that is, single or unmarried women – from the streets of urban areas. WAG challenged the government on this blatant violation of women’s rights.

Kagoro identifies the third phase of the development of civil society as occurring between 1987 and 1990. Civil society organisations increasingly focused on human rights, the law, and environmentally sustainable development. This was in response to the excesses of the now entrenched ruling party, which had severely crushed dissent, especially in the southern region of the country, in the mid-1980s. The Unity Accord of 1987 effectively silenced any opposition to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) party – now called ZANU Patriotic Front. In 1987, the government introduced the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act Number 7. This amendment created an Executive Presidency with an unlimited term of office, and marked a fundamental shift from the constitutional model adopted in the Lancaster House Conference in 1979, after the national liberation struggle.\(^1\) Power was shifted significantly towards the executive, and the legislature and the judiciary were effectively marginalised (Makumbe and Campagnon 2000). It was within this context that civil society’s critique of state authoritarianism strengthened.

The fourth phase identified by Kagoro, (1991–94), was the era of economic structural adjustment. Zimbabwe adopted its Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991. As much as the government stridently claimed that ESAP was home-grown, there was never any doubt in people’s minds that this was an agenda driven by the IMF and the World Bank. A new breed of civil society organisation emerged in response, focusing on economic policy. ESAP exacerbated the plight of many poor communities, particularly women, and thereby exposed the multi-faceted fractures in social relations and structures in Zimbabwe. The introduction of ESAP coincided with a number of defining events at national and regional level, including the end of apartheid in South Africa, and the fall of the dictatorships in Zambia and Malawi. These events created conditions conducive to political liberalisation in Zimbabwe. This in turn led to a rapid increase in advocacy on questions of poverty, participation, and governance. This phase saw questioning of the basis of power in Zimbabwean society, and the start of a protracted debate about democratisation.

In the women’s movement, more feminist groups were set up. The internationally renowned Musasa Project for example, was formed in the early 1990s and focused on violence against women, a subject which directly opposed patriarchal power and challenged the State to protect the rights of women. The Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN) and the Women and AIDS Support Network (the first and presently the only group focusing specifically on women’s rights and HIV/AIDS), were also formed at this time.

Kagoro calls the current phase (from 1995), the era of constitutionalism: focusing on issues of governance, corruption, democratisation, electoral processes, and constitutional change. Political events in the country have affected the apparent unity of the women’s movement, and have brought into sharp focus the need to go beyond female identity as the ‘lowest common denominator’ uniting factor between individuals and organisations in the movement.

Rampant human-rights violations against women are taking place. State agents are largely responsible for these. How can the women’s movement respond to the fact that women’s human rights have taken a severe knock, and most of the gains made by women in Zimbabwe in the 1980s have been lost? The movement is being forced to confront and deal with the critical questions of the day. An important issue here is the
relationship of the women's movement to the State. The apparent unity in the women’s movement has now been exposed as an illusion.

**Coalitions and networks: diversity in misery?**

Since the late 1980s, the Zimbabwean women’s movement has attempted to build and work in coalitions and networks. This way of working emerged out of the belief that together we would make a bigger difference. Our coalitions and networks were based on notions of solidarity, mutual support, and information sharing. ‘Coalitions and alliances bolster advocacy by bringing together the strength and resources of diverse groups to create a more powerful voice for change’ (Veneklasen and Miller 2002). Until recently, very few divisive issues were apparent. Diversity was evident around our personal identities, but political or ideological differences were concealed by the language of gender and development, with its depoliticised messages associated with national development, such as, ‘women are here to complement the efforts of the government’; ‘everyone is a stakeholder’; ‘women must be given their rights because it is good for development’. This kind of discourse has tended to mask the huge ideological divides that lie beneath debates on national (economic) development policy and the rights of women. It also masks differences between women, which arise as a result of our different positioning in society in relation to aspects of our personal identity, as mentioned in the opening paragraph.

**From Independence to the early 1990s**

Looking back at the period from Independence in 1980 to the early 1990s, it is clear that the discourse of national development enabled the women’s movement to mobilise collectively around the ‘project’ of the moment. State tolerance and co-optation of civic voices ensured that there was very little open space or opportunity for dissent or debate.

Several scholars have noted how the ruling party had previously systematically silenced major parts of civil society, including the women’s movement (Saunders 1996, Moyo et al. 2000). As mentioned earlier, as early as 1983, WAG sought a different form of struggle from that previously adopted by women’s groups, and adopted a directly confrontational approach to the State, which had deliberately violated women’s human rights through the round-up of women believed to be prostitutes. Rather than cooperating with it, WAG challenged the State and exposed the limitations of its nationalist ideology.

Significantly, though, WAG remained to some extent isolated among the ranks of the growing women’s movement. I have personal recollections of working for WAG from 1989 to 1993. I recall several occasions on which colleagues in the women’s movement disowned WAG and its messages in public. It became apparent that the reluctance of many to be associated with WAG came from the perceptions of its political position and its confrontational approach to both the State and to patriarchy. While we were all working for the development of women (read as welfare and economic empowerment), different women and organisations were miles apart on what this really meant and the extent to which we would challenge entrenched power relations.

**From the early 1990s to the present day**

In the 1990s, the women’s movement formed a number of notable coalitions and networks. Some of these operated beyond the borders of Zimbabwe, at the regional level. Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) was formed in 1990, with its regional headquarters in Harare. The membership of WiLDAF-Zimbabwe comprised four types of organisations: faith-based groups (mainly the women’s wings of churches); trade unions (under the ambit of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions);
women's rights and legal-rights organisations (that is, those working on legal literacy, legal research, and violence against women), and lastly, those which can be narrowly defined as development-oriented.

WiLDAF emphasised development as a central concern. The Zimbabwe chapter of WiLDAF, at its height in the mid-1990s, comprised a diverse grouping of organisations and individuals working 'to use the law as a tool for development' (WiLDAF brochure 1992). Given the over-arching non-political framework prevailing in Zimbabwe, it is not surprising that the same language and ideology pervaded WiLDAF in Zimbabwe. Similarly, relations between the State and the network were markedly co-operative. The government tolerated WiLDAF as a partner in development.

The language and ideology of development was attractive to the women's movement, and was a useful tool for organising, providing a 'pull factor' around which groups coalesced. Yet, once again, underlying ideological differences within the network were masked by this common factor. Hence, although the network comprised organisations such as WAG, Musasa, and others working specifically on women's rights, it must be noted that the human-rights volume was turned down – emphasis was put on 'rights for development', since this was safer, less threatening, and less divisive. An example of this was the debate on abortion. In 1994, WiLDAF tentatively took up this issue and organised a street march to protest against the high numbers of deaths among Zimbabwean women from 'back-street' abortions. The march was very badly attended by members of the network itself. It was clear that the issue was so divisive for the network that it was not going to progress far. Advocacy on this issue has not been revived since.

The current fault-lines in the women's movement can be traced from 1997, when we saw the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). The NCA is a coalition of civil society groups. It was formed by five young activists, of whom two are feminists. It brought together most of the civil society organisations in Zimbabwe interested in matters of governance and human rights. It was patently clear by 1997 that the biggest problem underlying the Zimbabwean polity was the governance framework – that is, the constitution. Amended more than 15 times since 1980, the Zimbabwean constitution was not, and has never been, a document negotiated and owned by the general population. Civil society groups contended that unless the governance framework promotes and protects the fundamental rights of citizens, as well as providing the necessary checks against executive and State excesses, the social and economic problems of the nation would not be solved. The NCA's broad objective was to agitate for constitutional change, through advocacy and other peaceful means. In 1999, a complementary body was set up by the women's movement – the Women's Coalition (WC). This was intended to push forward women's demands around constitutional change. Some members of the WC were also members of the NCA.

Fearing civic unrest, the State sought to derail the NCA by launching its own parallel process through a Constitutional Commission (CC). The state co-opted some members of the NCA into the CC; prominent among these were members of the WC. This precipitated a crisis within the WC and the wider women's movement. Several questions arose:

- Shouldn't the NCA fold up, now that the CC had been formed?
- Wasn't the CC a better platform for advancing women's interests, since it was government-engineered, and therefore more likely to be taken seriously?
- Didn't all women want a new constitution that guaranteed their rights, regardless of how this was arrived at, and by whom?
• How much of a voice was civil society and the women’s movement going to have in the CC?
• Was joining the CC co-optation or critical co-operation? A metaphor used by some here was that Zimbabwe was like a bus, badly in need of help to put it back on the road. Should those who wanted to do this be inside the bus (like the CC)? Or should they be outside the bus?

These questions reflected varying degrees of belief in the State and its role in furthering women’s interests and rights.

In 1999, these questions became much harder to answer: the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the strongest opposition party to emerge since Independence, was launched. The MDC attracted a large number of NCA leaders, who immediately assumed prominent roles in the party. The government and ruling party, sensing an opportunity, was quick to brand the NCA a cover for the opposition. Subsequently, it went further, calling the NCA an imperialist creation.

The women’s movement and the WC, already smarting from internal divisions, was thrown into more confusion by these developments. A new set of questions emerged:
• Would continuing to support the NCA be tantamount to being anti-government?
• What were the implications, personally and collectively, of seeming to be pro-opposition?
• What was the best way to frame the women’s rights questions, and what was the best platform to promote these?

The crisis after members of the WC ‘crossed the floor’ to join the CC brought into question the underlying principles on which the WC had worked. These had not previously been put on the table explicitly and agreed to by the members. One can surmise that the unspoken assumption until then was that a general agreement on the rights of women and what we wanted in a new constitution was enough. But this assumption was to be severely tested in the months that followed.

In February 2000, the government put a new Draft Constitution to a national referendum. As a protest against the process through which the draft had been arrived at, rather than its content, Zimbabweans voted against the government. While the Draft Constitution contained some of the socio-economic rights that citizens had agitated for, it was civil society’s contention that the CC had not extensively consulted the people, and had doctored sections of the draft to suit the ruling party.

For the first time since 1980, ZANU PF had publicly lost support. The NCA, which had led a ‘Vote No’ campaign became a target once more for State repression. In the same year, fearing defeat at the parliamentary polls, the government launched the now famous Land Reform Programme, in which citizens’ human rights were violated. In 2000, the government and ruling party mobilised scores of so-called ‘war veterans’ to invade white-owned commercial farms. Hundreds of farms were occupied, and land was allegedly distributed to needy landless blacks. In the process, some farmers were killed, and so were farm workers, and thousands of black people were physically abused. Besides the farm invasions, ‘war’ was also waged in rural and urban areas to rid them of opposition leaders and supporters. This was all done under the guise of land reform, when in fact it resulted in violations of black people’s rights, and had very little to do with the land question. Women bore the brunt of these human-rights violations (Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition 2003; Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum Reports 2001; 2002). Hundreds of cases of rape, gang rapes, forced concubinage, murder, torture, and the physical abuse of women have been recorded since 2000.
When sharing female identity is not enough

The crisis has left the women's movement in disarray. Most affected have been the coalitions and networks previously based on what I have been calling 'the lowest common denominator' – an idea of shared female identity – which had not been exposed as inadequate during the earlier era of the depoliticised discourses of 'national development'.

The future of women's coalitions in Zimbabwe

The lack of a clear set of non-negotiable principles guiding the WC, other women's coalitions, and women's networks in Zimbabwe, has contributed in large measure to the present paralysis in the women's movement. Three major lessons stand out. Firstly, the political crisis in Zimbabwe has demonstrated the need for women's coalitions and networks to have strong foundations, including shared values, principles, and ideology. By their very nature, coalitions and networks are based on a commonly identified issue and set of objectives. Bobo, Kendall, and Max (1991) define a coalition as, 'An organization of organizations working together for a goal'. They go further, to caution that, 'coalitions are not built because it is good, moral, or nice to get everyone working together. The only reason to spend the time and energy building a coalition is to amass the power necessary to do something you cannot do through one organization' (Bobo et al., 70).

Similarly, Veneklasen and Miller also caution that the very reasons for forming coalitions or alliances are often the reasons why they are difficult to manage: 'They [coalitions] sometimes suffer from unrealistic expectations, such as the notion that people who share a common cause will agree on everything' (2002, 311).

While the members of the WC were united in demanding that women's rights be enshrined in a new constitution, the WC was less united on how this was to be arrived at. Was confronting the State a desirable tactic? What kind of alliance would the women's movement have, if any, with the opposition political parties in this process? Was a good constitutional document all the women wanted, or was it critical that this should emerge from an inclusive process? What exactly would constitute 'good enough' participation, by and for women? How would the question of race and racism be tackled both within our own ranks, and in the wider political discourse?

The WC had been formed in what appeared to be an uncontested political terrain – what one would call 'fair weather'. Come hail and thunderstorms, questions began to emerge about how far the unity of the coalition would go. To date, the WC has not been able to mobilise its membership around the issue of political violence against women. On the surface, it would appear that violence is an issue against which all women are united. In reality, this is an issue that could tear apart the WC. The lesson here is about the need to keep track of the changing political context, and strategise accordingly. 2000 was a new political moment in the history of Zimbabwe, and the over-arching political context had so dramatically shifted that the women's movement needed to look again at how they commonly defined issues, as well as at the strategies they should adopt in the changed circumstances.

A second lesson is that, while a great deal of time is often spent defining internal relationships and leadership structures (in coalitions), rarely is as much time spent figuring out how to manage relations with external forces, including the State – in Zimbabwe's case, a predatory State. A major blockage for the WC is its lack of a clear position on its relationship with the State. Equally, the movement has been reluctant to confront the issue of the use and misuse of State power. Complicating matters here are the individual relationships of some activists with the State. Could – or should – members of the CC continue to share space with
members of the NCA? Similarly, the women’s movement had been united in its calls for gender-equitable land redistribution in Zimbabwe, but the wider political context necessitated a recasting of those demands, and the values that underlay them. Could it be tenable, for example, for the WC to applaud the violent land seizures? If some women were given some of that land, knowing that other women had been killed or raped in the process, what position would the WC take?

Another issue dogging Zimbabwean civil society in general, and which the women’s movement has not escaped from, is race and racism. While at a general level, civil society groups are united in broad alliances around the short-term aim of fighting against State excesses, they have still not taken up critical positions on questions related to the issue of race – particularly around the issue of access to and control over resources. Neither has there been a debate on race and racism within civil society. These are some of the issues that have continued to dog the women’s coalitions and networks in Zimbabwe.

**Conclusion**

Women’s networks and coalitions can be one of the most potent forces for claiming women’s rights. If they are based on commonly agreed values and principles, coalitions can manage their own diversity in changing political circumstances. But if they merely work on common issues and do not recognise the diversity of values and principles which exists within them, coalitions will immobilise themselves. Recognising and affirming difference, particularly fundamental difference, is a critical part of effective strategising. It allows groups to negotiate and renegotiate the terms of coalition, and how far they will go with one another. In cases where huge differences lie underneath a surface of unity, it is maybe necessary to let go of the coalition. The case of the women’s coalitions and networks in Zimbabwe illustrates the political nature of coalitions. Rather than seeing coalitions as mere functional organisational formations, they should be seen as political institutions, with political issues to deal with, both internally and externally. How well a coalition navigates the political terrain will determine whether it survives.

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**Note**

1 The Lancaster House Conference of 1979 marked the end of Zimbabwe’s war of liberation. The conference brought together the Rhodesian government and the black liberation movements, and adopted the Lancaster House Agreement, which paved the way for the elections held in 1980.

**References**


Microfinance from the point of view of women with disabilities: lessons from Zambia and Zimbabwe

Cindy Lewis

Women with disabilities continue to face significant obstacles to equal participation in economic development initiatives. Microfinance services have been rightly criticised for their failure to deliver poverty alleviation and women's empowerment. Yet, despite their limitations, these schemes currently dominate the development scene. Disabled women need and want access to credit and associated services, and to the ongoing debate on the strengths and weaknesses of microfinance as an approach. In this article, the multiple barriers facing women with disabilities who wish to obtain microfinance are outlined. Research from Zambia and Zimbabwe highlights key issues facing disabled businesswomen, and recommendations are made that would enable development organisations to mainstream the experience and analysis of disabled women into their programmes.

It is quite absurd that international development programmes rarely address the needs of disabled women. Women with disabilities are harassed sexually, exploited by men, suffer abject poverty and social disrespect, malnutrition, disease and ignorance.

(Uganda Disabled Women's Union, Mobility International USA, 2002)

'Women of the world, take note: women with disabilities are here! We are powerful, we are proud, and our message will be heard!'

With these words, Susan Sygall, executive director of Mobility International USA (MIUSA), convened the International Symposium on Issues of Women with Disabilities, held in Beijing, China, on 29 August 1995. More than 200 women with disabilities assembled under the tin roof of a hotel meeting room on the outskirts of Beijing. They shared a single purpose: to ensure that the voices of women with disabilities were heard at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women. The symposium, co-ordinated by MIUSA, represented a triumph of international networking, communication, organising, and fundraising, culminating in the representation of grassroots women from 35 countries in the global North and South. As the first gathering of its kind, the symposium provided a unique opportunity for women with disabilities from every region to compare issues and experiences, to exchange strategies and resources, and to sow the seeds of an international development agenda by and for women with disabilities.

Women from rural areas, indigenous women, young women and older women, lesbians, refugees and migrant women, sex-trade workers, and women with disabilities continue to be under-represented in development initiatives, locally and internationally. These diverse groups of women could be empowered by finding common ground, to exchange ideas and to collaborate on initiatives to end poverty. MIUSA is working to bring about such connections. MIUSA, a US-based non-profit organisation established in 1981, aims to support and empower...
people with disabilities around the world through international exchange, information-sharing, technical assistance, and training. It aims to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in international exchange and development programmes. Since 1981, MIUSA has collaborated with women with disabilities from every region of the world, through programmes which emphasise leadership training and disability rights. We also provide technical assistance to US-based international development agencies to include women with disabilities in development work as decision makers, implementers, and participants. We believe that organisations working on development and human rights and women’s organisations must support women with disabilities to achieve the full range of options available to women: to be workers, leaders, activists, mothers, partners, and citizens.

Each year, we are excited by the determined and skillful efforts of disabled women who, in spite of immense barriers, are working to become full and equal participants in their communities. We are also encouraged by the increasing attention of international development organisations, particularly those with a focus on gender equity, to the issues of women with disabilities. Around the world today, women with disabilities are challenging old stereotypes by becoming involved in politics, by leading organisations, by entering the labour market, by participating in community life, and by fighting gender- and disability-based discrimination that results in poverty, inadequate healthcare, lack of education, violence, and abuse. Nevertheless, women with disabilities, like women from other minority groups, continue to face significant obstacles to equal participation in economic development initiatives, including the microfinance services that target women.

Beijing: feminist disability perspectives on development

The International Symposium on Issues of Women with Disabilities provided a rallying point for women with disabilities. The Symposium broke the isolation of disabled women, enabling us to bridge communication gaps among ourselves, and harness our individual resources to present a unified voice at the NGO Forum and World Conference on Women.

(Mobility International USA 2002, 207)

The NGO Forum on Women in Beijing provided unexpected opportunities for women with disabilities to build international, cross-disability solidarity. Restricted by impassable pathways, inaccessible venues, and a lack of accessible materials, nearly 350 women with disabilities gathered for eight days in the ‘Disability Tent’, channeling anger and frustration into strategy meetings and workshops on such critical development issues as income generation, wheelchair building, reproductive rights, parenting, leadership, and policy development. On the third day of the forum, disabled women convened a spontaneous demonstration on the steps of an inaccessible workshop building, capturing international press coverage and drawing the attention of the global community to women with disabilities as a vocal and visible force at the UN World Conference on Women.

Women with disabilities are much stronger now than before we met in Beijing. So many disabled women gathered at one place became visible all over the world. We will be remembered as a strong and powerful group.

(Mobility International USA 2002, 207)

As a result of lobbying by the international, cross-disability Disabled Women’s Caucus, the Platform for Action which emerged from the Beijing Conference mandates governments and non-government organisations (NGOs) to include girls and women
with disabilities in economic development, education, leadership training, health, violence prevention, and decision making. Its recommendations include: 'Mobilize all parties involved in the development process ... to improve the effectiveness of anti-poverty programmes directed towards the poorest and most disadvantaged groups of women, such as ... women with disabilities' (UN 1995).

However, programmes focused on gender and development do not appear so far to have had a better track record on the inclusion of women with disabilities than other development programmes. According to MIUSA’s 2001 survey of 165 US-based international development agencies, gender-specific programmes are no more likely than non-gender-specific programmes to include women with disabilities, to collect data on the participation of women with disabilities, to provide disability-related accommodations, to implement specific strategies to include women and girls with disabilities, or to address issues of women and girls with disabilities in training on gender issues (Mobility International USA 2001).

Microfinance and women with disabilities

'NGOs, when we approach them about microcredit projects, you know, some of them they say "Oh! We would love to help you. Unfortunately disability issues are not our priority."'

(Dorothy Musakanya, Chair, Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled, Women’s Committee in Mobility International USA, 2004).

Over the last two decades, microfinance (including credit, savings, and insurance services), has taken centre stage in international development work as a strategy to address simultaneously two issues prioritised by development agencies and donors: the alleviation of poverty, and the empowerment of women. The logic is that by targeting women as clients, microfinance services address poverty-alleviation goals, as women are poorer than men and are responsible for family subsistence; and they address the goal of empowering women by increasing women’s control over income and assets.

Early microcredit programmes simply offered very small loans to poor and low-income micro-entrepreneurs to expand their businesses. Many non-financial development organisations incorporated microcredit, and later savings and insurance programmes, into their range of services, both to meet the financial needs of their clients and as an incentive to use other services. More recently, emphasis has shifted toward building sustainable institutions to serve a range of financial needs of poor people, and cost-effectiveness has been prioritised together with long-term financial viability. Donor interest in this ‘financial systems approach’ (ACCION 2004), has contributed to the growth of stand-alone microfinance services. It has also led to a shift towards emphasis on ‘economic empowerment’, away from broader interventions which focused on non-finance-related activities and on the social and political aspects of empowerment. Today, the discussion is shifting again, as organisations examine microfinance services within participatory and rights-based approaches to development. For example, Anton Simanowitz asks, ‘Should we be looking first at how to design services to impact effectively on the livelihoods of the poorest, and then look at how to make this sustainable, rather than looking at first how to make an organisation sustainable, and then how to adapt this to meeting the needs of the poorest?’ (CGAP Microfinance Gateway, 5).

Questions of benefits and risks to women and poor people, the effectiveness of microcredit for long-term economic self-sufficiency and sustainability, debates over goals, methods, and associated services – these issues are the focus of intense dialogue,
study, and experimentation around the world. In her 2002 report, 'Women's Empowerment or Feminization of Debt?', Linda Mayoux questions whether microfinance programmes represent 'virtuous spirals or vicious circles'. While acknowledging that 'many of the microfinance programmes ... have undoubtedly made a contribution to both household poverty reduction and women’s empowerment' (Mayoux 2002, 19), Mayoux also states that 'overwhelming evidence indicates that for many [women], the impact of microfinance \textit{per se} on both economic and social empowerment is marginal or even negative'. Mayoux concludes, 'Unless poverty reduction and empowerment goals are explicitly integrated throughout programme design and implementation, microfinance may have little positive impact. It may actually increase household poverty and be seriously disempowering for women. In this case, microfinance programmes risk becoming merely a means of shifting the burden of both household debt and development itself onto women' (Mayoux 2002, 42).

How are women with disabilities involved in these explorations of microfinance as a strategy for poverty alleviation and women's empowerment? Women leaders with disabilities have sought to contribute to this global conversation as implementers, consultants, and participants. Women with disabilities have traditionally not had access to microfinance services, despite the fact that so many services target women or the most impoverished groups within a population. Women with disabilities are perceived as 'bad risks', and, as such, they are refused loans by banks, micro-lenders and peer-lending groups. Microfinance lenders commonly share the prejudices against women with disabilities that lead to this exclusion. They assume that, by virtue of their disability, women with disabilities are not appropriate for microcredit or business services, or that they are adequately and better served by rehabilitation programmes and charities.

Micro-enterprise programmes target women because of the many barriers they face in setting up businesses and obtaining finance. These include the lack of acceptable collateral, low self-confidence, few resources for business, lack of experience and training, illiteracy, heavy family responsibilities, unmarried status, or discouragement from husbands (Mobility International USA 2002).

Women with disabilities share these obstacles, but disability shapes their experience, altering and intensifying some obstacles, and adding others. For example, disabled women may have children and other dependents, whom they need to feed, clothe, and educate, just as do their non-disabled sisters. But, because of their comparatively low 'market value' as wives, women with disabilities are more likely than their non-disabled counterparts to be unmarried mothers, or to have been abandoned. Girls with disabilities are frequently a family's last priority for scarce educational resources, and have less access to educational or vocational training programmes which would prepare them for the job market.

Disability-related obstacles affect the participation of women with disabilities at every stage of development interventions intended to boost livelihoods – from outreach strategies to application processes, from training programmes to business activities. Structural and communication barriers facing women with various disabilities include inaccessible meeting and market places, equipment and modes of transportation which require adaptation, print-only materials, and lack of sign-language interpreters. Other important barriers include stigma related to disability, and the resulting discrimination in training, loan opportunities, and the marketplace. These disability-specific obstacles require practical measures to facilitate the participation of women with disabilities.

Economic crises in developing countries have created new problems. The effects of
globalisation, including structural-adjustment programmes (SAPs), that have resulted in privatisation, tax increases, and the reduction of basic services, disproportionately affect women with disabilities. For example, in times of high unemployment, women with disabilities are likely to be the first to be forced out of jobs. Increased competition in the marketplace sets small non-disabled businesses against those run by women with disabilities, who are at a competitive disadvantage due to stigma and access issues. As social service budgets are depleted, restrictions on social spending result in diminished access to assistive technology or services that would increase the ability of women with disabilities to participate in the economic life of the community, such as hearing aids or wheelchairs, braces, Braille materials, or sign-language interpreters.

Limited in opportunities by barriers to mobility and independence, isolated from public channels of information, and affected by restricted expectations based on both gender and disability, women with disabilities very often have little chance to develop the confidence and assertiveness required to succeed as a borrower and businesswoman. Without a strong sense of entitlement and independence, women with disabilities who do take loans and start businesses are not well equipped to withstand pressure from family and others to cede control over money and decision making.

Disabled women’s programmes

Fully including women with disabilities in development requires development organisations to move beyond traditional, segregated approaches to disabled populations. Instead, they need to make the full range of development options available to women with disabilities. This is a lesson learned from the history of integrating feminist concerns into development. Mainstreaming is an essential strategy to ensure that no sidelining goes on: ‘While women-specific projects are appropriate under certain conditions and can bring significant benefits to women, women-specific projects are often ineffective in achieving a long-term change in the balance of power ... since they often lead to further marginalisation of women’ (InterAction Commission on the Advancement of Women 1998).

Nonetheless, frustrated by their exclusion from mainstream development opportunities, and highly motivated to move out of poverty into self-sufficiency, organisations led by and for people with disabilities have made efforts to provide microfinance services, particularly microcredit programmes, for their members. Among these, most have incorporated some degree of gender focus, from dedicating outreach to women members, to conducting programmes specifically for, and in some cases led by, women with disabilities. However, grassroots disability organisations are rarely equipped for the demands of operating sustainable microcredit programmes, nor are such programmes within the scope of their mission and expertise. Sarah Dyer, of Leonard Cheshire International, UK, articulates this dilemma:

Because the economic needs of poor and disabled people cannot be ignored, organisations of and for disabled people have rightly established their own initiatives in economic empowerment, including micro-finance and credit programmes. There are many examples of successes and positive changes in the economy of poor disabled people. However, it has been the experience of many disability organisations that their work in credit has detracted and diverted their limited resources from other priority areas of their work. ... Because of resource constraints, conflicting interests and priorities and limited technical knowledge and experience, the finance programmes operated by disability organisations have had limited success. (Dyer 2004, Section 7.3b)
In spite of the limitations, disability-led projects do provide opportunities for women with disabilities to demonstrate their potential as borrowers and businesswomen, to clarify challenges faced by disabled women in microcredit, and to identify strategies for addressing them.

The next section documents the experience of women with disabilities in Zimbabwe and Zambia. MIUSA conducted a project to document their experience, in partnership with the Southern African Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD) and the National Council of Persons with Disabilities of Zimbabwe (NCDPZ).

**Documenting the experience of businesswomen with disabilities**

Following completion of a business-management workshop and presentation of a business plan, approximately 30 women with disabilities received small microcredit loans, most less than US$100, to start or expand businesses, which included sewing, knitting, tailoring, selling produce, baked goods, and groceries, raising poultry, candle-making, and fabric dyeing. One industrious deaf businesswoman opened a restaurant next door to her already successful grocery shop, and single-handedly keeps both businesses running at the same time. In October 2002, Susie Grimes, MIUSA director of administration, Karen Heinicke-Motsch, manager of MIUSA's International Disability and Development programme, and videographer Dana Vion, travelled to Zambia and Zimbabwe, to meet, observe, and conduct interviews with SAFOD and NCDPZ borrowers.

**Business challenges in Southern Africa**

‘When I move into a bank, the first thing they will see is my bad foot and then they will associate the difficulty in paying back that loan to the disability, which may not be the case.’

(Francisca Muyenga, director of Zambia National Association of Disabled Women, Zambia, Mobility International USA 2004).

‘When I went to apply, I was never successful. They actually said, “Somebody who is disabled can’t manage to do anything. She’s always a beggar.” Even if you go into the [meeting about microcredit], they will think that you are only attending to ask them for a handout because they always think that we are begging from them.’

(Yohane Sigamano, Zimbabwe, Mobility International USA 2004).

Business-related challenges reported as most significant by the SAFOD and NCDPZ businesswomen were increasing costs and serious shortages of commodities attributed to current economic, political, and environmental conditions. These problems are certainly not unique to disabled entrepreneurs; they are affecting small businesses throughout Southern Africa. Women with disabilities would unquestionably benefit from access to the pool of experience, resources, and technical support offered by mainstream economic development programmes in dealing with these community-wide issues.

Similarly, another frequently mentioned difficulty was a lack of sufficient start-up capital, which would be alleviated if women with disabilities had access to community microfinance programmes, whose greater access to funding affords loans of comparatively larger amounts. There is no shortage of microfinance programmes in either Zimbabwe or Zambia, but very few of the women in the SAFOD or NCDPZ programmes had applied to any other credit resource than that of the disability organisations. Most stated that they did not know that such programmes existed, or that they had not believed that, as women with
disabilities, they would be eligible to participate. Indeed, each of the few women who had at some point applied for small business loans outside of disability organisations had been turned down, either explicitly on the basis of disability, or because she had been unable to produce the collateral required of disabled – but not of non-disabled – credit applicants.

**Challenges of accessibility and discrimination**

[Discrimination based on] disability has always been her main hindrance, as people didn’t want to buy from a woman with a disability.

(Lizzie Longshaw, NCDPZ Women’s Wing co-ordinator, Mobility International USA, unpublished report)

Inaccessible infrastructure and the lack of appropriate adaptive equipment and resources, make it more difficult for women with disabilities to succeed in business. Transport and mobility were among the most commonly mentioned problems, since public transport systems, including taxis and buses, and most public pathways, are difficult (if not impossible) for women with mobility disabilities to navigate. None of the borrowers have wheelchairs or other mobility equipment designed or maintained to effectively enable them to transport goods independently. Deaf women reported that communication difficulties affect their ability to negotiate with wholesalers or customers, as sign-language interpreters are not readily (if at all) available. Moreover, women with all types of disabilities reported that misinformation and prejudice regarding disability put them at a competitive disadvantage in the market.

On the other hand, one woman cheerfully related that her disability gives her an advantage, when pitying community members allow her to go to the head of long lines, where she buys up fast-moving grocery items for resale at her market stand.

**Business solutions**

‘We saw women with disabilities confront barriers in very, very interesting ways. Obviously a woman in a wheelchair on a muddy road in Africa isn’t really going to be able to get her stuff from the market to home. What can she do? Well, we saw women doing all sorts of different things. Some of them had somebody push them. Some of them sent somebody else out to go get it for them. Some sent a relative or an employee. These women will think of ways to overcome their business barriers just like everybody else does.’

(Karen Heinicke-Motsch, Mobility International USA 2004)

Discussions among borrowers at SAFOD and NCDPZ workshops focused on solutions and progress. To address mobility-related issues, some borrowers have chosen businesses that they can conduct in, or near, their homes. Others have formed business collectives, where they pool their skills, resources, and abilities to meet the needs of the business. Many borrowers draw on the aid of family members, hire assistants, or rent vehicles and drivers. These are often imperfect solutions, sometimes requiring a business owner to relinquish control of some aspect of the business, or incurring extra expenses that cut into profits. And yet, they manage. While they experience many difficulties, most of the SAFOD and NCDPZ borrowers are making payments on their loans, sustaining, and even expanding their businesses.

**The impact of microcredit on poverty and empowerment**

‘When we have money, they call us by our names, not by our disabilities.’

(Lizzie Longshaw, NCDPZ Women’s Wing co-ordinator, Mobility International USA 2004)

Like other businesswomen around the world, SAFOD and NCDPZ borrowers are using income from their businesses to improve their own living conditions and those of their families. Profits are spent on food and clothes for children, housing, or
school fees for children. For women with disabilities, the impact of being able to support their families and to contribute to the economic development of the community is often particularly powerful in terms of increased respect and status. Women told us, ‘For the first time, I am able to buy my daughter whatever she needs’; ‘You see, before I took the [loan] I stayed on the road begging. But now I am independent and I’m running my own life’; ‘I used to be nobody, but now, when a decision is being made in the family, they say, “Go call Mary! We can’t decide without her!”’ Now they respect me.

Organisational challenges
With minimal resources and the greatest of efforts, the women’s committees of SAFOD and the NCDPZ are successfully supporting the economic empowerment of their members in Zambia and Zimbabwe. When funding is available, they provide small loans, business training, and group support for the hardworking businesswomen who make up their constituency. Both organisations report the same difficulties encountered by scores of other NGOs attempting to incorporate microfinance services into their non-financial programmes. These include: clients living too far apart to facilitate regular monitoring and payment collection; administrative costs far outstripping income from interest payments; loan amounts being too small to be effective; clients needing more business training and ongoing support; and lending, monitoring, and evaluation systems not being effective. SAFOD and NCDPZ organisers are learning the same hard lessons that any number of microfinance programmes in their communities have learned from hard experience over the years.

The question is: why, when donors, microfinance institutions, and development agencies have identified conditions under which microcredit and other microfinance services are appropriate and have the best chance for success, have organisations led by women with disabilities had to learn the hard way? Why are disabled women’s organisations continuing to struggle – to develop effective screening, lending, training, evaluation, and monitoring systems, and only dreaming of providing other financial services – when there are development agencies in their communities that are experienced and equipped to provide those services to women? Microfinance is not the answer to the economic empowerment of women with disabilities, just as it is not a panacea for the economic empowerment of poor people. However, microfinance is at the centre of the global conversation on development today. Women with disabilities need to be part of that conversation.

It’s too easy to say, and too often said, and too simply dismissed as an unfortunate fact of life, that ‘organisations [or men, non-disabled people, society, governments, etc.] discriminate against disabled women’. This is not a very specific or informative statement, and perhaps it is even marginalising. Our goal is to place the inclusion of disabled women squarely within the context of development; to place discussion of issues of women with disabilities squarely within discussion of other development issues. Towards this goal, it seems useful to discuss development-related problems specifically (in this case, the struggle by disabled women’s organisations to provide effective services), and less useful to make unspecific statements about discrimination.

Mainstream organisations working on gender and development need to apply their well-developed understanding of the oppression of women, and of development solutions, to the situation of women who are also disabled, and to take proactive steps to ensure that women with disabilities participate in the development process as decision makers, implementers, and participants. In the next section, we make some suggestions to enable that to happen.
Recommendations: don’t reinvent the wheel

What will it take to break the deadlock that excludes women with disabilities from microfinance and other economic empowerment opportunities? There are lessons to be learned from the struggles to include gender issues in development, which can now be applied to include women with disabilities in development.

Bring women with diverse experience and perspectives into the dialogue

Consultation with local women’s organisations and involving women participants in programme planning is perhaps the best way to ensure a gender perspective in programme design. (InterAction Commission on the Advancement of Women)

A key lesson learned is the importance of infusing gender perspectives throughout all aspects of programme planning and implementation. In the same way, involving women with disabilities in participatory processes, and in all aspects of programme planning, implementation, and evaluation, is the best way to assure that practical and effective methods for inclusion are built into projects from the outset. Women with disabilities themselves are often the best resource for incorporating practical, appropriate strategies to make programmes accessible to women and girls with disabilities.

Development agencies need to talk with women with disabilities to assess the kinds of financial services that would be useful to women who have historically been excluded from participating. They need to learn what types of accommodations, support, or adaptations women with disabilities actually need in order to participate in microfinance programmes. Institutionalised barriers and discrimination that impair the access of women with disabilities have to be identified, and commitments made to change them. Studies of micro-lending programmes that specifically target or include women with disabilities need to be commissioned and supported, in order that real data for comparison and evaluation is made available.

Build bridges

Mainstream development organisations can use organisations like MIUSA as bridges. While in Zambia and Zimbabwe, MIUSA and its partner organisations convened three ‘Building Partnership’ workshops, to facilitate dialogue between local and international women’s organisations, development agencies, government offices, and organisations run by and for people with disabilities. Each meeting began in a similar way, with a small number of representatives from women’s and development organisations, sitting across a literal and symbolic divide from women with disabilities, the leaders and members of grassroots disability organisations. In each meeting, MIUSA offered a bridge, facilitating introductions and a cautious exchange of issues, goals, and experiences. It was not long before the tentative conversation evolved into animated dialogue, as participants began to make personal connections, identified common goals, and explored opportunities to collaborate.

In MIUSA’s role as a bridge between women with disabilities and international development organisations, we frequently encounter a gap between organisations that want to include women with disabilities but don’t believe that they know how, and women with disabilities who want to participate but can’t get a foot in the door – sometimes literally. Development agencies can foster opportunities for women with disabilities and non-disabled women, including other ‘minority’ women, to connect, exchange support, and join forces, and for women’s and disabled women’s organisations to build relationships and explore collaborations towards mutual goals.
Build capacity
Capacity building for women and grassroots women’s groups has been a key strategy for achieving gender equity in development and human-rights movements. Development and women’s organisations can build their own capacity to serve a more diverse client base by tapping the knowledge, skills, expertise, and leadership of women with disabilities. Conversely, women’s programmes can provide women with disabilities with opportunities to build capacity, individually and organisationally, to develop leadership and gain access to information, education, business training, financial, and other development opportunities. Development organisations can offer disabled women’s organisations technical assistance, funding, and opportunities for collaboration and partnership.

Strategies for inclusion
The following are key strategies for including women with disabilities in microfinance programmes, recommended by disabled women leaders from around the world. We invite all women, including our sisters from other under-represented communities, to join in an international exchange of experiences and ideas for promoting a fully inclusive development process.

1 Make development projects accessible
- Reach out to women with disabilities.
- Bring women with disabilities to your projects, and facilitate relationship building with other participants through formal and informal activities.
- Use low-tech, low-cost solutions to reduce accessibility barriers.
- Seek out the advice of women leaders with disabilities and disability-led organisations to find solutions to accessibility problems.
- Provide sign-language interpreters, readers, and Braille materials for your application processes, training programmes, and services.
- Make your meeting places accessible: meet in ground-floor rooms, build ramps, add hand-rails to stairways.
- Find solutions to transport problems: contract with taxis, private drivers, ambulance services, rehabilitation services. Offer mobility aids to assist women with disabilities to use inaccessible transport systems.
- Include women with disabilities in every training programme or service.

2 Build the capacity of organisations led by women with disabilities
- Provide funding, technical assistance, and partnership for projects by women with disabilities.
- Collaborate with disabled women’s organisations to provide business and microcredit training opportunities for women with disabilities.

3 Go to women with disabilities
- Reach out: invite women with disabilities to your meetings and ask for invitations to their meetings.
- Conduct information sessions, application processes, and training at the places where women with disabilities meet.
- Hold meetings of your projects in the places where women with disabilities meet.
- Form partnerships with organisations led by women with disabilities.
- Incorporate your services into existing projects run by women with disabilities.
- Make sure that information reaches women with disabilities about training, partnership, business, and funding opportunities, and that it is in a format that they can use.
4 Support creative funding approaches to pay for disability-related costs
• Attach a ‘conditional grant’ to loans for individuals or organisations to purchase equipment or services for accessibility.
• Accept proposals for funding that include disability-related items, such as mobility aids, wheelchairs, sign-language interpreters or readers, adapted bicycles, and ramps for buses or lifts.
• Fund business ventures run by women with disabilities that will empower women with disabilities: wheelchair building or crutch-making workshops, accessible transport services.

5 Support leadership and capacity building of women with disabilities
• Headquarters staff: write letters of introduction for women with disabilities to field staff, with instructions to meet and co-operate.
• Support businesses run by women with disabilities. Contract with women with disabilities to provide services that your organisation needs.
• Share your office: offer use of your mailing address, word processor, fax machine, copier, or e-mail address.

6 Be a mentor to a woman leader with a disability or to an organisation led by women with disabilities
• Introduce leaders to potential funders and partners.
• Write letters of recommendation and support.
• Pass on relevant information, news, and announcements.
• Co-sign loans.
• Provide matching funds or seed grants.
• Take representatives to meetings and conferences.
• Listen, advise, and share your experience.
• Invite women with disabilities to be your mentors, to develop leadership in including people with disabilities in development.

7 Engage women with disabilities in the global dialogue on microcredit and economic empowerment of women
• Actively include organisations led by women with disabilities in local and regional networks of microcredit programmes.
• Facilitate conference participation: provide support for women with disabilities to participate in regional and international conferences.
• Put women with disabilities online: donate used equipment, provide technical support and training. Share your printer, e-mail address, or Internet server. Pass on information downloaded from the Internet or e-mail lists.
• Facilitate coalition building between women with disabilities and other disenfranchised women.
• Listen to and learn from women leaders with disabilities.

8 Make your organisation inclusive
• Collect data about the participation of women with disabilities in every project.
• Hire qualified women with disabilities to your organisation, as field staff, consultants, trainers, and administrators.
• Include women with disabilities on community-advisory councils and boards of directors.
• Learn and implement the USAID Disability Policy.
• Provide ongoing opportunities for women with disabilities and development workers to build professional and personal relationships, leading to changed attitudes and real partnerships.
• Use low-tech adaptations to make your office and training facilities accessible.
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Gender, identity, and diversity: learning from insights gained in transformative gender training

Dorine Plantenga

This article aims to stimulate critical thinking around gender, identity, and power in development organisations. It focuses on two insights from gender and development training: first, an individual's identities are always multiple and interconnected, so that you cannot talk about gender in isolation; and second, all identities are gendered. There are power dynamics between different identities, and these give privileges to some and make others vulnerable. The aim of transformative gender and diversity training is to acknowledge these power dynamics, to demystify them, and to find strategies that will promote equality for all involved. I discuss four insights from training that have important implications for organisational transformation in relation to gender and diversity.

I have facilitated many gender training sessions for policy makers and practitioners in order to support the introduction of a gender-sensitive approach in development organisations. Over the years, in the training sessions in which I have been involved, I have been regularly confronted by questions such as, 'Why prioritise oppression on the grounds of gender over all other sorts of oppression, such as those based on class, ethnicity, and religion?'. Another way of expressing the same doubt has been, 'Aren’t we all human beings? Shouldn’t we, as a principle, treat all human beings equally, with no special preference for any one?'. These questions are a result of the perception that during a gender training session, the focus is mostly on gender inequality alone, over and above other forms of oppression. There is an assumption that this will lead to an exclusive focus on women in development programmes.

One way of dealing with this concern is to justify the special focus on gender inequality, and on women, by way of statistics and case studies that show the painful evidence of global gender imbalances at all levels. This evidence, combined with the argument that promoting women’s rights will lead to sustainable development, does help in advocating a gender-sensitive development approach. But it does not really address the questions highlighted above in all their complexity. To do this, it is necessary to admit that the issue is not one of prioritising one identity – such as gender – over all other identities, but of acknowledging the fact that all the identities of a particular human being are interconnected, and cannot be separated. There are privileges and vulnerabilities linked to those identities. The questions are justified, therefore, and present gender trainers and development organisations with a number of challenges.

When I started work as a gender and development trainer, my Indian colleagues told me, 'You cannot talk about gender in isolation'. And I knew they were right. How can you talk about gender oppression in India if you don’t talk about caste or religion?
How can you talk about the position of poor women in Brazil if you don’t make a connection between gender, racism, and class? How to work with Somalian female peace activists if you don’t talk about clan-based identities? And how are you to deal with gender violence anywhere in the world, if you don’t consider patriarchy as a system, affecting all our identities and the ways in which they interconnect? At the same time, it is important to realise that the reverse is also true: all identities are ‘gendered’. Whoever you are, you are always, also, a man or a woman.

Remembering the words of my Indian friends, I always bear in mind that the main goal of a gender training session is not to encourage participants to prioritise gender-based oppression over other forms of oppression, but to explore the concept of oppression itself. This can only be done by acknowledging the connections between gender and the other identities held by an individual, within a given economic, political, and social context. The institutional and organisational context in which people work and live should also be included. Many development organisations have recently adopted a more comprehensive gender and diversity approach, moving beyond a narrow focus on gender inequality.

Gender and identity: privileges and vulnerabilities

Multiple and interlocked identities
To challenge social inequalities, we need to see how people’s identities are interlocked within systems of dominance that include some and exclude others. All of us have multiple identities; some of them give us privileges, and others make us vulnerable, depending on the political, economic, and socio-cultural context. For example, during gender training in South East Asia, a feminist activist, very committed to the cause of poor and oppressed women, identified herself as an ‘upper middle-class woman’. While she was speaking, her voice was trembling. She explained that it was the first time that she had had the courage to say this aloud. There had been a period in her life when she was not at all conscious of her class position, and considered herself to be ‘normal’. But when she started to realise her own privileges, she felt extremely embarrassed. ‘Now,’ she said, ‘the time has come that I want to confront my own dominance’.

Being an upper-class woman in India gives you many privileges. But how do people from your own class see you when you are not only an upper-class woman, but also an activist and a feminist, fighting for the rights of oppressed women? And how do poor women see you? All of us have multiple identities, and these identities are interlocked – it is impossible to separate them. They determine how we perceive ourselves, and how others perceive us.

Acknowledging one’s part in systems of dominance and sub-dominance
Training exercises which focus on gender and identity enable participants from development organisations to understand that they themselves are also part of the systems of dominance – not only in their professional capacity as ‘change-agents’, but also in their personal and political life. This understanding is not always easy, especially for those who are in dominant positions. If they have never felt the pain of being excluded themselves, they tend not to be conscious of their own identities and the privileges that come with them. They are the ones who may object, ‘But aren’t we all human beings? Shouldn’t we simply respect each other?’ or ‘Can’t we simply be friends?’. For them, it is important to understand that systems of exclusion are not only about human behaviour; they are also about power. When one starts to recognise and feel the pain of ‘the other’, it is possible to start questioning the privileges one derives from
one’s own identities, like the Indian woman in our example above.

This understanding helps us to interpret an event that occurred during a training session with a group of female peace activists from northern and southern Sudan. Because of the civil war in Sudan, the training took place in Nairobi. One of the women from southern Sudan was hassled by the police in Khartoum at the airport, so she arrived two days late. All the participants were worried about her, and were very happy when she finally arrived. As the venue was fully booked, a participant from northern Sudan offered to share her room with her, which had a double bed. But the woman from the south resolutely refused, ‘I can work with you for the peace that both of us want, but I cannot share a room with you’. The woman from the north was shocked, and her eyes filled with tears. ‘Why does she say that to me? She knows I am her friend, and that I would never do her any harm’.

These two women had much in common – sharing the same dream of peace, and a similar experience as feminist activists and mothers. The refusal of the woman from the south to share a room with the woman from the north was based on her awareness of the identities that separated them, consisting of a mix of regional, religious, and clan identities, which have been the cause of so much suffering in Sudan. The identities they shared were influenced and defined by the other identities that made them different. This made it impossible for the woman from the south of the country to ‘cross the line’ and to accept the offer made.

Typically, it is the person who is part of the ‘sub-dominant’ identity group (in this case, the woman from the south), who will first feel the existence and significance of the factors separating them. It can be very painful to be labelled as someone from the ‘other side’, based on only one of your identities, as if all your other identities don’t count any more. It makes one feel fragmented. This is what a young Dutch participant referred to during a training session, ‘If someone labels me as a lower-class woman, it functions as an explanation for everything I am doing, and as an excuse for whatever I am not doing. It blocks me in my process of becoming an autonomous woman, of becoming myself’. And Antjie Krog (2000), a white South African ANC activist and a writer, speaks of yearning for the moment when people no longer label her solely by her skin colour. She feels as if she is held hostage by this one identity. In line with this, one of her poems is called, ‘Colour never comes on its own’ (‘Kleur kom nooit alleen nie’).

Transversal identity politics

As has been made clear, it is not always easy to talk about identities. Talking about who you are may be very self-affirming, and may create feelings of (self) respect, and of pride. But it may also provoke feelings of anger, pain, loss, guilt, and frustration. The negative feelings are always connected with feelings of ‘being excluded’, ‘being fragmented’, or ‘not being allowed to be yourself’.

During a training session in Eastern Europe, in which the group struggled with their experiences of exclusion based on gender, ethnicity, and religion, the participants tried to find a word that meant the opposite of exclusion. They decided on ‘belonging’. They described what it feels like to belong. All of them mentioned moments when they were allowed to be their own ‘whole self’, not being fragmented, being at peace. When asked to reflect on the places where they experienced this feeling, the answers were, ‘with my family’, ‘with my grandmother’, or ‘in the village where I was born’.

Training experiences like these have taught me how crucial it is to create space for discussions around the inter-connected concepts of gender, identity, power, exclusion, and belonging. This is especially important for a group of participants belonging to a network or an organisation who work on a common goal. The differences that divide
the group should be acknowledged and understood, in order to allow them to continue to work together in a meaningful way.

Cynthia Cockburn has described this approach, which argues that differences should be affirmed, as ‘transversal identity politics’ in her book *The Space Between Us*. She refers to the work of Nira Yuval Davis, who highlights two components of this approach, which she calls ‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’: ‘The idea is that each participant brings with her the rooting in her own identity, but at the same time tries to shift, in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have a different identity’ (Cockburn 1998, 8). Cockburn’s own research on this topic was carried out among three women’s organisations in conflict areas: Ireland, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Palestine. She focuses in her book on the way in which these women, coming from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, fill the social space between them with a meaningful dialogue, which enables them to work together and to survive in ‘alliances’. An alliance is defined as: ‘a creative structuring of a relational space between collectivities, marked by problematic differences’ (ibid., 211). By a ‘relational space’, she means one that ‘has to afford an optimal distance between differences, small enough for mutual knowledge, for dispelling myths, but big enough for comfort’ (ibid., 224).

In the gender training session with the Sudanese women, discussing transversal identity politics proved to be a very helpful strategy in defining realistic plans for future participation in the north–south peace negotiations, and for regional networking. Participants read some chapters of Cockburn’s book together, and this enabled the participants from north and south Sudan to name their pain and their discomfort. It was a relief for them to see that ‘sisterhood’ does not necessarily mean that you have to hide your differences and join hands if you don’t feel like it, or in other words, if the space between you is ‘too close for comfort’.

**Change and transformation in development organisations**

These insights are very important for development organisations thinking about gender and diversity. People do not leave their identities at the organisational doorstep. They bring with them their personal ‘package’ of privileges and vulnerabilities, based on which, they are socially included or excluded. At the same time, the organisation itself reflects and reinforces the systems of dominance that are found in the broader social and political context (as does the family system, and all other institutional systems). This is because these systems are strongly interconnected, as has been elaborated by Naila Kabeer: ‘Understanding ... inequality through an institutional perspective helps emphasise the complex ways in which organisational rules, cultural norms and routinised practices from different institutional sites intersect to produce and sustain such inequalities across society’ (Kabeer 1999, 24). There is a growing awareness among development organisations that they have to be prepared to discuss diversity issues within their own organisation, at the level of their ‘deep structure’, that is, the ‘collection of values, history, culture and practices’ (Rao et al. 1999), that underlies the organisation’s way of working. Underpinning the deep structure is what Rao *et al.* call ‘exclusionary power’, which ‘devalue[s] participation and silence[s] the voices that would bring the alternative perspectives and knowledge required for gender equal outcomes’ (Rao *et al.* 1999, 12).

If an organisation wants to take its gender and diversity policies seriously, the exclusionary power mechanisms at work within the organisation need to be challenged. As long as that does not happen, the deep structure is unaffected, because only superficial change will take place. Organisational transformation is not a sudden change; it is a gradual process. It cannot be imposed externally, as it needs to be based
on a process of change that grows from within. Once transformation takes place, it is irreversible.

Antjie Krog, in her book *A Change of Tongue* (2003), has described the difference between change and transformation in organisations with reference to racial diversity. She explains, ‘Replacing white people with black people is not transformation in itself. If these newly appointed black people bring another vision with them – or the white people already employed by the firm develop a new vision or attitude – then transformation is taking place. If black people replace white people, but the same structures, systems, visions and attitudes are retained, you merely have change. The faces have changed but the company has not been transformed. This is why black people say nothing has changed, and white people say everything has changed’ (Krog 2003, 126).

Referring to the situation of South Africa, she writes, ‘Economically, culturally, and socially, the country has not been transformed. Changed, but not transformed’ (ibid.,127).

**Training principles supporting the implementation of a gender and diversity policy**

There is a set of methodological working principles that is used during transformative gender training, which might also be helpful in establishing a gender and diversity policy at organisational level. (For materials about a transformative training methodology, see the references given below.) In my view, four core training principles are: that people are central to the process of learning and change; that diversity and the inherent patterns of dominance should be acknowledged; that empowerment of individuals as well as of the group should be aimed for, and dichotomous perceptions in thinking and action should be broken. In the following section, the usefulness of these principles in relation to organisational change will be explored.

**People are central to the process of learning and change**

During a training session, participants are seen as individuals, with their own personal, political, and professional experiences and ambitions. All three levels are addressed during a transformative training session, and the learning process is facilitated with reference to the life histories of the participants. They are then able to ‘own’ the learning process, and implement their learning in their own lives.

Likewise, organisational transformation will not happen if it is imposed on people. It should ‘make sense’ to them. Their own full participation and commitment is conditional. This is why the design and the implementation of a gender and identity policy should be people-centred. Critical discussions about the space the organisation gives to people to develop, to break (informal) rules, and to pass organisational boundaries (like the famous ‘glass ceiling’) will be a fundamental step in the process towards organisational transformation.

**Diversity, and inherent patterns of dominance, should be acknowledged**

A second principle of transformative gender training is to acknowledge and affirm the differences between the participants, in relation to the patterns of dominance that are involved. There should be a ‘non-closure on identity’ (Cockburn 1998, 225), that is, judging people by their actions, not by their identities, so that there is space to discuss personal experiences. In sharing their stories, participants learn to recognise their own privileges and vulnerabilities and to understand better the underlying systems of social inclusion and exclusion. The objective of these sessions is not to avoid dominance as an issue, but to unveil it, demystify it, and see how it works.

Apart from acknowledging the identities of those who are present, it is also crucial to
investigate who is not present, and why. Was the fee too high, the venue not accessible, or the notice inadequate? Maybe we simply 'forgot' them, or did not consider the conditions under which they might have come?

This second training principle of acknowledging diversity is important for organisational transformation, since the diversity within the organisation should be acknowledged, and the organisation should recognise who is part of the organisation, and who is not. What do people have in common, and what makes them different? Patterns of dominance, exclusion, and stereotyping should be revealed. Organisational diversity can also be a rich source of knowledge and experience, as long as people’s stories are heard and valued. If this is the case, it adds to the credibility of the organisation, especially if it is a development organisation with partnerships worldwide.

**Empowerment of individuals as well as the group**

During a training session, individual experiences are shared. In the process, the common underlying patterns that shape and define our lives are revealed. It is fascinating to note that the underlying power mechanisms that shape our room for manoeuvre as individuals have astonishingly similar features all over the world. Patriarchal systems reliant on notions of honour and shame, and norms and values about ‘real men’ and ‘good women’ are similar worldwide. Machismo in Brazil, in Pakistan, or in Georgia may have a different face, but the underlying stereotypes of men being the protectors of the family honour, whereas the women are literally the embodiment of it, is exactly the same. In exploring these concepts, there is a double emphasis on the experience of the individual participants and of the group.

Likewise, a commitment to organisational transformation should involve a process of learning in which presumed ‘personal’ problems should be politicised, in order to disclose the underlying general systems of inclusion and exclusion that are located in the organisational deep structure, and that reflect societal inequalities.

Equal space, voice, and respect should be guaranteed for all involved. Efforts should be made to encourage a mutual meaningful dialogue, while discouraging participants from stereotyping each other.

**Recognising, challenging, and breaking dichotomies**

Pairs of terms are used in many societies to reinforce the existing systems of dominance. No pair is symmetrical – that is, one side of a dichotomous pair will be less valued or noticed, or perceived as a threat and a deviation. Examples are male–female, white–black, urban–rural and heterosexual–homosexual. Dichotomies also exist in mainstream education: a common idea is that the intellect is superior to, and in opposition to, the emotions. Another is that the mind is superior to, and in opposition to, the body.

During a transformative training session, the facilitator needs to ensure that participants draw on both their intellect and their emotional feelings, and value their body language and physical reactions, as well as their thoughts. This is why role playing, guided meditation, and drawing and ‘sculpturing’ are not just complementary training methods, but are unique and crucial opportunities for learning in their own right.

With reference to organisations, rules always exist (even if they are sometimes hidden) which refer to ‘how things are done in this organisation’ (the norm) and ‘how things are not done’. There is a common sense of what is counted and valued, and what is not. Most organisations have a ‘monoculture of instrumentality’ (see Rao et al. 1999), valuing the accomplishment of quantitative goals over the quality of the process. Writing and speaking will be valued more than reading and learning; and a
person who dedicates himself or herself fully to work within the office will be valued more than someone who works half-time, in order to combine family and work responsibilities. It has to be kept in mind that these dichotomous pairs reinforce each other, and seriously block the accomplishment of a gender and diversity policy, which has as an objective to give equal respect and voice to all involved.

**Conclusion**

Based on the insights that I have presented in this article, it is clear that there are many lessons to be learned from transformative gender training, for an organisation that wants to establish a gender and diversity policy. Specially designed gender and diversity training might be helpful in supporting the design and implementation of such a policy. However, this will only have a positive impact if a committed management actively supports the training. A follow-up programme should also be arranged, taking into consideration the outcomes of the training, within the broader process of moving towards a transformative gender and diversity policy.

I believe that a training programme that contributes in a positive way to the introduction of a transformative gender and diversity policy should be based on a solid set of methodological working principles, and should include the following concepts as a minimum package of core training sessions: gender, identity, power, systems of exclusion and inclusion, change, and transformation.

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**Note**

1 This paper is a shortened version of a longer article called ‘Women Climbing Trees’, which elaborates more explicitly the principles of a transformative training methodology, and includes some examples of gender and identity training exercises, as well as a report of a one-day training session on gender, leadership, and power. Please e-mail the author for information.

**References**


**Further reading**


Promoting cultural diversity and the rights of women: the dilemmas of ‘intersectionality’ for development organisations

Liesbeth van der Hoogte and Koos Kingma

Work with women belonging to indigenous groups in Latin America needs to take into account both their identity as women and their identity as indigenous people, and the interplay between these identities. Indigenous women do not reject their culture, but want to change certain traditions in order to promote justice. Novib and Hivos, two Dutch development organisations, organised a workshop with local experts to discuss how to support indigenous women. Two important dilemmas were identified: the tension between collective and individual rights, and the need to link and address social and economic exclusion with cultural discrimination. Holistic solutions are needed. Changing power relations is a long-term process, which also needs to deal with fighting gender-based violence. NGOs need to change their attitude towards their target groups, and think and work for the long term. This is a challenge, given the current emphasis on short-term, measurable results.

Development agencies face the challenge of working with populations who live in a complex reality. People's identities have many different facets: they belong to different cultures, ethnic groups, and socio-economic classes; they are male or female, urban or rural dwellers, and so on. All these different aspects of identity are important in people's daily lives, yet most NGOs and other development actors work to promote social change in a way that focuses on only one – or possibly two – aspects of people's identities. This means, for example, that a project focusing on challenging gender inequality does not simultaneously work on challenging inequality between women from an ethnic majority, and women from an ethnic minority. Similarly, a project focusing on promoting the rights of indigenous people will not necessarily focus on inequality between women and men in the indigenous community.

There is currently much interest in the issue of intersectionality in the international development community – that is, the way in which multiple identities cut across each other to produce disadvantage for particular individuals and groups in society. In 2001, the UN Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance was held in Durban, South Africa. At the conference, and in the regional preparations for it, there was an increasing interest in developing the intersectional approach, emphasising diversity in plurality, based on the analysis of power and rights.

The concept of intersectionality was introduced by Crenshaw for dealing with the specific problems of black women in the USA, whose position was different from that of other women or black men (Crenshaw 1994). The intersections of different identities determine the social position and power of each person, which can be an advantage or
disadvantage in given situations (Wekker 2002). The intersectional approach makes it possible to recognise and tackle very specific problems, without the risk of stigmatising or homogenising specific groups. However, applying such an approach confronts actors with certain dilemmas. This article discusses these dilemmas, as they played out in a recent seminar on gender and diversity in Latin America supported by Novib and Hivos. Both organisations are development agencies based in the Netherlands; both support organisations in various countries working from a perspective of human rights. Hivos has a regional focus on culture, and Novib a special programme on indigenous rights. Both require that the organisations working with them have a policy on promoting gender equality.

Novib and Hivos decided to support the seminar so that discussion around dilemmas on gender and culture are not only being held among indigenous organisations or people, but are present also in international organisations working with communities on development issues. It is becoming increasingly clear to development organisations, including our own, that the failure to recognise the importance of people’s multiple identities leads to a failure to address the discrimination against individuals and groups which arises out of this.

Novib wants to extend its understanding of these issues, and to develop organisational capacity to address them in its programme. As a member of the Oxfam International family of international development NGOs, Novib supports community-development work which addresses poverty and suffering from a rights-based perspective. The right to equality on the basis of gender and diversity is considered by Novib to be crucial to ensure that the development process is inclusive: no person should be excluded or marginalised and denied his or her rights based on his or her identity.

The intersection of ethnicity and gender: the dilemmas we face

The first, and most important, methodological question for us in planning the seminar was how to deal with so many complex and challenging issues in a few days. We needed to avoid the pitfall of having interesting discussions without being able to make concrete suggestions for how to improve our work. It is difficult to give priority to particular issues in working for a more equal society, because in reality there are many issues that need to be faced.

However, to avoid talking about everything without finding common ground, the organisers decided to focus on the ‘intersection’ of ethnicity and gender.

This intersection presents challenges that differ according to the route from which we approach it. It can be approached by focusing on gender-based inequality, or by focusing on the cultural rights of minority communities.

Challenges in addressing gender-based inequality

Gender is perhaps the best-known aspect of identity which development agencies aim to address in their work. Working to promote gender equality has become an accepted part of development policy, and, to lesser extent, development practice. Yet, despite these efforts, women still face many forms of exclusion and discrimination. The problems women are confronted with are comparable to those of excluded ‘minorities’, which have their roots in ethnic, racial, or other differences. All these groups may be prevented from exercising their rights, due to the fact that political, economic, and social systems privilege the interests of white men. However, a comparison between the problems faced by women and minorities does not create an automatic synergy between them.

Because the groups overlap, women within minority groups lose out in terms of power and rights not only because they are
women, but because of their minority identity. Women within minority groups are constrained particularly severely by men within the groups to conform to gender stereotypes of correct behaviour. This is especially true if the minority group faces particular threats from outside. At the same time, women from minority groups who are involved in development initiatives may also face prejudice from programme staff, and fear being stigmatised by telling them their problems. It is important to emphasise that women from minority groups often do not feel secure enough to share their problems with staff of development organisations, because of the unequal relationships which result from cultural and racial discrimination. Minority women don’t want to be addressed only as women, but as indigenous women.

Challenges in addressing inequality based on race or ethnicity
While the struggle for the rights of women emphasises their collective rights in relation to men at the level of government and society, it also has a strong individual and personal dimension, since the majority of women coexist with men at household level.

In contrast to the focus of the feminist movement on the individual and collective rights of women in relation to men and the State, the struggle for the rights and emancipation of indigenous peoples focuses on the importance of collective rights, and the right to cultural integrity, in a State dominated by people of a different culture.

Integrating these analyses and relating them to human rights
Currently, the movement for women’s emancipation, movements for the emancipation of ethnic and racial minorities, and other emancipation movements meet in the human-rights movement. Each movement has a different relationship with the concept and practice of human rights, and with the State. Feminists have critiqued the State as representing the interests of the men who shaped it and now govern it. But feminists from many different parts of the world have also tended to see the concept of individual human rights as helpful, because it offers scope for upholding the rights of individual women facing discrimination within the household and community. In contrast, movements to promote the emancipation of racial and ethnic minorities have tended to see the concept of individual rights enforced by the State as undermining their collective right to cultural integrity.

These different ways of thinking about universal, individual human rights lead to difficulties for development organisations. On one side, cultural relativists argue that the intrinsic values of every culture should be recognised; every culture is equal, and each culture or ethnic group is to be evaluated on the basis of its own values. This implies that criticisms should not be made from the point of view of standards and values which come from outside the culture. However, this kind of respect for culture can easily lead to various forms of fundamentalism, where values in a particular culture are wrongly understood to be absolute and fixed. In fact, every culture is characterised by unequal power relations between particular groups, leading to discrimination and exclusion. Challenges to the social hierarchy occur all the time within groups. However, people who hold power can combat challenges coming from outside the culture by presenting the culture as monolithic and static, and accusing the challengers of external interference. This is a powerful defence against change.

At the other end of the spectrum is the argument in favour of a multicultural society. Culture is not seen as something fixed or static, but it is acknowledged that culture, as well as gender and ethnic relations, are socially constructed, and hence subject to change. However, this change will not occur in societies that feel under threat. The very real fact that ethnic minorities are often politically, economically, and socially marginalised from mainstream society leads
to a tendency to protect and promote the right to a distinct cultural integrity. Preserving the cultural identities and traditions of the minority group is prioritised to the detriment of the civil and political rights of women and other groups. Women then pay the price: women who do claim their rights will be perceived as acting out of solidarity with their men and their culture.

**Identifying two key dilemmas for discussion**

We can see from the above that the questions raised by the way in which cultural diversity intersects with gender relations are complex in theory. In practice, things become even more complex, since gender relations and race relations differ from society to society, and each situation prompts different questions and needs. Neither blueprint solutions nor simple answers are useful. So how can different situations be challenged and changed? We agreed that the seminar in Latin America should discuss the central question: ‘How should or can we ensure that everyone’s rights are respected, in relation to two key dilemmas?’ For discussion in the seminar, we summarised the following two overarching dilemmas as the most important in this field.

- The tension between collective and individual rights: the UN Conference on Human Rights held in 1993 in Vienna, Austria, ratified cultural rights (the right to preserve and develop one’s cultural identity) as an essential (integral and universal) component of human rights. But these cultural rights could, in some cases, oppose the exercise of civil and political rights of individuals from indigenous groups or other minorities, and above all, of women. In the debate on the contradictions between cultural and individual rights, some theorists have argued that cultural rights hold for only as long as they do not oppose individual rights. Others are of the opinion that cultural rights should be freely exercised. One of the questions that has emerged in this debate is: who decides which cultural rights are allowed to dominate over individual rights?

- Cultural differences and discrimination lead to social hierarchy and segregation in many regions, including Latin America. How should one understand the link between social and economic exclusion and cultural discrimination, and how should this be addressed in development work? The North American philosopher Nancy Fraser (2001) assures us that there is a dilemma for policy makers here. Socio-economic injustice (exploitation, economic marginalisation, and deprivation of material goods), cannot be separated from cultural injustice, rooted as it is in what Fraser describes as social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication. However, policies to address economic injustice will only work if they are tailored to the needs of particular groups, and take into account all the forms of discrimination they face. For example, when women or girls have access to education, they are still vulnerable to other forms of gender-related discrimination, including violence, in school. For women from minority groups, these forms of discrimination arise not only as a response to the fact that they are threatening gender norms, but also because they are challenging power relations between the ethnic majority and ethnic minority group.

Undifferentiated policies to address economic injustice do not recognise cultural differences as causes of the other forms of discrimination people face.
These dilemmas have consequences for our daily practice as development workers. We need to recognise and face them, and work out how to address them. What effects do they have on us and on our organisations?

First, they perpetuate power imbalances, which present themselves as strong hierarchies and social fragmentation. These shape the relationships between development donors, partner organisations, and the people in the communities with whom we work. Development staff and professionals are almost always from a different social stratum than the population with whom they work. In many cases, this difference in identity and interest will lead to inequality in that relationship, with consequences for attitudes, communication, and the ways in which people interpret reality. For example, if the staff of government bodies or NGOs ask women from marginalised communities about the inequality they face within their communities, the women may deny that they face inequality. This is because they fear that their cultural identity will be stigmatised. For that reason, many NGOs working with indigenous people or traditional communities in South America assume that women don’t face inequality.

Second, these dilemmas present women from marginalised communities with complex problems if they want to challenge inequality. Development workers need to recognise this fact. For example, women play a central role in socialising children to continue cultural practices, but if these cultural practices have a harmful impact on women and girls, they have very limited scope to question or change them. If women rebel against tradition, they run the risk of being excluded from the community. Exclusion carries a very high price, if you are also discriminated against in the wider society based on your membership of a marginalised group. If women from indigenous or ethnic minority communities denounce domestic violence to the police authorities, for example, they are often treated with hostility, due to racism. We need to recognise the stake that women have in their society, and the high risks that they face from men inside and outside their community if they question injustice.

The seminar: how did we address the issues?

To ensure that the exchanges and contributions would bear fruit, it was necessary to guarantee that the participants could discuss shared realities. We opted to focus the seminar on gender and diversity in three areas: the Andean region, the Amazon region, and Guatemala. Although all these regions are characterised by different cultures, they share a political and socio-economic reality. We invited six or seven people from each region to participate in the seminar; although we did not explicitly select women, there were only two men among the participants. We took the following aspects of diversity into account when selecting participants: they should have specific experience of the issues; be open to new ideas and reflections; be ready to engage seriously with the issues in order to achieve change; have respect for the differences between participants at the seminar; and be accustomed to thinking within the framework of rights. The participants included representatives of development agencies, researchers and consultants, employees of NGOs or local government, community workers, and women’s leaders.

We started with panel presentations based on national experiences. Working groups then analysed case studies provided by the participants, and discussed strategies for dealing with theoretical cases. The working groups were mixed, and included women’s leaders, NGOs, consultants, and agencies. At the end of the seminar, the groups proposed recommendations for different actors, including international co-operation.
As stated above, two speakers gave presentations based on their experiences in the national contexts of Bolivia and Guatemala. In both countries, the majority of the population is indigenous: approximately 60 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. Statistics show a disproportionate degree of poverty and lack of education in the indigenous groups. Within the indigenous groups, women are more likely than men to be poor and uneducated.

The case of Bolivia
In 1952, a revolution in Bolivia ended a feudal system of government. However, this neither succeeded in creating a more egalitarian society, nor created a sound economic structure. Moreover, the political structure that was created was susceptible to corruption and clientism. The State was the major employer for Bolivians. In 1985, a neo-liberal economic model was introduced, and national enterprises were privatised, creating widespread unemployment. The State reduced its role in providing social services such as healthcare, and these responsibilities were delegated to civil society. In the process of delegation, the State encouraged communities to take over these responsibilities by stressing the concept of community, and suggesting that this kind of self-help was in line with a respect for tradition. In the indigenous communities, women found that they had to take on the responsibility for providing social services, while the emphasis on tradition contributed to a polarisation of gender roles and further marginalisation of women. This case illustrates how policy makers need to consider the link between economic and cultural differences.

Cecilia Salazar, who presented the situation in Bolivia at the seminar, stressed that in recent years, interesting policies and ideas have been developed and introduced in Bolivia, including the recent ‘Ley de Participación Popular’. This is a law which enables and regulates popular participation in local government. In spite of some good policies like this, Cecilia Salazar told the seminar participants, there have been no real changes in the lives of indigenous women. On the one hand, elite groups at national and local levels perpetuate the marginalisation of indigenous communities in the eastern lowland regions of the country, and on the other hand, communities in the highlands face the problem of traditional social organisations that are not willing to change the hierarchical way in which they work. Salazar concluded that change depends on the interaction between people in political and social power, and not on the mere introduction of progressive laws and policies.

In urban areas of Bolivia, a new social group of middle-class indigenous people is facing ethnic and race-based discrimination. Because of their indigenous identity, they are not considered by many as full citizens, and their history is not seen as part of the formal history of the country. These middle-class indigenous groups are reinterpreting and recreating their history, as a way of asserting their rights of citizenship. This is changing indigenous people from being individuals with complex, dynamic experience into ‘custodians of identities’. Cecilia Salazar identified two specific factors that have influenced the struggle for equal rights of indigenous women in Bolivia. The first is the tension between the struggle of indigenous women and the feminist movement: indigenous women want to exercise their individual rights in their own way, within the context of their social group. She argues that the Latin American feminist movement promotes the human rights of women in a uniform and universal way, and that this often does not provide an answer to the specific expectations and needs of indigenous women. She also made the point that the way that society is run and perceived is determined by middle-class intellectuals on behalf of the wider society, so that the voices of marginalised groups, including women and indigenous people, are not heard in the decision making that affects their lives.
The case of Guatemala

Morna McLeod introduced Guatemala to the seminar as a country with four indigenous peoples: Maya, Garifuna, Xinca, and Mestizo. There are no government initiatives to integrate indigenous peoples into mainstream society. The current situation cannot be understood without taking into account the fact that Guatemala has endured almost four decades of violent conflict under dictatorship. During this era, indigenous people were particularly affected, but that was not fully recognised by society until recently.

In Guatemalan society, there is a strong emphasis on valuing culture, which is not only obvious from the clothes people wear and the language they use, but in the expression of peoples' philosophy of life. Although indigenous people are discriminated against and don't have the same opportunities as the rest of Guatemalan society, they make themselves visible, especially the political movements among them.

The women's organisations in Guatemala are the most diverse and dynamic in civil society. They are exploring new ways of working in feminist politics, including using the intersectionality approach, and developing an integral analysis of women's marginalisation, while recognising the ways in which this crosscuts other identity issues which create disadvantage. Most of the focus of women's groups in Guatemala is on ethnicity, class, and race. An interesting effort was made by one organisation, with a declaration of the specific human rights of indigenous women, incorporating individual and collective rights. Not everyone in the (indigenous) women's movement (or in the seminar) agreed with it, however. This example, and other issues raised in the panel discussion after the two presentations, made clear that change can be a painful and complex process, in which different positions can clash. Morna MacLeod, and some other participants, stated that it is difficult to defend a particular political position taken by some people due to the particular issues they face, without affecting other people. Different types of feminism exist, which can often be in conflict. But while conflict is unavoidable, the intersectionality approach helps to identify and understand specific situations, and helps to define possible solutions.

Following the panel discussion were two sessions of group work, in which various experiences and cases were discussed. There were many diverse contributions, and the most important ones are summarised below.

The struggle of indigenous women is not only about gender issues

The struggle of indigenous women is not only about culture, ethnicity or race, class, or gender, but is about all these and more. This is not a surprising conclusion, but it has significant implications for the ways in which development agencies work with indigenous women. The women's leaders taking part in the seminar made it clear that they shared problems of inequity, violence, and discrimination, independent of their cultural or national context. They face discrimination within their own organisations and communities, as well in the national society and its institutions. The often-cited existence of harmony and complementary functions between men and women in traditional cultures seems to be a myth, according to the experiences these women, although this does not imply that the women criticise their culture as a whole. They need the chance and support to change traditions that affirm and promote injustice and to strengthen other traditions, and these vary from one culture to another.

Holistic solutions are needed

Development programmes need to change the ways in which they work with indigenous women. Existing strategies that are important are the promotion of education for girls and literacy for adult women, the
provision of information about rights and laws, and training in specific skills and competences. However, seminar participants emphasised that these strategies and interventions should be used together, to reinforce each other. Currently, selecting only one or two strategies to use with a particular group has little impact. Furthermore, despite the similarity of the issues faced by indigenous women, strategies should not be implemented as 'blueprints'. The particular cultural and economic context means that the issues play out in different ways. Strategies should therefore be adapted to the specific situation.

The attitudes of NGO staff need changing
During the seminar, participants mentioned various prejudices and counter-productive attitudes that they had encountered among NGO staff. These included paternalism, and an assumption that the staff knew exactly what the problems were, and their proper solutions. Women complained that they were not taken seriously, either by NGO staff or by the men working in their organisations. For example, it was reported that NGO staff attempted to solve the problem of traditional leaders opposing women's equal participation in the organisation, by excluding women from responsible roles or on committees, or by including women only in limited areas of a project, to solve the problem of participation. Seminar participants called for NGO staff to take the organisational structure of programmes seriously and to involve women in discussions with traditional leaders. Only then can women change the hierarchies of organisations and communities.

Seminar participants also criticised some NGO staff for having culturally relativist views: that is, they accept gender inequality in a culture as unchangeable, and consider criticism of inequality as an offence against the culture in general. This can have two effects. First, indigenous women who are working to change negative aspects of their culture are not supported, and their responsibilities and roles as part of that culture are ignored. Second, it can lead to NGO staff dismissing and stigmatising the entire culture, rather than working with the people within it who have a progressive vision.

NGOs must think and work long-term
Participants were very critical of what they perceived as a new focus on measuring results and assessing impact in the short term. However, changes in power relations and in social and gender hierarchies are long-term processes. In addition, the narrow focus of most impact assessment leads to results being evaluated only in terms of the narrow aims of the project, rather than in terms of the broader changes which may have come about in communities.

NGOs must support indigenous women combating gender-based violence
Violence against women seems to be such an universal phenomenon that it seems almost impossible for a woman to challenge gender equality and gain leadership and autonomy, without experiencing some form of violence – whether this is physical, sexual, or psychological violence. Violence against women was mentioned at different moments during the seminar, while outlining the obstacles women are confronted with when they want to denounce violence or need support. It cannot be too often repeated that gender-based violence is not a problem only of some cultures, societies, or groups. Nor is it an issue only for victims and perpetrators. Rather, it is an instrument for imposing and perpetuating unequal gender-power relations in daily life, and an obstacle for women who seek to challenge this inequality and gain autonomy. It is an issue of human rights, human dignity, and development, and therefore a responsibility for all institutions, including development agencies.
Conclusion

The seminar proceedings confirmed that indigenous women are not rejecting their culture, rather, they want to change those elements of it that hinder them in exercising their full rights. Indigenous women should be supported in this challenge, to defend and respect their rights and so fight the twin challenges of cultural relativism on the part of development agencies, and growing fundamentalism within their communities.

The recent development of the concept of intersectionality is helpful for assessing the complex situation of indigenous women and the discrimination they face. The position of indigenous women cannot be understood exclusively by an analysis of cultural difference. Development practitioners should not accept any cultural arguments that tend to neglect or hide gender injustices. Development work informed only by an analysis of cultural difference will fail to support indigenous women’s interests and needs. Yet, analysis and work informed by a narrow feminist perspective (which focuses on gender inequality in isolation from other forms of inequality) is equally inadequate. Development organisations should work hard to develop their understanding of what intersectionality means for policy and practice. This means they need to ally themselves to research institutions focusing on this issue which share their interests and goals.

For Novib, the insights which came from the seminar will be very important in informing the development of a programme of work on the rights and security of women. This theme became a priority for our organisation in 2003. This means an institutional commitment and a huge challenge to work for gender equity in a diverse and polarising world.

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Notes

1 We thank Chantal Verdonk and Els Rijke of Hivos for their comments on earlier drafts.
2 It is essential to mention the close association between culture and ethnicity. When we refer to indigenous women in the article, the observations could also apply to forms of multiple discrimination against women in other contexts.

References

Diversity in Oxfam GB: engaging the head and turning the heart

Bimla Ojelay-Surtees

This article, by Oxfam GB's diversity adviser, shares her experience of addressing diversity in an international development NGO that has British roots and history. In particular, the article focuses on race and sexuality. Oxfam recognises diversity as an inclusive concept - that is, it makes a commitment to value all individuals and their identity differences. It also recognises that individuals from particular identity groups experience inequality and discrimination because of who they are. Therefore, Oxfam has to address both the need to include individuals from different identities in its work, and the inequalities between groups. Here, some of the personal and professional challenges facing change-agents are discussed, in the context of developing a strategy and action plan on diversity, and of work on learning and development.

I took up my job as diversity adviser in Oxfam GB (henceforth Oxfam) nearly six years ago. During this time - and especially in the early days - I was occasionally asked to write about how I was taking diversity work forward in such an organisation. I declined those requests, because I felt it was not the right time. It seemed too early, as I was in the thick of planning and doing the work, and had not reached the stage at which I felt I could share my insights and experiences in a sufficiently useful way with others in similar positions. Six years on, it is now an appropriate time to share some of my experience.

This article focuses on two different aspects of my work. The first relates to the process I used in order to develop Oxfam's organisational Diversity Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan. The second relates to work on learning and development which I have led more recently, aimed at enabling staff to develop attitudes and behaviours that support and value diversity. Here, I relate these two aspects of my personal experience and learning during the journey. This is because agents of change on equality issues can face difficulties that have a personal dimension and impact. It is important not to deny this personal-professional link, and to share experience on it, in order to help others facing similar situations, and to enable our organisations to learn about the challenges facing change-agents.

The early months: barriers and challenges

When I was offered the job of diversity adviser (initially called 'co-ordinator') with Oxfam, I was absolutely thrilled. Oxfam was an organisation I had supported in the past, particularly in my student days, and I had continued to admire it. I felt excited about working on equality issues in an organisation whose beliefs and principles were fundamentally grounded in equality, dignity, and respect for all. I thought that this would mean no more 'fire fighting' (that is, trying to convince people that equality is a
good thing), as I had had to do in other organisations.

I was initially tasked with putting together a Diversity Strategy and accompanying Action Plan for Oxfam. The brief for the diversity post was to work across the whole organisation, but I was told that the initial focus would be on internal activities (all activities except our international development programme), and mainly in the UK.

The diversity post had been created as a result of consultancy work undertaken in 1996 by some leading experts on diversity, whose brief had been to recommend how Oxfam could involve more people from ethnic minority groups in the UK in the organisation. I realised that I was going into a situation in which the post was a highly visible one, and that there were likely to be both sensitivities and expectations linked to it. I had sensed very early on that the post was a ‘political’ one, even from the composition of the interview panel (including Oxfam’s Director and a Trustee, among other senior staff).

The location of the post

My post was positioned in the Corporate Human Resources Division (CHR), a central support division for the other four divisions of Oxfam GB. I was informed at that time that the reason for being located in CHR was based on a desire for the diversity work to be undertaken using an organisational development approach, with a style that differed from telling staff that diversity was a policy requirement and restating the moral argument for equality between different social groups. Some senior managers claimed that this was the approach that had dominated Oxfam’s gender-equality work in the past. This style was seen as insufficiently effective, because it did not inspire or sustain the changes needed in practice. Putting the post in the Corporate Learning and Development Team in CHR was meant to allow more scope for a new approach.

However, perhaps inevitably, the positioning of the post in CHR created some tension. Some staff felt that it should have been placed in the International Division, which had a Programme Policy Team consisting of advisers tasked with developing Oxfam’s international development-programme work on gender equality. Some of those working on gender equality felt that putting my post in CHR indicated a lack of real commitment to addressing issues of inequality related to diversity. It was even perceived by some as a deliberate undermining of the gender-equality work already being progressed by other staff.

Gauging support and challenges

In the early months, I absorbed the mixed reception to the new post from existing Oxfam staff as an important initial indicator of the level of existing support and challenges. There were a few who indicated that they saw the diversity post, and my arrival, as a sign of progress; it gave them hope that the issues would be addressed. Others initiated contact quickly, and expressed verbal support for the work, but I perceived them as doing so for political reasons. There were those who said that the post was only a tactical move by Oxfam, and that there was no genuine commitment to address the issues. As already mentioned, some challenged the notion that ‘diversity’ was the right approach — it was seen as weak and not connected to addressing inequality, and it was feared that it could potentially undermine existing work on gender equality. Finally, there were those who remained completely silent, and remained at a distance from me. All these responses mattered, and informed my thinking about how to take the work forward.

One of the first things that struck me about Oxfam was that I had expected a more visible diversity in the profile of its UK staff, because of the stated values of the organisation and the nature of its work in international development. I found a complete lack of black role models at senior level,
and lower representation throughout the organisation than I had expected to find. As an Asian woman coming from a working-class background, I felt alienated from the white, academic, middle-class culture that seemed to pervade the organisation. I had some moments of concern about how I would get on. But it was early days, and these were only first impressions.

By the time I had been in Oxfam for a few months, my initial concerns had become tangible challenges, which had a significant impact on me personally. Although I came to Oxfam with nearly ten years of experience of working on equality issues in the UK, ranging from action research, grassroots youth and community-development work, to leading organisational change in both voluntary-sector and local-authority contexts, I began to feel that my knowledge and skills were not seen by some as relevant to Oxfam, and on occasions people actually said this to me. I felt undermined and constrained, to the extent that I started to lose confidence in my own intuition, skills, and ability to do the job. I experienced many staff, and particularly managers, responding to me on the basis of their stereotypical preconceptions of an Asian woman. I come from a working-class background, and looked young for my age; there appeared to be an underlying assumption that I must lack experience and would struggle to do the job. My initial comments and ideas were criticised in seemingly exhaustive detail, except for some that were simply blocked without discussion (for example, the idea of forming staff groups based around aspects of identity, including race). Almost every time I went into a meeting with a white member of staff, it seemed as if I was being re-interviewed for the job, as the relevance of my skills and abilities were questioned and scrutinised. My movements were monitored heavily beyond the six-month probationary period, in a way that other new (white) members of staff were not.

As I went on to meet with other black staff in the organisation and heard confidences about their own experiences of working in Oxfam, I realised that my initial experiences were not uncommon. Many black staff said that they did not feel that their skills and abilities were trusted, and found that they were continually trying to prove that they could do what they were employed to do, in a way that their white counterparts were not. It was generally felt among the black staff I spoke to that despite Oxfam’s stated values on equality and its international programme presence, only white staff could rise to senior management positions. They pointed out that over the years, Oxfam had continued to be a white-led organisation.

While these experiences are obviously subjective impressions, they echo the external perceptions of Oxfam from graduates who were consulted during the research that formed a part of the 1996 consultancy on diversity. The consultants had included Oxfam in a study that examined graduates’ perceptions of different sectors as potential employers, together with other not-for-profit organisations. It found that, ‘With regard to recruitment, there is a belief that Oxfam seeks to employ a certain “type” of person. That is someone who is highly educated, intellectual, speaks the Oxbridge language, has a breadth of managerial and/or technical experience, and who is familiar with a Western style of managing. This type of person tends to be white, middle class and male.’ (internal report 1996, 9).

The personal cost of being a change-agent

My experience of racism\(^5\) in Oxfam was different from the overt forms of racism I had dealt with in other organisations, but, ironically, it actually affected me more deeply, because it undermined my belief in myself. I struggled with deciding whether to leave or stay, but either way, I felt the burden of personal failure looming.
However, after consulting a few trusted ex-colleagues who had relevant experience in equalities work and in-depth race awareness, I learned that I needed to take a step back. I had to accept that this kind of experience is common, and gives rise to a personal and professional dilemma faced by many black and ethnic-minority staff who are acting as internal change-agents to address issues of inequality in large white mainstream organisations. I realised that if I challenged what was happening to me on a personal basis, it could undermine my role and my ability to do the work effectively. If I then tried to address race issues in the wider organisation, I would risk the work being discredited as coming from a personal agenda or crusade. I would also risk alienating staff from other identity groups who might assume that my only interest was in race, and not in other diversity issues and identity differences. I also realised that I needed to adjust my own assumption that Oxfam would be much more progressive in practice because of its stated values and beliefs about equality. I had arrived with a passion for Oxfam, and needed to manage my disappointment at not finding what I expected!

At this time, the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry was being discussed in the media, and this helped me manage my expectations about Oxfam and my emotions about what I was experiencing. It put Oxfam GB into context for me: it was a British institution, in which it was inevitable that institutional racism was likely to be present until relevant and deliberate actions were taken to recognise and address such racism. I recognised that such findings, coupled with the experiences that black staff had related to me (albeit in confidence) could provide enough leverage for me to go on to address issues of racism within Oxfam with some authority, without either dwelling on or denying my own experience.

So, like many others working on equality issues which affect us personally, I refocused my mind on the task at hand. I set out to strive hard to do the job of dismantling barriers, to enable people from a wider range of identity groups to be included and to thrive within Oxfam. In the process, I hoped to prove my skills and abilities and to regain my self-confidence and self-esteem.

**Engaging the ‘head’**

So, the question now was not whether to stay, but where to begin. The key issues and challenges that I faced were:

- understanding more fully what were the different barriers to equality in Oxfam;
- gaining access to some of the networks and groupings, and developing an awareness of the power dynamics within Oxfam – to find out who were the real supporters and the real gatekeepers;
- engaging people who were coming to equality issues from a primarily intellectual base;
- learning more about the various aspects of Oxfam’s work – and in particular, the aims and motivations of teams and departments, and how diversity could be leveraged in connection with these.

**Networking and gathering intelligence**

The first step I took was to go back, one-by-one, to staff who had made initial responses to my arrival, and to use these contacts to ‘snowball’ meetings and networking with people at all levels across the whole of Oxfam. Wherever possible, I included staff based outside the UK. I persisted in getting meetings with people who were in strategically important positions – that is, both those who held explicit power (mainly due to holding senior positions), and those who held implicit power (due to the influence they carried, or the impact they made).

In these meetings, I took the deliberate approach of saying very little and of not giving any of my own initial assessments of equality issues in Oxfam, even though this is what everyone wanted to know. I focused
more on listening and learning about people’s areas of work, their motivations and those of their teams, and their own perceptions and views of equality issues in Oxfam. This was important work, to gain trust and to start building relationships. When I needed help to open doors, I used the support of the Oxfam Director and individual trustees who had expressed interest in the work and had offered their support. This leverage, outside of the line-management structure, was important for two reasons: first, staff were more likely to become involved in response to requests from those who were perceived to be in the most senior and ‘powerful’ positions in the organisation. Second, at that time my own division was perceived to be a weak division, which could be ignored.

Simultaneously, I made deliberate efforts to ensure that I networked with people from different identity groups in Oxfam, and particularly with those who may have experienced inequality or discrimination because of their identity, in order to learn about their experiences and views. This included both those who were optimistic and those who were pessimistic about the potential to make progress on equality issues in the organisation. In the course of doing this, I eventually also found a few people who had a certain wisdom about issues of inequality and diversity in Oxfam, mainly due to their extensive years of experience of Oxfam and their learning from previous organisational changes. Again, these contacts were made by a process of ‘snowballing’. Interestingly, most were based outside the UK.

Avoiding ‘quick wins’

At this stage – about six months into the job – there was an expectation that I should start to produce ‘the goods’ on diversity – to get some ‘quick wins’. However, based on what I learned from my extensive networking within Oxfam, added to my past community-development experience, I wanted to avoid easy solutions. Instead, I wanted to establish a sound foundation for the work, so that it could start to flourish even if attempts to undermine or contain the work continued. Given the predominant intellectual/academic culture in Oxfam, I decided that although it would take longer, it would be appropriate to develop the Diversity Strategy and Action Plan via a diagnostic and evidence-based approach (that is, one based on facts: both quantitative ‘hard’ data, and qualitative data), produced using a structured process.

Using a workshop to develop a strategy and action plan

I decided to use a workshop format for generating the ideas that would form the Diversity Strategy and Action Plan. I designed the workshop primarily using a basic organisational development model: asking, ‘Where are we now?’; ‘Where do we want to be?’; ‘How do we get there?’; and ‘What do we need to get there?’.

In preparation, I gathered and analysed data that I believed was relevant to answering these questions. This included:

- data on the profile of Oxfam staff and volunteers by gender, disability, ethnicity, and age;
- census data on the profile of the UK population by gender, disability, ethnicity, and age, looking at employment and unemployment patterns; at representation in various geographical locations, in class and occupations, in educational qualifications, and so on;
- actual experiences of inequalities, and perceptions and views on barriers to progress within Oxfam (through in-depth interviews with a cross-section of staff from different levels and identities, including white staff);
- current definitions and thinking about diversity from various external sources, both in and outside of the UK.
In the ten workshops that resulted from this preparatory work, data was provided to participants so that they could use it to make the analyses and diagnosis for themselves. Using an accompanying rather than a directive approach meant that participants were in charge of their own learning and ‘aha!’ moments. This led to questioning by participants about the lack of diversity in Oxfam, why it existed, and why it was a problem. There was a better engagement on thinking through what diversity meant in Oxfam and why it was important to the organisation, and greater involvement in generating ideas for action and ownership of the outcomes. The thinking and ideas from the workshops was used to develop the Diversity Strategy and Action Plan.

While the nature of the data itself meant that the participants could not avoid acknowledging the existence of inequalities between groups, the process was also designed to lead participants to issues of power and discrimination experienced by particular identity groups. This was achieved by asking two additional ‘Why?’ questions: ‘Why are we where we are now?’ (lacking in diversity), and ‘Why do we want to be in a new position?’ (one that reflects greater diversity). A link was made with Oxfam’s organisational beliefs, which acknowledge the impact of unequal power relations on particular groups. By taking this broader approach, Oxfam has arrived at a balance between the need to include individuals from different identities and the need to address the inequalities between different identity groups.

The selection of workshop participants was not left to chance. Individuals were invited to take part on the basis of their strategic positions, or from the nature of their initial responses to my appointment, as mentioned earlier. Staff were selected who were in a position to act as levers for implementing action on diversity through being involved in areas of Oxfam’s work where the integration of diversity was a key issue. They included those who were seen as supporters and gatekeepers for diversity, and encompassed staff from different levels and parts of Oxfam.

My accompanying role did not mean that I set aside my responsibilities to challenge and to steer participants towards action on the issue. I acknowledged and drew out the collective knowledge and experience of all participants in the workshop (as opposed to using an ‘expert’ versus ‘learner’ model); challenged attitudes on the basis of the evidence we had in front of us; and guided participants forward by enabling them to find their own reasons to embrace diversity. For example, people involved in Oxfam’s retail and fundraising activities might embrace the ‘business case’ for diversity; those involved in recruitment and other human-resources activities might embrace the legal case for diversity; and those involved in Oxfam’s international development and humanitarian programmes might embrace the moral case for diversity in relation to Oxfam’s international programmes, which should promote equality for all. The objective was to help participants to see that embracing diversity was a ‘win-win’ process; there were business, legal, and moral reasons to do so. Finally, both Oxfam as an organisation, and individuals involved in Oxfam’s work, would gain from Oxfam becoming a truly inclusive organisation.

Involving the leadership
I subsequently led a similar workshop with the most senior staff in Oxfam – the directors of all divisions. This was intended to secure their ownership and leadership of the development and implementation of the Diversity Strategy and Action Plan.

After this workshop, it was possible to gain access to each divisional director’s senior management team, to ask them to identify the actions in the draft Action Plan that they could lead on implementing, and the time and resources needed for this work. Putting the planning of the implementation
into their hands helped to further the transfer and ownership of the development of the Action Plan to a wider group of senior managers, and resulted in the drafting of the Diversity Strategy and Action Plan. Staff working specifically on other equality issues in Oxfam (that is, gender and disability) were also given an opportunity to comment on the draft documents.

The Diversity Strategy and Action Plan were not sophisticated or well-polished papers, as is usually the case in Oxfam — instead, they were simple, rough, and ready. It was more important to reflect what workshop participants had said and how, as this would be important in spreading the ownership of the strategy, and in turn affect implementation.

**Launching the strategy and plan**

Once the drafting and implementation of the strategy documents had reached this stage, it was time to launch and communicate about them. The decision of Oxfam’s senior managers at the time was for a very low-key launch. This was because it coincided with the high-profile launch of some other key corporate work, and it was felt that a gentle approach was required for diversity. With hindsight, this was a mistake. Although a copy of the Diversity Strategy and Action Plan was sent to each manager in Oxfam, with accompanying notes on how to communicate the key points to their own teams, the impact was limited. While those who had already been directly involved in some way discussed the strategy with their teams, it by no means reached all the many layers of people within the organisation. I was directly involved in introducing the Diversity Strategy and Action Plan to some staff, and this proved to be very successful in inspiring involvement and action. However, the approach could only be used with teams based in the UK, as I had insufficient budget for travel outside the UK at that stage. The impact outside the UK was limited, therefore.

The key learning from this is that I should have persisted in pushing for a more high-profile launch of the strategy, involving the leaders of the organisation making a public declaration of their collective intention to progress diversity in Oxfam. This would have reinforced their commitment and accountability, and helped to open new and different doors in Oxfam — especially outside the Oxford headquarters.

Readers interested in the details of the Diversity Strategy can find it on the Internet at www.oxfam.org.uk/about_us/diversity.htm

**Turning ‘the heart’**

When I first started work as Oxfam’s diversity adviser, it seemed more important to engage the ‘head’, in terms of changing people’s minds, given the predominance of an intellectual and academic culture in Oxfam. However, several years into the implementation of the Diversity Action Plan, mobilising and getting involvement by capturing hearts as well as minds has become important in my efforts to further challenge and develop attitudes and behaviours, so that all staff truly live Oxfam’s diversity and equality values in their work. In doing so, I have encountered other personal and professional dilemmas.

In the last few years, I have led and advised other colleagues on the development of learning and development activities on diversity. I have felt dissatisfied with the progressive, but limited, level of engagement on diversity and equality issues which I observed from the participants of various learning events. I was also aware that there was a growing level of dissatisfaction (and, in some cases, of anger) from staff who belonged to particular identity groups (including gay, lesbian, and bisexual staff, and black staff) about the slow rate of progress and the lack of personal awareness among some members of staff about the negative impact they were having on others.
I felt that more needed to be done. Working on the basis that our attitudes and behaviours are informed by our values, I wanted learning and development on diversity to help people achieve a deeper human connection with the issues.

The approach I have taken is to use methods that lend themselves to engaging people emotionally. I have designed two learning events with this aim in mind: one is a workshop that addresses issues faced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual staff in Oxfam, using storytelling performances; the other is a meeting for directors and senior management teams to address race issues within Oxfam (focusing mainly on our offices in the UK), using Forum Theatre.

**Gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues**

When the Diversity Strategy was being quoted or promoted, I often encountered the criticism that the diversity work did not seem to highlight sexual orientation as a diversity issue, and that issues facing gay, lesbian, and bisexual staff were missing. This came as a bit of a blow, as I had from the start tried to promote the notion of diversity both as being inclusive and as addressing inequalities experienced by all groups. I decided that I needed to find a way of looking into issues of sexual orientation in a much more focused way.

I started by gathering stories from gay, lesbian, and bisexual staff about their experiences within Oxfam. They were invited to provide stories confidentially or anonymously. Their stories showed that they felt that their freedom to speak about or to challenge homophobic attitudes and behaviour was very limited. I was alarmed by this, and realised that despite many years of working on equality issues, I too lacked a deeper awareness of these issues. I questioned whether I had, albeit unconsciously, failed to do more about the issues faced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual staff because I could not identify personally with the issues. For me, this raised the dilemma of whether it is possible to be an effective change-agent on issues of which one has no direct personal experience. I felt that I did not have the relevant expertise to lead awareness raising of the issues, but I needed to act, as the diversity adviser. I decided that since there was such a taboo in Oxfam about talking about issues faced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual staff, I would bring in the relevant expertise from outside the organisation, and use a medium that would bring the issues out into the open.

**Using a storyteller**

After talking with a few of the affected staff in Oxfam, I decided to design a workshop which would use storytelling as a medium to raise and address issues faced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual staff in Oxfam. I employed a storyteller and a trainer with in-depth expertise of the issues from a leading UK organisation specialising in this area of diversity. A small number of stories that had come from gay, lesbian, and bisexual staff in Oxfam were selected, and, as a team, we turned them into materials that could be performed during the workshop.

The workshop was designed to include three live story performances, each presenting a different problem or experience faced by staff in Oxfam. The performances were followed by small-group work, in which participants were given a conceptual framework to help them identify and discuss the issues. Having the stories performed brought the issues to life for the participants, and this had the impact of engaging them emotionally in a way that could not have been achieved by reading the stories on paper as case studies, or as verbal presentations of the issues faced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual staff. Once this emotional engagement was achieved, participants were more motivated to address the issues on both the personal or individual level and at the organisational level, and hence to identify possible actions.

The feedback from all participants was extremely positive. It revealed that the use of storytelling in combination with an experienced trainer had the impact of
engaging not only people's minds, but also, more importantly, their emotions. All participants offered to be ambassadors for the workshop, to promote it to other colleagues.

The workshop is now running as a part of Oxfam's central learning and development programme. I have transferred my role in organising the workshops to a colleague in Oxfam who has more experience of the issues; this will help to widen the ownership of such work. In the process of setting up and jointly designing the workshop with the expert trainer and storyteller, I learned more about the issues and have resolved my initial dilemma. I have confirmed to myself that as agent of change for equality, it is appropriate to take a lead on addressing aspects of diversity that are not part of my personal experience, as long as the process is inclusive of – and gives voice to – those with direct experience of the issues.

Using Forum Theatre

In October 2003, a meeting of all directors and senior managers in Oxfam (around 70 people) included a learning event on diversity. The overall focus of the meeting was race issues in the UK, and was part of Oxfam's aspiration to become more inclusive of people from black communities in the UK. The objective of the learning event was firstly to expose senior staff to the race-related tensions and problems that had been raised at two earlier meetings that year (one external, with a number of black community and voluntary-sector groups in the north of England, and the other internal, involving black staff from Oxfam in the UK and the Director of Oxfam). The second objective was to generate a greater emotional engagement with race issues by senior managers, both as individuals and collectively. To enable these objectives to be met, a greater representation of black staff was needed at the event, so a number of black staff from various parts of Oxfam who had attended the meeting with Oxfam's Director were also invited to take part.

When planning the event, I felt I was in the firing line of both white and black staff. On the one hand, some black staff felt anger and frustration that the openness about racism represented by this event was unprecedented: they could not be so open either with their managers, or at other meetings. They directed this anger and frustration at me. On the other hand, I was challenged by some white managers and staff who felt that Oxfam was already very progressive; I was told it was 'bending over backwards' to address equality issues, and that the examples of racism to be used in the event were isolated events, rather than an accurate reflection of a wider situation.

I decided that what was needed was to bring both white and black staff together and get them to start talking out the issues directly with each other. I wanted to help white and black staff to step into each other's shoes and experience something of what the others were thinking and feeling. This is what led me to use Forum Theatre. Forum Theatre was originally developed in Brazil by a theatre director, Augusto Boal, to give a voice to marginalised and oppressed groups, giving them the chance to 'rehearse' new ways of being, thinking, and acting to improve their lives. Over the years, Forum Theatre has been adapted into a process for addressing issues of inequality, including in working environments.

The Forum Theatre process begins with a small group of professional actors acting a short scene based on real-life experience, depicting the issues relevant to participants of the learning event, who are their audience. The actors play various characters, presenting the situation or problem from their own different perspectives, and the scene is left open-ended, at a point of real tension. The actors leave the 'stage', and each takes advice from a section of the audience on how to proceed next. The audience becomes the mind and mouthpiece of the individual characters in the scene. The process proceeds with each actor returning to the stage with the lines that have been given to
him/her by the audience. The action can be stopped at any point by any section of the audience wishing to advise 'their' actor on what to say or do next. This usually happens as the tension increases and more controversial things are said. At some point, each section of the audience is made to change the actor they are working with, so suddenly they have to be the mind and mouthpiece of a different character.

The key point about this process is that as the members of the audience are forced to think on their feet and are put under pressure to confront the issues from different perspectives, views, comments, and feelings that are often guarded or held back come out into the open. This method allows people to say what they may be thinking and would like to say about a particular issue. Once the previously hidden views and comments are out in the open, the issues can be addressed in a more meaningful way.

The scene acted out at the Oxfam meeting involved three characters. The script was based directly on evidence collected from Oxfam by the Forum Theatre Company. The Company had observed the meeting between black staff and Oxfam's Director, they had held in-depth interviews with a number of mainly white senior and middle managers in Oxfam, and as diversity adviser, I had provided relevant documents and notes on diversity.

After the Forum Theatre session, participants were split up into small groups to reflect on what they had just experienced, including the race issues that had been raised. As a follow-up, they were also asked to identify some personal actions that they would take as individuals in response to the session. They were then asked to work in their divisional groups to discuss and identify three things they would do differently in the areas they managed, in relation to both internal and external Oxfam activities.

In terms of the learning from the event, the conditions under which the Forum Theatre session was used in this meeting were by no means ideal, as I observed that the process did not work well with such a large group. Limited finances had led me to go ahead with a large group, knowing that the impact might be reduced.

However, while it was clear from observing the dynamics of the event that a few participants had opted out of taking part, and that a small number continued to respond only using the 'head', most of the participants were drawn in and became emotionally engaged. There was evidence of denial, resistance, humour, sadness, and anger in the room. The fact that the majority of participants responded with emotion, and not intellect alone was significant. This was reinforced in the evaluation of the meeting. Two particularly significant comments were from a white manager, 'This is the most effective race-awareness training I have ever experienced', and from a black member of staff, 'You have helped a marginalised group of people within Oxfam to gain a voice; we can move forward'.

Such experiences are likely to have a positive impact on the implementation of action plans on diversity, both personal and organisational. After the meeting, I was approached with some stories from black staff of small but significant changes in attitudes and behaviour of white colleagues or managers, and by white managers who wanted to talk through the issues and openly share their feelings. I feel strongly that seeds have been sown and that they will flourish if they continue to be nurtured appropriately.

**Conclusion**

Working as an internal change-agent on diversity and equality issues in an organisation that includes such values as part of its mission can be both positive (in that the main effort does not have to go into convincing people that diversity is a good idea) and negative (in that most people take it for granted that if equality is part of the organisation's values, it automatically exists in practice).
However, I have learned that to mobilise others effectively to engage with diversity and equality both with the head and the heart, it is important for the change-agent to

- recognise and address personal challenges, including those related to his or her own identity, by placing them in the context of addressing wider equality issues in the organisation;
- have support available from trusted people who have expertise in the area of addressing inequalities, and from whom it is possible to accept challenges about one’s own thinking, strengths, and weaknesses;
- gain a sound understanding of where one is starting from – the culture, barriers, and opportunities unique to the organisation – to guide decisions about which approaches and methodologies to use, and to be ready to try out new ways and approaches;
- invest time in engaging with as many different people as possible (those with different kinds of power, perspectives, and identities, including those one perceives as gatekeepers and supporters or allies), and by observing, listening, and learning from them, even if that presents personal challenges;
- build and sustain relationships of trust right up to the leadership level through a process of accompaniment, enabling individuals to find their own ‘hook’ or leverage for action on diversity, rather than trying to impose it upon them as a so-called ‘expert’;
- influence, nurture, and lead, but be collaborative in doing so;
- accept that the journey as a lonely one, be self-motivating, and continue to be driven by a personal passion for the work; it is rarely a role you receive thanks for!

I do believe that there has been some real progress on addressing inequalities and valuing diversity in Oxfam. This is not only seen, for example, in the gradual increase in numbers of staff from different identity groups in Oxfam, including at senior-management levels (such as an increase in women and ethnic minorities). It is also evident in the current organisational culture in which it is now possible for staff from particular identity groups to speak much more openly about the problems that they experience within Oxfam, such as those connected to race and sexual orientation. As a change-agent on equality issues it has been a difficult journey with personal costs that have at times been hard to bear, but unfortunately change rarely occurs without some pain, and on balance, I do believe that Oxfam is worth it.

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Notes
1 The other four divisions in Oxfam GB at that time were International (mainly programme and policy), Trading (mainly retail/shops), Marketing (mainly campaigns and fundraising) and Finance and Information Services.
2 Personal communication, 2004.
3 ‘Black’ is used as a political term (rather than one descriptive of colour) that includes people of African and Asian descent and identity who have experienced racism because of their colour, culture, or ethnicity.
4 Personal communication.
5 ‘Racism in general terms consists of conduct, words, or practices which advantage or disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. In its more subtle form it is as damaging as in its overt form.’ (The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry – Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, London: The Stationery Office, 1999, 321).
6 The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, carried out by Sir William Macpherson from July 1997, was an inquiry instigated by the British government into the unprovoked racist attack and murder of Stephen Lawrence. It was requested by Stephen's parents because of the failure of the police to carry out an appropriate investigation.

7 Institutional racism is 'the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.' (from The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, op. cit.).

8 These ranged from analysis and approaches to human resources from the Institute of Personnel Development in the UK, to the ideas and paradigms presented by, for example, David A. Thomas and Robin J. Ely in the USA (Harvard Business Review September–October 1996, 79–90).
Poverty-reduction policy responses to gender and social diversity in Uganda

Dereje Wordofa

How does a lack of consideration to gender and diversity restrict the success of implementing poverty-reduction policies? What are the lessons to be learned from past mistakes and omissions? This article examines the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process (UPPAP), which fed into Uganda’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The UPPAP process involved the participation of people whose identities often cause them to be marginalised. Useful lessons can be learned from this experience.

Who are the most vulnerable, poor, and powerless groups, and why? It is now widely acknowledged that poverty is not just about low income; it is also about powerlessness and exclusion. Exclusion from decision making prevents people from receiving equal recognition and from exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms in political, economic, social, and cultural life. The processes of exclusion generate economic poverty, and this creates vulnerability to risks and shocks. Marginalisation and powerlessness are perpetuated, in turn leading to more economic poverty.

In the second half of the twentieth century, strategies aimed at reducing poverty and promoting economic development were limited by a failure to understand how marginalisation of particular groups, including women and minorities, perpetuated and produced poverty. The industrialisation model of development of the 1950s, the Green Revolution of the 1960s, approaches in the 1970s to integrated rural development, income redistribution, and meeting basic needs, and the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s, all gave little emphasis to the issue of social diversity. In contrast, the poverty-reduction strategies being promoted today show a positive trend towards giving more attention to the worth of increasing poor people’s participation in political, social, and economic spheres, and promoting decentralisation (devolution of government). Many donors and governments are just beginning to understand, with non-government organisations (NGOs), how to develop policies and programmes that are flexible enough to meet the needs and aspirations of all members of society. Some have reached this point through recognising the need to respond to major conflicts which have arisen as a result of deepening and widening poverty.

In general, poverty-reduction strategies should be based on the analysis of the causes poverty and inequality. If analyses do not focus on social diversity and how the exclusion of particular groups occurs, the strategies which come out of them will often
have the opposite effect from that intended—that is, they will aggravate poverty and inequality. Some analyses concentrate on the impact on particular people of one or two aspects of diversity—for example, on how class and gender shape the options of women in poverty—and ignore the rest (for example, age, ethnicity, or disability). This narrow focus on one or two aspects of diversity is partly because of the lack of a clear understanding of the interactions between poverty and social diversity, and partly due to not understanding the ways in which the different aspects of social diversity connect.

In this article, I focus on the case of Uganda and its engagement with the process of creating a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). PRSPs are national socio-economic plans directed at reducing poverty and are the prerequisites for debt relief and further loans as part of the initiative for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) by international financial institutions (the World Bank and the IMF).

**Poverty and social diversity in Uganda**

Over the past fifteen years, Uganda has made substantial political, economic, and social progress. The number of people living on less than one dollar a day has reduced from 56 per cent in 1992, to 44 per cent in 1997, and to 35 per cent in 2000. Other poverty indicators such as infant mortality, immunisation, malnutrition, net school enrolment, and literacy also show impressive improvement compared with the levels in late 1980s. However, Uganda is still among the poorest countries in the world, ranking 158 of 174 countries in the Human Development Index (UNDP 2000). According to official reports (MoFPED 2001), Uganda’s economy, with real GDP per capita of US$330, has been growing at an average rate of five per cent per annum since the late 1980s. Agriculture contributes 90 per cent of its total export earnings, and employs approximately 80 per cent of the work force.

Many poor people in Uganda are grappling with economic poverty and inequality, caused by the lack of recognition of the differences among and within communities. Uganda’s population is approximately 22 million, and is growing at the rate of 2.6 per cent per annum. The country went through civil wars and political instability in the 1970s and 1980s, which paralysed the social fabric and caused the economy to collapse. This period ended in 1986, when the National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power under the leadership of President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. The government is still fighting the Sudan-based Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in the north of the country. The NRM is the dominant ruling ‘movement’, and hence Uganda is a de facto one-party state.

There has been a significant effort to get women into government (in parliament and the cabinet) and there is a strong women’s movement, which includes organisations such as the Uganda Women’s Network, the Uganda Land Alliance (working on the co-ownership of land), and the Uganda Media Women’s Association. However, for the majority of women, life continues as it always has, in serious poverty, with most women occupied in the informal sector and in subsistence agriculture, and with traditional social norms which distance them from decision making at household and community level. The subsistence farmers who constitute the largest group of the poor are predominantly women. Women provide in aggregate 75 percent of total agricultural labour in Uganda, and yet women’s right to co-ownership of land is not protected through law (Kasente and Mwebaza, 2000).

Uganda is home to a large number of different linguistic groups. Past governments have excluded particular groups from political and economic power. To give some brief examples, the Karamojong pastoralists have been marginalised since the early twentieth century. The Baganda people were
discriminated against between 1966 until 1986, when the current government came to power. When Prime Minister Obote-I seized government in 1966, hundreds of Baganda people lost their lives. The dictator Colonel Idi Amin’s regime encouraged xenophobia when, in 1972, he expelled over 60,000 Asians from the country, giving them 90 days’ notice to leave. In 1977, Amnesty International estimated that 300,000 people of different ethnic identities had died during Amin’s regime. The Acholi and Langi, among others, were targeted (Baker, 2001).

The Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project (UPPAP)

In 1997, the government of Uganda formulated the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) as a framework to help to bring about sustainable development. This process was adapted and augmented in 1998, when, together with donors and NGOs, the Uganda Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development launched the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project (UPPAP). In the last quarter of 1999, the World Bank and IMF invited the government of Uganda to compile a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), as a requirement for obtaining further loans and debt relief under the Enhanced Heavily-Indebted Poor Country (HIPC2) initiative. The revised PEAP was completed and submitted by the end of March 2000, as a PRSP for Uganda. Uganda’s PRSP is therefore a revision of PEAP, and the terms PEAP and PRSP are interchangeably used in Uganda.

The UPPAP aimed to consult the poor and most marginalised groups, to improve understanding of the nature and causes of poverty in Uganda, and to gather the views of different groups in society about their access to—and the quality of—basic services. This was to ensure that their voices fed into development planning at macro (national) and district levels.

The UPPAP was initially designed to last three years, from mid-1998 to mid-2001. However, the process slipped behind this original schedule, and became focused on ‘learning as you go’, with three phases. Phase one, from 1998 to 2000, consisted of a first round of participatory poverty assessments. Phase two lasted from 2000 to 2001, and consisted of using the information obtained to influence policy, and for the dissemination of findings. Phase three, which also ran from 2000 to 2001, focused on research to deepen the understanding of poverty and of poverty trends for different socio-economic groups, and of poor people’s experiences of the implementation of selected government policies. From October 2001 to June 2002, a second round of participatory poverty assessments took place, for a second UPPAP.

The outcome of this process was a PRSP based on the findings and qualitative information generated by the UPPAP. Additional information has also been obtained from the household surveys of the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, civil society organisations, and donors. The PRSP aims to guide government, donors, and other development partners in sector planning, setting priorities, and resource allocation. The most important pillars of the PRSP are, first, sustainable economic growth and structural transformation; two, good governance and security; three, raising the income of poor people; and four, improving the quality of life of poor people. Uganda is determined to reduce poverty to the level of 10 percent by 2017 (PEAP 2001, Vol. 1).

Gender and diversity in UPPAP

The process and the resulting paper has succeeded in drawing attention to the multidimensional nature of poverty, revealing the processes leading to impoverishment, explaining anomalies, and filling gaps in the information about poverty. Importantly, it has exposed the fact that the benefits of
Uganda's widely publicised and impressive macro-economic growth were not trickling down through society, especially to the poorest 20 per cent of the population.

The first UPPAP
In 2000, the final report to come out of the first UPPAP process had a chapter devoted to gender issues (UPPAP 2000). Despite this, and the fact that the UPPAP generated a number of findings pertinent to gender and diversity issues, the research synthesis did not explain the key issues. Ultimately, gender analysis was not strong in the resulting PRSP. The sex-disaggregated data emerging from UPPAP were synthesised and re-aggregated during the formulation of PRSP, thus hiding gender differences and inequalities. The PRSP document concentrated on some approaches to tackling women's problems, such as girls' access to education and ways of tackling violence against women by their husbands. But it did not include an analysis of why these problems existed: that they are a result of the underlying inequality between women and men in terms of power and resources. Beyond gender, other aspects of diversity were ignored.

There are many reasons for these weaknesses. First, there was limited time allowed for gender analysis, and there was an inadequate level of participation from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, which was responsible for the gender input into the process, and from key women's networks. NGOs and government were given only three months in which to feed into the PRSP, working within the parameters set out by the World Bank and IMF. The engagements were reactive, and gender issues had to be added in at the end. What was needed instead was a proactive and comprehensive approach, in which gender analysis formed a part of the research and writing from the very start. In addition, the UPPAP process fed into the work of the national team, which was tasked to write the PRSP itself. The writing team included few women, and the gender skills of the team were weak, with limited training.

The second UPPAP
During the planning phase of the second UPPAP, lessons were learned about past failures and omissions, and the process was remarkably improved. Extensive gender training was given to researchers, gender consultants were recruited to oversee the process, and the composition of the writing team was changed to include more women. The second round sought to deepen the understanding of poverty in Uganda that was gained in the initial UPPAP, by strengthening the gender analysis and, in addition, focusing on the different views and needs of other marginalised groups. These included people who had been forced to leave their homes because of conflict and had become internally displaced, pastoralists, people in fishing communities, and those dependent on agriculture. The participatory poverty assessments in each research site were conducted with women, men, young people, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The process was carried out in 60 research sites in 12 districts, in contrast to the 36 sites (24 rural and 12 urban) in nine districts of the first UPPAP. Many more people were involved in the second assessment, therefore, in which 48 researchers were trained and deployed. The research process entailed three cycles of research of up to 35 days each and three rounds of national mini-workshops between each cycle for reviewing the research processes and synthesising findings.

What has the UPPAP process told us about poverty in Uganda?
The findings of the second UPPAP assessment (UPPAP 2002) covered a wide range of gender and diversity issues. All the groups involved in the research agreed that poverty can be described as a lack of basic needs and
services such as water, education, health, funds to do business, and so on. However, all emphasised the importance of powerlessness in their experience of poverty, meaning that people lack the ability to express their views and to be heard, at government level. For women, this powerlessness is also a feature of life at home.

The impact on poverty of social exclusion and discrimination came out as the most important finding of the second UPPAP. The finding revealed many issues familiar to gender and development researchers and workers. While some dimensions of poverty are familiar to all poor people, different categories of the poor experience poverty very differently, depending on the social, political, and economic conditions they face. For example, women explained that they lack control over land, the crops their labour produces from it, livestock, and other productive resources. Yet they are responsible for meeting family needs. Women's lack of decision-making power over land and other household assets, over cash income, and over decisions on when and how often to have children is a direct cause of welfare problems for entire families, including poor nutrition and health, and high infant mortality. Tracing the links between gender inequality and poverty was new for many involved in the PRSP process.

The process has also revealed that children remain excluded and voiceless. Due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and to conflict, Uganda has a particularly high proportion of orphans, many of whom are living on the streets or caring for younger siblings. A final example of exclusion to mention here is disability. The findings revealed that the exclusion of people with disabilities led to their diminished access to basic services. The elderly also lack the safety nets and social care that they deserve.

While inequality based on gender, age, and (dis)ability is present within families and households, other forms of inequality are shared by all members in a particular context among the poor, leading to different problems requiring specific policy responses. For example, the findings revealed that the pastoral communities in Karamoja lacked cattle and land, and that the cattle they did have were often in poor health. They experienced insecurity due to cattle raiding, and low crop yields due to prolonged drought, and remained powerless to influence national decision making. Young people endured the agony of extended unemployment, and their position in the job market was weakened by the lack of useful skills training. The people of Acholi in northern Uganda, in contrast, faced economic poverty in a very different context. Conflict has resulted in a vast loss of life and property, mass displacement, and the abduction of children.

Integrating the perspectives of all these different groups is critical if poverty-reduction policies are to work, and these policies will fail if the issues are not addressed systematically. If the needs, potential, and aspirations of different groups are included, it is possible to make policy responses that address the root causes of the problems.

Implications for social-policy planning

PRSPs are being developed in more than 30 countries in the developing world. Are they resulting in documents which are genuinely useful to women and men in poverty and for marginalised social groups? This depends on the level of participation of diverse marginalised groups of people and their ability to determine the process and direction of policy initiatives. Many governments in sub-Saharan Africa have failed to consult genuinely all segments of their societies in the development of policy, and have therefore produced documents which are superficial and of very limited use in national development. In contrast, the government of Uganda is clearly committed to revise its PRSP every three years, basing
these revisions on participatory poverty assessments. The country has exhibited significant commitment to listening to the voices of the poor. It can now contribute its experience, from which others should learn.

Policy makers working on poverty reduction should move beyond judging success in terms of spectacular strategic plans, and measure success in terms of facilitating genuine participation and empowerment. Participatory processes lead to appropriate strategies, but facilitators are not necessarily in control of the outcome. Addressing diversity issues means genuine participation and the inclusion of diverse groups in policy-planning cycles. However, exclusion can still happen, even if the participation of poor people is promoted, because of the power dynamics of the surrounding society. The power to silence another person in a process is not simply the power to prevent talking; it is the power to shape and control the talk. Those facilitating participatory poverty analysis must therefore take into account the context – of past exclusions, prejudices, and discrimination. Analysts will have to think harder to determine the measures that will ensure positive change.

This does not mean that policies should always be initiated and designed in from the bottom upwards, and rely entirely on processes that generate qualitative data and analysis. The impact of policies will significantly improve only when policy initiatives and responses at the top level become inclusive of grassroots perspectives based on collective analysis, which can enrich quantitative analysis. Participatory approaches are important for bringing out data and information that are often missed by quantitative survey methods. They also challenge the underlying assumptions of policy makers about the diverse circumstances of men and women living in poverty.

Over the past two decades, approaches to participatory research with people in poverty have evolved. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning Approaches (PLA) provide policy makers with useful tools for working with a range of communities (Chambers 1997; Holland et al. 1998, Blackburn et al. 1998). PRA stresses the need for changes in the behaviour of policy makers, if they are to become facilitators, listeners, and learners. The approach places great confidence in the abilities of groups of people in poverty to analyse and solve their own problems. PRA has provided a powerful means for the collection, analysis, appraisal, and synthesis of qualitative information on why people are poor and what can be done about it. It helps to identify different groups and to assess who is marginalised and excluded, while avoiding making people hostile to each other. It is about systematically and peacefully finding common ground and solutions. In recent years, critiques of participatory approaches from a gender perspective have resulted in greater attention being paid to intra-community and household power relations, which should result in participatory processes which challenge inequality at these levels (Cornwall 2001).

**Conclusion**

Attacking poverty requires working together, and mobilising the various knowledge, skills, and perspectives of different groups towards the common goal of poverty reduction. But this is difficult in practice, since power relations are unequal between different social groups, which may be in competition for resources. Understanding poverty requires us to understand how unequal power condemns specific social groups to marginal existences. Policy makers who design and implement poverty-reduction strategies must acknowledge, understand, and appreciate the wide range of differences which exist within communities, and the impact of this on poverty, and they should ensure that marginalised people are involved in the decisions and processes
which affect their lives. Otherwise, instead of the number of people in poverty being halved by 2015, the proportion will increase. Governments and international financial institutions are moving in the right direction in committing themselves to involve all marginalised groups in planning for poverty reduction. But to ensure that words become action, the élites who govern at national and international level will have to renounce a degree of control, and interest groups will have to feel a shared commitment to democratic means of decision making.

The question of social diversity, and the unequal power which results from it, is a complex, slippery issue, which challenges all who focus on it at a personal level; development organisations are not yet competent enough to deal with this successfully. We are all affected by the power relations which exist between dominant groups and those with less power. Working on social diversity challenges those who facilitate the formulation of poverty-reduction policies to change their own beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions towards people who do not share their identity. This will not be achieved quickly or easily. It becomes more complicated when the same need to change core beliefs becomes clear at organisational level.

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Notes

References
Empowerment through activism: responding to domestic violence in the South Asian Community in London

Aisha Gill and Gulshun Rehman

This article focuses on South Asian women's activism, and its impact on diversity and social development in South Asian communities in east London. It discusses the experience of the Newham Asian Women's Project (NAWP), which is committed to secure social justice for women and children escaping domestic violence. The article examines the tensions between the global phenomenon of violence against women and women's specific experiences of violence in different cultural settings. There is a parallel tension between universal responses to violence as a human-rights violation, and more culturally situated approaches. The article emphasises the ways in which NAWP's work addresses gender, race, and class-based inequality, using participatory approaches to empower women and direct the strategy of the organisation. For South Asian women in Newham, activism emerges out of their everyday resistances to oppression, which are based on ideas of community and family.

'...It is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves, we will be defined by others – for their use and to our detriment ...'
(Lorde 1984, 94)

Gender-based violence is prevalent in every society, throughout the life cycle, and across all socio-economic and cultural divides. It is a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women, which have historically led to domination over and discrimination against women by men. As such, violence has prevented women's full development (Coomaraswamy 1999). Such violence both violates women and impairs their enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Pateman 1998). Essentially, all acts of extremism linked to race, class, gender, or religion that perpetuate the lower status accorded to women in the family, the workplace, the community, and society can be regarded as violence against women. Violence against women is an enduring fact and an institutionalised form of male domination in many South Asian societies (Abraham 2000). As described in a recent article in the Howard Journal of Criminal Justice (Gill 2004), due to the inferior status traditionally ascribed to women in the South Asian community, violence towards women is often viewed as acceptable if exercised to preserve family solidarity and honour.

NAWP's history and experience

Newham Asian Women's Project was founded in 1985 in Newham, a borough in London, UK. Its initial remit was to provide
advice and support to South Asian women and children fleeing gendered violence. The organisation’s mission statement affirms its commitment to ‘secure the highest level of quality of service provision towards protecting, promoting and upholding the rights of women, children and families from South Asian communities’. The organisation has supported survivors of gendered violence to become independent and to determine their life course, through a wide range of strategies. These include counselling, advice and support to secure justice and protection for women and their children, and long-term resettlement support, including education and employment training.

NAWP emerged out of a recognition that mainstream refuges for white women had failed to meet the specific religious, cultural, and linguistic needs of South Asian women and children fleeing violence. In the mid-1980s, a strong and vibrant black and Asian movement had built up in the UK, made up of women from a range of class backgrounds and work experiences. During this period, organisations such as AWAZ (meaning ‘voice’ in Urdu), Organisations of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD), Outrage (a collective of lesbian black and Asian women), and Southall Black Sisters placed on the national and local agenda issues such as violence against women, women’s sexuality, and cultural and religious conservatism, which sought to deny women equal opportunities for social, political, and economic advancement.

In NAWP’s early stages of development, a core group of activists working at the local level consisted of professionals including advice and community workers, lawyers, and teachers, working with the local South Asian community. As the concept of separate and tangible service provision became a reality, a second core group of local South Asian women activists came together to form a committee to manage the affairs of the organisation, and to establish NAWP as a legal entity. Almost two decades later, NAWP’s membership consists of South Asian women from a variety of ideological perspectives, motivations, and political circumstances who live or work in east London. All are united in creating and promoting social change, through services delivered by South Asian women for South Asian women.

During the early years, NAWP claimed particular kinship with feminist ideologies, principles, and beliefs, as defined by South Asian women. NAWP sought to highlight the dual oppression of sexism and racism in the daily lives of black and South Asian women in the UK. The movement also tried to challenge the impact of imperialist concepts of Western feminism and institutional racism on the delivery of appropriate and effective services to South Asian women.

The term ‘feminism’ is very difficult to define. In *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*, Caroline Ramazanoglu (1989) explains that attempts to define feminism have been confused by the diversity of women’s struggles. She argues that the definition of feminism also depends largely on who is defining it. For example, some liberal feminists and some male commentators who see feminism as a social movement define it as either the ‘radical’ feminism of the USA in the 1970s, or the ‘bourgeois’ feminism of nineteenth-century Europe. In contrast, many feminist writers employ a broad definition that attempts to encompass all types of feminism. Ramazanoglu (1989) argues that both these approaches have their disadvantages. The former narrow definition excludes many political practices and schools of thought that are widely regarded as feminist; the latter fails to convey the contradictions in feminist thought. As a solution, therefore, some feminists have used the term ‘feminism’ loosely to refer to different conceptions of the relations between men and women and how they might be improved.

An important aspect of NAWP’s critical analysis of mainstream ideas of feminism rejected the essentialism of talking for South
Asians instead of with South Asians about their lived experiences (Carby 1982). As well as providing a safe and secure physical environment where victims of domestic violence could make informed choices about issues affecting their lives, NAWP has aimed to support the struggle of Asian women to claim a political space in which to address and challenge oppression in all its manifestations; to call attention to gender inequality and social injustice, and to highlight the politics of gendered violence and its consequences for the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of women. In so doing, NAWP represented a larger national South Asian women’s movement that sought to challenge feminist assumptions and to redefine feminist ideology and practice from a race and class perspective more accurately reflecting their experiences and reality. It was impossible to focus on gender inequality as the reason for South Asian women’s oppression and not to investigate the other oppressive dimensions of their lives. Hence, NAWP has developed services that reflect women’s myriad different experiences and the range of differences between them.

Violence against women is found in all societies, and the arbitrary exercise of power over women and children is a global phenomenon. But analyses of the causes of violence, the type and mode of violence, and the redress needed vary according to the local context. Violence against women plays out differently according to culture. Some believe that appreciating cultural difference can be an excuse for ignoring the violation of women’s rights in non-Western cultures. But we share the view of some feminists (Brennan 1990; Ono 1997) that the rights of women have to be interpreted and applied with sensitivity and due regard to differences in cultural norms and values. Although human-rights norms and standards are accepted in terms of their general formulations, their actual application and exact content must take cognisance of the different ways in which people’s rights are recognised and enacted in particular contexts. People’s ideas of who they are depend on their cultural context; this means that respecting an individual’s human rights should entail respect for variations in the ways in which those rights are exercised.

**Power and strategies of resistance**

During the 1980s and 1990s, NAWP highlighted the failure of the British State to intervene appropriately in cases of domestic violence in the Asian community. As well as providing practical and immediate support to women and children escaping male violence, NAWP recognised the need to foster a better understanding of women’s actual experiences of violence within the family, the frequency and nature of these experiences, and how structures of authority are constituted and controlled within the family.

This resulted in a heightened awareness of the inequalities embedded in the interlocking systems of race and class and underpinned by religion, gender, and location. It also resulted in a strengthening of the demand for a woman’s right to control her own life and body. Successful alliances between women activists of all colour and academics led to mass protests in campaigns against rape, immigration laws, the rights of women who had been imprisoned for killing their abusers, and forced marriages. It also led to protests against institutionalised racism and religious fundamentalism (NAWP 2002; Southall Black Sisters 2000).

The main targets for criticism were the police and the courts, who, due to their lack of understanding of domestic-violence issues and their general tendency to reduce incidents to a ‘domestic issue’ or to ‘blame’ the ‘victim’ for not leaving a violent relationship, made it difficult for women to have full confidence in the police’s ability to offer protection, and reduced the incidence of reporting domestic violence.
Feminist ambivalence towards the State runs deep. As Pettman (1996) has argued, ‘There is a very complex politics here, as women’s organizations and feminists direct demands at the State for more services to protection, while many are profoundly suspicious of the State and its implication in the reproduction of unequal gender relations.’ (Pettman 1996, 9) The State represents institutionalised inequalities between men and women, but it can also be a powerful site of potential or actual change (Pateman 1998, MacKinnon 1994). Resistance to, and dismantling of structures of domination, such as institutional racism, are crucial to the liberation of black and minority ethnic (BME) organisations. Criticism of the State and the debate about its role remains high on feminist agendas. Over a period of almost two decades, NAWP has recognised the limitations of the services that meet the immediate needs of victims of domestic violence, and has sought to expand its interventions to address women’s long-term needs through the provision of a holistic programme of support and empowerment. During the last ten years, NAWP has expanded its operational remit by adopting a more proactive and strategic approach to addressing gendered violence within the Asian community.

Our work with survivors of domestic violence has confirmed research findings that economic dependency prevents many women from escaping abusive relationships (Abraham 2000; Aguirre 1995). Many women who seek NAWP’s services have been denied access to education or work outside the home, because of a cultural conservatism that restricts women’s participation to their reproductive roles as mothers and carers. They often demonstrate a thirst for participating in activities that support their long-term economic empowerment and strengthen their self-confidence and self-esteem. Thus, our highly successful and extensive training programme seeks to empower women through an increased access to and control over resources, and includes activities such as language-skills development, vocational training, career counselling, and employment opportunities through strategic partnerships with local employers such as supermarkets and local authority departments. NAWP’s training department has also sought to explore the effects of abuse on women’s ability to become successfully employed, and to offer courses that address issues of health, violence, and work. During 2002, more than 230 women of various ages and educational levels benefited from our training programme.

The impact of violence and abuse on the long-term emotional and psychological health and well-being of women has also led NAWP to develop several groundbreaking interventions focusing on mental health, targeting young Asian women. Statistics show that one in four women will experience domestic violence at some time during their lives (Hague 2000), and that violence against women and children has serious consequences for their physical and mental health, making them more vulnerable to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and other mental-health difficulties. Studies have also shown that around half of Asian women experiencing domestic violence have had to wait up to five years before they were able to access help; this is for a number of reasons, including the lack of available appropriate support services (Gill 2003a; Imkaan 2003; Rai and Thiara 1997).

Finally, it is important to note that, in addition to service-provision and legal advocacy, NAWP has concentrated much energy in supporting groups like Southall Black Sisters in campaigning and advocacy on violence against women and children, both locally and nationally.

Gender, empowerment, and participation

As an organisation working from the ground upwards, NAWP has a firm commitment to ideologies and principles that support women’s empowerment through
participation. Acquiring a voice has been crucial to South Asian women’s political development of a sense of ‘self’, and has created a platform from which to act. This action may be within the confines of the community or in society at large.

A by-product of our training activities has been participants’ heightened awareness of the societal factors that contribute to domestic violence. This has led to their increased activism and participation in the organisation’s activities to end violence against women. The work we do highlights a number of gender issues that require further thought and action. Gender inequities related to the sharing of status and power and the control of household income hinder women’s full participation in genuine development (Kabeer 1998). Inequitable social, cultural, economic, and political structures are the root cause of crimes against women, and hinder women’s full potential in the empowerment process. These inequitable structures must be challenged or transformed before any real change is possible.

Participation has long been accepted in international development as a process of empowerment that involves the intended beneficiaries of development initiatives as central actors, elevating them from passive recipients of aid to primary stakeholders (Chambers 1983). However, in the Northern context, the popularity of participation as a tool is a more recent phenomenon. Donors and governments have increasingly recognised the value and benefits of a transfer of power as a key component of development initiatives (New Deal for Communities Delivery Plan Year 1 2000/2001), although cynics would say that this has been motivated by concerns for cost efficiency, rather than a genuine transfer of power to previously disempowered or excluded groups.

In contrast, participation as a means to community empowerment has been a central tenet of community activism in black and ethnic minority communities in the UK since the 1970s and 1980s. Excluded and marginalised communities have organised at the local and grassroots levels, to lead and direct community-development initiatives designed to improve their social, political, and economic status. Community empowerment is seen in this context as a means to forge new relations between strengthened social movements and the State, in order to bring about social, political, and economic change (Mitlin and Patel 2002).

However, we know from a growing literature on participation from a gender perspective that there are dangers in an uncritical acceptance of the idea of communities as being heterogeneous, and the dynamics of competing power structures within communities must be taken into account when involving them in the articulation of need, the identification of appropriate interventions, and the control of resources. Mohanty (1991) argues that for women, empowerment is a process of critically understanding that power is constructed and developed to subordinate women.

Oakley and Rowlands (1998) argue that empowerment is not only about opening up access to decision making, but must also include processes that lead people to perceive themselves as being able and entitled to occupy that decision-making space. While goals of empowering women through development projects reflect a commitment to gender equality, integrating women into existing projects does not necessarily equate to the empowerment of women. Empowerment is demonstrated by the quality of people’s participation in the decisions and processes affecting their lives (Moser 1989). In theory, empowerment and participation should be different sides of the same coin. In practice, much of what passes for popular participation in development work is not in any way empowering to the most disadvantaged in society (Oxaal and Baden 1997).

Participation is at the heart of the empowerment process, as individuals come together with equally valid but different
perspectives, sharing problems and exploring answers. This co-operative search for answers is where education takes place (Freire 1974). Through education, people gain the ability to analyse their situation critically, to recognise their options and to make choices for their own reality. Education makes people aware of the effect of their personal choices on society and on the world, and allows them to choose wisely. It is one of the most important means of achieving self-determination, particularly for women, providing the chance to develop fully one's dignity and potential. Education needs to be participatory, as this creates a relationship of communication between people. Part of the solution to development issues is for women to acquire knowledge, which gives them the opportunity to be actors, not just objects, in the process (Freire 1974).

The women involved in NAWP's activities have begun to analyse and understand the intertwined nature of empowerment and disempowerment in their everyday lives, and the manner in which their struggles for access to and control over resources, namely literacy, technology, and economic security, are inseparable from the deeply ingrained gendered practices of violence in their communities. These understandings have led them to rethink the scope there is for taking action.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

As part of its advocacy against gender violence, NAWP continues to evaluate the impact of South Asian women’s participation and the ways in which it has transformed gender and class inequities in their lives and the their quest for self-determination and independence. It is premature to assess or predict the longer-term impact of the organisation; we need to continue to monitor our services and their impact on individuals. This will require more attention to both process and results; only then will we know whether women are indeed benefiting from empowerment and participation.

The issue of violence against women has gradually become visible in public discussion and policy in the UK. Over time, NAWP has recognised the strategic importance of consolidating and expanding its work through local and national partnerships and coalitions. Part of the effect of working collaboratively has been to make an unrecognised problem visible, and the process has challenged conventional attitudes that either accept domestic violence in the South Asian community as ‘normal’, or see it as a ‘taboo’ subject, which should not be addressed. This work has included providing various national government departments and associated organs of civil society with data and recommendations concerning violence and safety. Forming these partnerships has been crucial for social action, and has contributed to developing a greater diversity of players concerned with violence and its prevention. It has therefore indirectly contributed to further grounding public safety as a human-rights issue.

Government inaction, or action that contributes to violence within a society, must be monitored in order to continue to prevent violence. Such monitoring must be done in relation to changes in relevant legislation and on government spending on the prevention of violence. This focus would need to include all the sectors of government whose laws, policies, and actions affect violence and its prevention. A new Domestic Violence Bill is currently being prepared for legislation, but questions are already being asked about whether such an instrument would provide sufficient protection from violence in all its manifestations (NAWP 2003).

In the meantime, we continue to deal with the pressures and constraints that adversely affect South Asian women’s experiences of domestic violence. There are many unanswered questions about the contextual factors that facilitate the occurrence
of violence against Asian women (Gill 2003b). However, any state legislation on domestic violence which begins by focusing on the inter-connectedness of race, class, and gender and the local contexts in which these incidents occur, further advances our understanding of the tangled web of social, cultural, structural, situational, and interpersonal factors that can interact to suppress or support violence.

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Notes

1 This article uses the terms gendered violence, male violence, violence against women, and domestic violence interchangeably throughout. Gender-based violence has been defined as 'violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering of women including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life' (UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Article, 144, 1994).

2 Almost all cultures place value on honour, defined as virtuous behaviour, good moral character, integrity, and altruism, and this ideal holds for men as well as women. In some cultures, however, honour carries an additional social significance as a theme around which most interpersonal life is organised. In these cultures honour is primarily based on a person's (usually a man's) strength and power to enforce his will on others or to command deferential treatment (Cohen 1997). A recent report published by Kvinnoforum (2003) defined honour-based violence as 'violence occurring when families with "honour-norms" violate girls', women's and boys' rights'. Honour, therefore, may be used as a justification (either implicit or explicit) for violence; in the most extreme cases it is used as a justification for the murder of spouses, particularly women, or family members in honour cultures, and formal customs and legal traditions have often been developed that sanction or excuse such violence.

3 Forced marriage is defined as a union between two individuals, at least one of whom has not provided consent. Such unions exist in a continuum of arranged marriage, defined by the degrees of coercion and consent. It may be useful, therefore, to understand this practice in the wider context of violence against women, as it is a significant variable in crimes of honour. It is also useful to point out that forced marriages occur in many societies in different parts of the world, and not only among diaspora communities and their respective sending countries.

References


Resources
Compiled by Erin Leigh

Publications

This classic text challenged Western feminists' conception and representation of women in the South. It charged Western feminists with depicting a homogeneous 'Third World woman', disregarding differences between women in the South. Mohanty argues that Western feminists see this woman as a poor victim, in need of Western feminist salvation. The text is theoretical and quite complex.

Lorde, among other black feminists, challenged the white-dominated US women's movement in the 1980s that ignored differences among women based on class, race, age, sexual preference, etc., and assumed a white middle-class norm for women's experiences. This is a must-read article, presented in an accessible way.

This collection of five independent, yet connected essays, is valuable for people working to promote gender equality in multicultural and international contexts. The author uses theoretical language, but grounds her writing in personal and concrete examples. The essays challenge the notion of feminism as a Western export; caution that international gender-equality work should not be based on (Western imposed) cultural stereotypes of gender inequality; challenge perceptions of gender inequality in the South as a sign of cultural inferiority, while similar instances in Western cultures are not addressed; and challenge romantic notions of Southern woman as Southern experts.

This is a useful group of academic essays on gender and race from around the world. Sections include: issues of theory and method; questions of identity; and racism and sexism at work.
Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms (1998)
Sherene H. Razack, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 10 St Mary Street, Suite 700, Toronto, ON M4Y 2W8, Canada.
www.utppublishing.com

Razack examines ways in which gender, race, and culture intersect in courtrooms and classrooms in Canada. She finds that many multicultural policies and practices are shaped by static and stereotypical understandings of different cultures. These misinformed policies often contribute to women from minority cultures being further marginalised.

www.simmons.edu/som/cgo/

This paper argues that, in order to understand the ways in which race, gender, and class intersect, we need to go beyond dominant organisational-change theory and practice. People experience race, gender, and class simultaneously. The paper includes guidelines and strategies for addressing race, gender, and class in organisational change.


McCall undertakes a holistic analysis (based on quantitative analysis) of US economic restructuring and its impact on wage inequalities from a combined gender, race, and class perspective. The book shows how policies to redress inequalities may fail, if they address one particular type of identity-based inequality at a time.

www.zedbooks.co.uk

Cultural Transformation and Human Rights in Africa explores the interaction between culture and human rights, and the fact that human rights are articulated and acted upon in locally and culturally specific ways. It is a useful book for people working from a rights-based approach, to consider how culture, which is constantly changing, impacts upon issues of rights. Many of the articles in the collection focus on women’s rights, especially women’s land rights in Africa. Contributors include Florence Butegwa and Celestine Nyamu-Musembi. Nyamu-Musembi’s contribution highlights the space that cultural transformation creates for interpreting both traditional customary law and state law in ways that advance women’s rights. The book challenges a common perception that customary law is necessarily in opposition to women’s rights, and that culture is unchangeable. A second book available in this series is Women and Land in Africa: Culture, Religion, and Realizing Women’s Rights (2003) L. Muthoni Wanyeki (ed.).

Every Girl Counts: Development, Justice and Gender (2001), World Vision Canada, 1 World Drive, Mississauga, ON, L5T 2Y4, Canada.
www.worldvision.ca

This report examines girl-children’s situations globally, and provides the reader with an accessible format for understanding the issues. The report covers twelve core topics, including HIV/AIDS, armed conflict, trafficking, and education. Each chapter provides a general analysis of the topic, World Vision’s particular experience, recommendations for further action, and international conventions that relate to the issue. An appendix contains the twelve chapters’ core conclusions and recommendations.
This collection of articles presents a variety of writings from both academic and non-academic writers working on the issue of disability, including chapters written by disabled women themselves. The topics covered include disabled women and sexuality, and service and resource needs of disabled women. Regions and countries covered include the USA, Australia, South Asia, and Mexico.


www.hrw.org
Also available online: www.hrw.org/reports/2003/safrica/

This publication documents the harsh realities faced by lesbians and gay men in southern Africa, where there is often open and harsh criticism of their sexual orientation and a related suspension of their human rights. This collaborative effort between Human Rights Watch and The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission analyses state-sponsored repressive situations in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, and Botswana. It contrasts these situations with the more progressive South Africa, where equality is guaranteed in principle, though not always in practice. The book includes recommendations to challenge state-sponsored discrimination and ensure that rights are realised in practice, not only on paper.
explanation of the different ways in which gender and race, ethnicity, caste, and other ‘racialising’ identities create particular experiences for women. It presents a background to the work carried out by the UN on racism and on gender and racism, the global context for these issues, and a presentation of different forms of discrimination based on race and gender. It provides clear examples and recommendations on how to incorporate this intersectional analysis for governments and the UN.

www.siyanda.org/docs/white_genderlens.doc

White presents a critique of the field of gender and development, and the development community more generally, on its relative silence with respect to racism in development. While issues of race and racism are a part of the development process, they are rarely addressed head-on, and when they are, it is more normally under the guise of ‘culture’, or other less controversial terms. White elaborates on the ‘neglect of black feminism’ in gender and development approaches, and highlights the different contributions that it has made to the field. She suggests that gender analysis should incorporate a race and class analysis – as all social interactions are influenced by these identities – but that such analysis may not lead to the conclusion that gender concerns are central to a situation.

www.unfpa.org/upload/lib_pub_file/73_filename_ageing_develop.pdf

This is a report of the Expert Group meeting on population, ageing, and development leading up to the 2002 Second World Assembly on Ageing. It undertakes a regional analysis of population and ageing in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, western Asia, and countries with economies in transition. The issues of population, ageing, health, and poverty have their own chapters, and in addition to these are chapters on capacity building, existing work on the issues, and a donor perspective. The report concludes with approximately 50 recommendations for action including, but not limited to, gender-specific recommendations.


One hundred and fifty million young people with disabilities are living in the developing world. Their needs are similar to those of their able-bodied counterparts, and include education, training, and employment, but support for young disabled people is lacking. This paper identifies the complex discrimination and marginalisation faced by young women, and by young people of both sexes from ethnic and racial minorities.

‘Development Myths Around Sex and Sexualities in the South’ (2003) Susan Jolly
www.siyanda.org/static/jolly_devmyths.htm

In this paper, Susan Jolly exposes the homogeneous depictions of women’s sexuality contained in development discourse, which ignores realities of women and men being anything but heterosexual, and considers sex only in terms of reproduction and disease, not in terms of enjoyment. Increasingly, work is being done to bring issues of sexuality into development approaches, but myths still abound. Jolly draws on international examples of work on sexuality and human rights to challenge the following myths: ‘homosexuality is a western privilege’; ‘we are all either women or men’; and ‘sexual pleasure – nothing to do with development’. This is an indispensable and accessible piece of work.
**Briefing papers and tools**

www.genderdiversity.cgiar.org/finaldiversbooksingle.pdf

This is a useful and accessible tool for planning the creation of coalitions and partnerships across difference. It suggests different ways of looking at collaborations, and provides helpful guidelines and hints on how to address diversity within them. The authors assert that there is an important difference between recruiting diverse staff, and creating an environment in which they are supported and creative.

*‘Gender and Ageing’* (2002) HelpAge International  
www.helpage.org/images/pdfs/Gender Pack.pdf

This set of papers addresses core issues relating to gender, ageing, and development. The first brief considers gender and ageing generally, highlighting older women’s particular vulnerabilities. The second issue covered is HIV/AIDS, including older women’s role as carers for their infected children and their orphaned grandchildren. It also discusses the incidence of HIV/AIDS among older women, despite the perception that the elderly are not sexually active, and argues that they need preventative education too. There is a section on the participation of the elderly in development, and how they should be incorporated into the decision making and planning of development programmes. Other topics covered include humanitarian crises, violence, and poverty.

www.icw.org/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=29

These guidelines offer a way of assessing a particular research project’s participatory nature. They include: participants and the nature of their involvement; the origin of the research question; the purpose of the research; process and context – methodological implications; opportunities to address the issues of interest; and the nature of the research outcomes.

www.unaids.org

This year’s World AIDS Campaign is on ‘Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS’, and this strategy note provides a background and rationale for choosing this theme. UNAIDS and the World AIDS Campaign have historically not taken root at national and local levels, and this year it is hoped that the campaign will be more flexible to the realities in these contexts. The strategy note also provides ideas, sub-themes, and organisations working on these issues, to support campaign work.

www.siyanda.org

This bibliography is a valuable resource for engaging with the issues of sexuality and human rights. In the first section, it provides abstracts to useful resources that engage with conceptual, thematic, and regional issues. Following this is a list of further resources on topics such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights, and refugees and asylum seekers, among others.
Organisations

Minority Rights Group International, 54 Commercial Street, London E1 6LT, UK. Tel: 44 20 7422 4200; Fax: 44 20 422 4201 minority.rights@mrgmail.org www.minorityrights.org

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) works to secure the rights of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples worldwide, and to promote co-operation and understanding between communities. Available on their website are various resources with a gender perspective, including ‘Twa Women, Twa Rights in the Great Lakes Region of Africa’ (2003) (also available in print), and a shorter report on Roma women in Albania entitled ‘Gender and Minority Issues in Albania’ (2003) (available free in print).


The Permanent Forum is an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council, with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health, and human rights. According to its mandate, the Permanent Forum will: provide expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the Council, as well as to programmes, funds, and agencies of the United Nations, through the Council; raise awareness and promote the integration and co-ordination of activities related to indigenous issues within the UN system; prepare and disseminate information on indigenous issues. The Permanent Forum holds an annual session; the third session, from May 10-21 May 2004, had the theme of ‘Indigenous Women’.

Women’s International Coalition for Economic Justice, 12 Dongan Place #206, New York, NY 10040, USA. info@wicej.org www.wicej.org

WICEJ is an international coalition representing organisations in all regions of the globe. WICEJ works to link gender with macro-economic policy in international inter-governmental policy-making arenas from a human-rights perspective. It utilizes an integrated feminist analysis, which links the multiplicity of systems that oppress women, and recognises the diversity of women’s experience by race, ethnicity, class, national origin, citizenship status, and other factors. It works to further develop this integrated analysis across regions and experiences, and to bring these perspectives to bear through policy advocacy, educational activities, and popular resources. It seeks to bring a stronger economic analysis to women’s issues and a stronger gender analysis to social and economic issues in the international arena. It seeks to bring local perspectives on gender and economic issues to the international arena, and conversely, to bring shared analysis from the international arena back to its members regions and national communities.

Center for Gender in Organizations, Simmons School of Management, 409 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215 USA. Tel: 617 521 3800; Fax: 617 521 3880 somadm@simmons.edu; www.simmons.edu/som/cgo/

The Center for Gender in Organizations (CGO) at the Simmons School of Management is committed to improving organisational effectiveness by strengthening gender equity in the workplace. Integral to CGO’s approach is the recognition that gender operates with other dimensions of identity such race, class, ethnicity, and sexual identity, in shaping organisational systems and practices, as well as workers’ experiences. It believes that
focusing on work organisations provides a powerful lever for broader social change.

CGO is an international resource to organisations, scholars, practitioners, executives, and managers in the profit and not-for-profit sectors.

The Gender and Diversity Programme of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), C/O ICRAF, PO Box 30677, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254 20 524 240, 650 833 6645; Fax: 254 20 524 001, 650 833 6646
v.wilde@cgiar.org
www.genderdiversity.cgiar.org

The Gender and Diversity Programme at the CGIAR offers a series of working papers and reports about working with diversity in international organisations. Many papers in this series are based on the programme’s own research within CGIAR, while others draw on the experience of organisations and diversity experts worldwide.

UNAIDS, 20, avenue Appia, CH-1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland. Tel: 41 22 791 3666; Fax: 41 22 791 4187
unaids@unaids.org
www.unaids.org

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS, is the main advocate for global action on the epidemic. It leads, strengthens, and supports an expanded response aimed at preventing transmission of HIV, providing care and support, reducing the vulnerability of individuals and communities to HIV/AIDS, and alleviating the impact of the epidemic. The World AIDS Campaign theme for 2004 is ‘Women, girls, HIV and AIDS’.

The International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS, Unit 6, Building 1, Canonbury Business Centre, Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road, London N1 7BJ, UK.
Tel: 44 20 7704 0606; Fax: 44 20 7704 8070
info@icw.org
www.icw.org

ICW is the only international network by and for HIV-positive women. It was founded in response to the desperate lack of support and information available to many HIV-positive women worldwide. Its aim is to improve the situation of women living with HIV through supporting them to empower themselves and exchange information.

Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) Young Women and Leadership Program, Secretariat: AWID, 215 Spadina Ave, Suite 150, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 2C7, Canada. Tel: 416 594 9680/594 3773; Fax: 416 594 0330.
South Africa Office: AWID, 2nd Floor, Community House, 41 Salt River Road, Salt River, 7925 Cape Town, South Africa.
Tel: 27 21 447 8821; Fax: 27 21 447 9617
yw@awid.org
www.awid.org

AWID aims to create opportunities for young women to articulate their priorities and build leadership. The programme includes an active e-mail discussion list, with particular themes prioritised by young women, including HIV/AIDS, trade, citizenship, and others. Also available on the website are articles and interviews relating to young women and development, profiles of young women leaders in development, and further resources.
Mobility International USA Women, Disability and Development Program, PO Box 10767, Eugene, Oregon 97440, USA. Tel: 541 343 1284 (Tel/TTY); Fax: 541 343 6812
exchange@miusa.org
www.miusa.org
MIUSA works for empowerment, equal opportunities, and human rights for women and girls with disabilities around the world. MIUSA’s ‘Loud, Proud & Passionate!’ projects focus on infusing the perspectives of women with disabilities into international women’s movements and development agendas. Loud, Proud & Passionate® is one important step toward creating opportunities for women with disabilities to take integral roles in the development process, empowering themselves and their communities. MIUSA has sponsored conferences and training all over the world.

Women Living Under Muslim Laws, International Coordination Office, PO Box 28445, London, N19 5NZ, UK.
www.wluml.org
run@gn.apc.org

The Network ‘Women Living Under Muslim Laws’ was created to break women’s isolation and to provide linkages and support to all women whose lives may be affected by Muslim laws.

Catholics for a Free Choice, 1436 U Street NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20009-3997, USA.
Tel: 011 202 986 6093; Fax: 011 202 332 7995
cffccatholicsforchoice.org
www.cath4choice.org

Catholics for a Free Choice is an independent not-for-profit organisation, engaged in research, policy analysis, education, and advocacy on issues of gender equality and reproductive health.

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), New York Office: c/o HRW, 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor, New York, NY 10118, USA. Tel: 1 212 216 1814; Fax: 1 212 216 1876. Mexico City Office for Latin America and the Caribbean: Roma 1 Mezzanine (entrada por Versalles 63), Col. Juárez, C.P. 06600, Mexico City, Mexico.
Tel/Fax: 52 55 10 54 32 14
www.iglhrc.org

The mission of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) is to secure the full enjoyment of the human rights of all people and communities subject to discrimination or abuse on the basis of sexual orientation or expression, gender identity or expression, and HIV status. A US-based non-profit, non-government organisation, IGLHRC effects this mission through advocacy, documentation, coalition building, public education, and technical assistance. Included on their website are reports, further links to relevant research, regional information, and action alerts.

Conferences

AIDS 2004
www.aids2004.org/

This will be the fifteenth International AIDS Conference, and will take place between 11–16 July 2004 in Bangkok, Thailand. The theme of the conference is ‘Access for All’. The conference is being organised by the International AIDS Society in collaboration with the Thai Ministry of Public Health. Among the co-organisers are the International Community of Women Living with AIDS and UNAIDS.