



GENDER AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Overview Report

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Executive Summary

Is GAD an imposition of western ideas on other cultures? Such accusations have often been made to thwart efforts for gender progress. Nonetheless, northern domination in development, including GAD, remains very real. How do we deal with this paradox?

What is culture?

Taking a closer look at what we mean by culture and where culture comes from provides one way forward.

In this report, I understand culture to be:

- diverse and dynamic
- formed by internal and external influences
- structured by representations and power

According to this understanding, cultures are products of history, place, politics and people, and change over time. Different people have different views about the cultures in which they live, and within any country or community there are many cultures. There is no homogenous fixed northern culture to impose on a homogenous and fixed southern culture. Furthermore, with or without the development industry, north and south are already interacting and influencing each other. Nevertheless, these interactions and influences are structured by north-south power imbalances.

How is culture formed on an individual level?

International dynamics interact with family, community and nation to provide the context for individuals' lives. These influences form the identities of individuals, such as those described in section three: British girl babies discouraged from crawling as far as boys; A Chinese girl constrained by her grandmother; A Nicaraguan woman organiser with disabilities; An anorexic American woman; A racist Zimbabwean white boy; An Indian woman in love with another woman; and an Indian intersex politician and Muslim convert. In turn, these and other individuals form and change their cultural environments, through accepting or resisting the norms with which they live.

Development changes cultures

Like individual action, development interventions will form and change cultures. Section four looks at development efforts to challenge cultures of gender. Redd Barna Uganda seeks to create a space for younger women to be heard and to promote their own agenda. PATH and MYWO Kenya replace the tradition of female circumcision with a new ritual of words. PROMUNDO Brazil mobilises young men who oppose gender violence. Gay and lesbian organisations in Zimbabwe and South Africa combat homophobia and racism. In the Musasa project in Zimbabwe, a white woman sought an appropriate role as an 'outsider' in challenging domestic violence. Such initiatives take action at a community and national level to change cultures of gender. As these experiences are disseminated and learned from, they also impact on development thinking and practice internationally.

Cultures of Gender and Development

Work is also needed which targets Gender and Development (GAD) norms from an international level. The thinking and practice of development – including GAD - are also laden with cultural values. Cultures of colonialism still influence development today. In development research, ideology and practice, the world is divided into 'south' and 'north', and assumptions are made that the former should learn from and emulate

the latter. For example, northern women are portrayed as models of liberation to which southern women should aspire.

However, many individuals and organisations are challenging such representations and forging new cultures in GAD: ACORD with its relocation to Africa and change of mission; Oxfam Great Britain with a south to north learning initiative, and representations of northern women as no more liberated than women in the south; Christian Aid International's projection of new images of the northern donor - southern recipient relation in fundraising campaigns; and international fora which recognise the relevance of sexuality to development.

The following recommendations are made based on the experiences described in this report:

- Charges of western imposition are often made in response to gender interventions. These accusations may be accurate, or simply a politically motivated effort to obstruct transformation of gender relations, or both! The possibility of both being true needs to be considered.
- Development will always impact on cultures and development interventions always impact on gender. They either change things (for better or worse), or sanction and reinforce the status quo. Ignoring gender in development is just as much a cultural assumption as putting it on the agenda. Cultural impact needs to be conscious and considered, and one directed at challenging oppressive norms of gender, sex, sexuality, and north-south dynamics.
- Culture and tradition can enable or obstruct, and be oppressive or liberating for different people at different times. There is nothing sacred about culture, and value judgements need to be made about which aspects of culture to hold on to, and which to let go of.
- However, who makes such judgements is an important issue. 'Outsiders' need to be cautious about how they judge other people's cultures. However, this does not mean standing back in 'respect' of 'local culture'. Instead, developers need to make space for discussion of cultures by 'insiders' and enable people to identify and take action against practices they find oppressive.
- Development thinking and practice – including GAD – are themselves laden with cultural assumptions. Individuals and organisations need to challenge their own assumptions and power dynamics. This examination should include issues of north and south, race, sex, sexuality and gender.
- Enabling participation and leadership of previously excluded groups (eg. women, black people or southern staff members) can contribute to changing the culture of development organisations and reorienting their priorities.

Culture is the forgotten dimension in development. For a long time 'other' cultures and not 'ours' have been promoted through, among other things, foreign development paradigms...However, rejecting western paradigms does not entail uncritically returning to the past. What is called for is a critical fusion of the two, to construct a world which is friendly to contemporary Africa. On the importance of the healthy link between the past and the future, Verhelst (1989: 63) observes that, 'we must hold the past sacred, but the future even more so.' (Makuvaza, 1998:43)

1. Introduction - Gender and Development: Imposing western ideas on other cultures?

In my work in India, I was operating in my own society and culture, and so was speaking as an 'insider'. Despite this, it was in my work for gender equity that I most often experienced allegations from different quarters that this work was against our culture, violated our traditions, and the worst criticism of all in the Indian context, that it was 'Westernised'. (Mukhopadhyay, 1995:14-15)

People working in Gender and Development (GAD) are sometimes accused of being 'western', no matter where they come from. Those advocating changes in gender relations are seen as interfering with other people's cultures, or betraying their own. At the same time, ideas in development are disproportionately influenced by the richer countries, whether these ideas are about what good gender relations might be (GAD), how economies should be run (structural adjustment), what is considered 'good' governance, or what counts as human rights. However, even those efforts to increase gender equality which are guided by local priorities, are discredited by being labelled 'western' and being treated as an imposition from outside.

How do we deal with the paradoxes this raises? One way is to look at what is meant by culture and where cultural norms come from. A closer look reveals that within each country, community or institution, there are many cultures. People have different relations to the cultures in which they live. Some aspects of culture are enabling for some and constraining for others. There are times when people go along with their cultural norms, and times when they resist. The going along with may reinforce those norms, and the resistance may challenge them. This process, combined with influence from outside forces, changes cultures. Thus there is no fixed homogenous 'local' culture to be imposed upon, and likewise no fixed homogenous 'western' culture which can impose. Local priorities and international norms are already interacting, and it is often hard to separate the two. This makes the question of western imposition on local cultures more complicated. Complicating the question may not result in a clear cut answer, but as I show in this report, it does point to some ways forward in practical terms.

The following section presents different understandings of culture and their relevance to development, and lays out the definition of culture used in this report. Culture is understood to be diverse and dynamic, formed by internal and external influences, and structured by representation and power (section two).

People form and are formed by cultural norms throughout their lives. International dynamics interact with family, community and nation to provide the context for individuals' lives and forming their identities. In turn, individuals form and change their cultural environments, through accepting or resisting the norms with which they live. Gender constraints and inequalities pervade the lives of individuals (section three). Development action has challenged such norms of gender at community and national level (section four).

The relation of development to culture is not limited to the impact of development on local and national cultures. Development thinking and practice (including of GAD) is itself laden with cultural values. Cultures of colonialism still influence development today. In development research, ideology and practice the world is divided into 'south' and 'north' and assumptions are made that the former will learn from and emulate the

latter (section five). However, many individuals and organisations are challenging such representations and forging new cultures in GAD (section six).

This report forms part of the BRIDGE Cutting Edge Pack on Gender and Cultural Change. The pack also includes an '*In Brief*' newsletter consisting of three short articles discussing this theme, and a 'Supporting Resources Collection' which summarises key texts, case studies, training manuals, guides and tools.

2. What is culture and how have understandings of culture influenced development?

The word culture has many meanings. Schech and Haggis separate out several ways the word is used in western thought, historically and today:

Definitions of culture

- 1 Culture = cultivation of land, crops and animals
- 2 Culture = cultivation of mind, arts, civilisation
- 3 Culture = ways of life, meanings and values
- 4 Culture = ways of life structured by representations and power

Adapted from Schech and Haggis 2000:16

I will not discuss the first definition, as this has had the least impact on development thinking. Below I consider the second, third and fourth definitions.

2.1 Culture as cultivation of mind, arts, civilisation: The values of the elite

Culture has been understood in a hierarchical way as cultivation of mind, arts and civilisation, with only the elites seen as truly cultured. For example, in India, the Sanskrit culture of upper castes is often seen as superior and to be aspired to. In contemporary China, people with education are said to 'have culture' and be of 'higher quality'. In the British colonial tradition, upper class British are seen as most cultured, with other classes and nationalities deemed less civilised.

This British tradition in particular has influenced the values of development ideology. Historically in Britain, and to some extent today, the lifestyle of those with economic and political power was considered cultured, while working class occupation and social conduct came to be considered as uncultured. By the mid-nineteenth century, and with British colonial expansion, non-Europeans were classed as less cultivated, with black people ranked at the bottom as 'primitive'. This argument was used to justify both slavery and a 'civilising mission' of imperial Britain to bring 'progress' and 'modernity' to other nations through their colonisation. Women were at times seen as uncultured and uneducated in relation to men. However, during the nineteenth century, upper class British women came to be seen as having an important role in transmitting the values of imperial Britain to the colonised.

Some development efforts have echoed the colonial civilising mission, where development is seen as a one way learning process, with developing countries learning from and developing according to particular western models, such as ideas of free market economics and good governance, or appropriate gender relations, as discussed in section five. However, there has been increasing awareness of this problem, and

attempts to address it, with moves to decentralisation, participatory approaches, and more equal collaboration with local partners. Such attempts are discussed in section six.

2.2 Culture as ways of life, meaning and values: Culture as 'other'

The development and maintenance of every culture requires the existence of another differing and competing alter ego (Said, 1978:332).

The understanding of culture as ways of life, meanings and values, has been associated with anthropology. This discipline emerged around the same time as colonialism began to take root in Africa and Asia. Early anthropology was concerned primarily with studying 'culture' in 'native' and non-western societies, in particular the rituals and traditions of isolated communities. Western cultures were seen as modern and cosmopolitan, and taken for granted as norms. The cultures of 'others' were seen as exotic and exciting, and interpreted as 'primitive' in contrast with 'civilised' European culture.

Much contemporary anthropology, however, has departed from these approaches, and taken on new understandings of culture as changing and contested. Anthropologists have also critiqued the ethnocentrism and taken-for-granted notions of culture in development thinking and practice.

A hierarchy is evident in both the above understandings of culture. Where culture has been understood as cultivation of arts, mind and civilisation, cultures of elites have been valued over cultures of others. Where culture is understood as ways of life, meaning and values, western cultures have been taken as norms of civilisation, and other cultures seen as primitive and exotic.

Both these understandings reinforce the idea of differences between the west and other regions as being a gulf of belief systems, lifestyles and also time, with people being seen as having life-styles of different times, 'modern' or 'primitive'. As shown in section five, such ideas of culture and cultural superiority remain present in development thought and practice.

2.3 Culture as ways of life structured by power and representation

While the above conceptions of culture persist, they have been challenged by new understandings coming out of recent anthropology and cultural studies. These take culture to be ways of life of everyone, not just of the elites, or of third world societies. Three aspects are important to this definition of culture. Culture is understood as:

- Formed by internal and external influences
- Structured by power
- Influenced by representations

Internal and external influences construct and change cultures. Nyamjoh (2001) describes these influences, and questions whether it still makes sense to think in terms of bounded cultures, distinct from each other:

Culture and tradition are...not frozen or stagnant; the individuals and groups partaking of any culture or tradition actively shape and reshape it in their daily endeavours. Culture changes because it is enmeshed in the turbulence of history, and because each act, each signification, each decision risks

opening new meanings, vistas and possibilities...Given accelerated flows and interactions of diverse cultural products as a result of globalisation, does it make sense to still talk of individuals and groups as belonging to given cultures like fettered slaves and zombies, or confined like canned sardines? (Nyamjoh, 2001:30).

Cultures Change

Traditional Punjabi saying and 1996 Pakistan Air Force Recruitment poster

دَن نِیسی رنَاں وِج ، تاندا نہ انا وِج -
 Women don't belong on the battlefield,
 Weeds don't belong in the field
 (Traditional Punjabi saying)



(Photos from Balchin (ed.), 1996: 191)

Power informs the way these diverse influences create culture. Different cultural norms impact differently on individuals according to structural factors such as class, gender, race, sexuality, disability and able-bodiedness, benefiting some and disadvantaging others.

Cultural representations could be someone's choice of words or clothes as well as portrayals in adverts or the media. Representations are themselves constructed by a mix of influences and power dynamics. Representations reflect these influences rather than any reality. In turn, representations influence how people see and treat themselves and each other.

The table overleaf summarises the three definitions of culture presented above.

Culture, Power, Representation

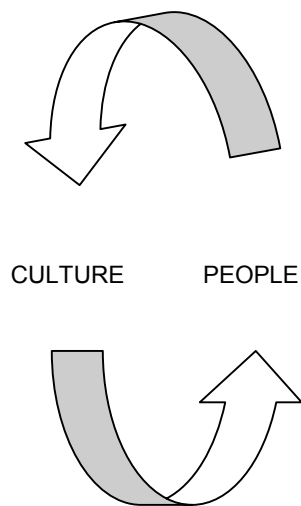
Understanding of culture	Cultivation of mind, arts, civilisation: values of the elite	Ways of life, meanings and values: culture as 'other'	Ways of life structured by power and representation
Where does culture come from?	Values of national elites. Elite culture is assumed to have intrinsic value.	Cultures are bounded and distinct from each other. External influences pollute indigenous cultures.	Culture is formed by internal and external influences.
What does power have to do with culture?	The power relations which have produced the above perception remain implicit and unquestioned.	Inequalities, (eg. between the researcher and those being researched), are assumed as normal, or ignored. Cultural difference rather than power is emphasised.	Structures of power, (eg. gender, race, class, able-bodiedness) influence how culture is formed.
What has representation got to do with culture?	The way in which elite values represent elites and non-elites is assumed to be accurate, or at least reasonable.	Researchers study how local communities represent themselves and the world, and how these representations are constructed. However, researchers do not question their own representations of the people they study.	Representations are themselves constructed by a mix of influences and power dynamics. Representations reflect these influences rather than any reality. In turn, representations influence how people see and treat themselves and each other.

In this report I understand culture as 'ways of life structured by power and representation'. I find this a useful lens through which to uncover the dynamics and relations of power through which cultural norms gain their impact, and to challenge these dynamics in practical ways. I use this conception to analyse the different cultures of individual, community, nation, and also of development ideology and practice internationally and to consider how such cultures can be challenged and changed. In the following section I use the above framework to look at how individuals are formed by and form the cultures which surround them.

3. Cultural norms at the level of the individual

This section considers how cultures are formed on an individual level by a multitude of influences. I talk through the different stages of life, from birth to childhood to adulthood, citing accounts of different peoples' experiences at each stage, and how they interact with the cultural norms that surround them. At times people conform, and at times they resist. At times they are comfortable with the norms, and at times they experience them as unwelcome pressure. People are influenced and formed by their cultural environments. At the same time, they influence and build the cultures around them, changing them as they resist, and reinforcing and recreating them as they conform.

Culture forms people and people form culture



The formation of cultures of sex and gender is discussed below. While I here focus on the individual, the cultures which form them consist of a mix of family, community, national and international influences. These individuals in turn impact on this mix of cultures.

3.1 Sex = Gender?

When a baby is born, one of the first things asked in many cultures, from the USA to China to Jordan, is 'is it a boy or a girl?'. This is often seen as the most important 'fact' about the child. Indeed, if the baby is not labelled as one or other sex, we do not know how to think about them or talk about them – in virtually all languages 'he' and 'she' are different words. It is as if you need to be female or male to be considered human. Is this process of 'sexing' the baby, and the importance given to it, biological or political? There are different arguments about this.

Sex and gender: biology or politics?

<p>Biology is destiny</p>	<p>Both sex and gender are biological. Gendered behaviour is governed by biological incentives such as reproduction. So men may engage in polygamy or rape women in order to maximise their number of off-spring, while women are more likely to seek a steady male mate who will help protect and support herself and their children (This argument is made by sociobiologists such as Thornhill and Palmer, 2001).</p>
<p>Sex vs. gender</p>	<p>Sex marks the distinction between women and men as a result of the biological, physical and genetic differences between them. Gender roles are set by convention and other social, economic, political and cultural forces.’ (One World Action leaflet: Closing the gap) While we are born male or female, the characteristics and meanings of girls and boys, women and men, vary across different groups and societies, and are constructed by social interactions rather than biological influences. The sex-gender distinction has been hugely important in arguing against the ‘biology is destiny’ case, and is the basis for many challenges to gender inequalities.</p>
<p>Sex = Gender</p>	<p>Sex and Gender are both socially constructed. Up to one in every five hundred babies are born ‘intersex’ with chromosomes at odds with their anatomy (Philips, 2001:31), but this is usually hushed up. In the west 1 in 2000 babies have surgery because their bodies do not fit the accepted categories of ‘female’ or ‘male’ (Philips:39). Radical biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling argues we should abandon the idea that everyone’s sex is classifiable and welcome the fact of human diversity (cited in Jolly,1999:241). The division between women and men is a political categorisation, not a neutral description of reality. This argument, made by some queer¹ theorists, and by transgender² activists, challenges the constraints of both gender <i>and</i> sex. However, it does create a problem: If ‘female’ and ‘male’ are artificial categories, how can we measure and challenge inequalities between the two?</p>

3.1.1 Is she a girl, or just acting like one?

Are the sex categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’ simply a neutral description of physical bodies? Judith Butler, feminist philosopher, argues that there is nothing natural about the categories that we use (1994). She says the importance given to particular parts of our bodies like breasts and genitals as defining characteristics of who we are, and the importance given to these differences between bodies, should be seen as political. For example, sometimes the potential to bear children is taken as the key indicator of being female. But many people commonly accepted as women do not meet this criteria, for example those who have not yet started menstruating or are post-menopausal, those on the pill or infertile women. Furthermore, this criteria can make women feel miserable, if they are pressured to reproduce but cannot or do not want to.

¹ ‘Queer’, was originally an insult for marginalised sexualities. However, in the late 1980s, it was reclaimed and invested with new meanings by radical sexual rights activists in the USA. In the 1990s, such thinking entered western academia, particularly in the USA and UK, giving rise to ‘queer theory’.

² ‘Transgender’ refers to all those who do not feel they fit sex norms, including: people whose bodies do not match standards for male or female (intersexuals); those who feel their bodies do not match the sex they feel themselves to be (transsexuals); and those who, as a political stance, reject the requirement to conform to categories of male or female.

The categories of women and men do not fit many of us. Nevertheless, we are all pressured to fit the categories. Butler observes that we have to constantly act out being a girl or boy. Having the right body is not enough, it is as if we need to prove our sex by acting it out. Girls are told to 'behave like a girl' and are told off for 'not being like a girl' if they deviate from the norms (such as climbing trees, which in some cultures counts as un-girl like). If one *is* a girl, why does she have to *act* like one, *being* one should be enough? The fact that it is not enough suggests that gender is not self-evident, but instead precarious and must be acted out to give it a reality.

3.1.2 Intersex identities

Pressure to conform to sex categories means that in many cultural contexts, there is little option but to identify - or be identified - as 'male' or 'female'. In some countries, it is possible to pursue gender realignment surgery and hormonal treatment to produce bodies that fit. In the west, surgery is often imposed on babies in the first year of life. Intersex organisations in Australia, UK and USA have called for a ban on all such non-consensual surgery unless medically necessary. In some countries, communities and identities exist that offer some space for alternative gender identifications, such as travestis in Brazil, 'ladyboys' in Thailand, hijras in India or transgender in the USA. Often, however, those who identify or are identified with these categories find themselves subject to discrimination, intolerance and abuse. The example of Hijras in India is given below.

This is an extract from a statement made by Adity Bondyopadhyay, an Indian lawyer who has worked for rights of sexual minorities for 8 years, in an NGO briefing to the UN Commission on Human Rights, April 8, 2002

Intersex in India

Hijras, a community comprised of biological intersex persons and transgender men, many of whom opt for castration, are found in all parts of India and come from all ethnic and religious backgrounds. It is estimated that there a half a million to one million hijras in India. Yet for the half century since independence, the State has assiduously turned a blind eye and refused to acknowledge their existence. Hijras, who prefer to call themselves a third gender as distinct from either males or females, are refused identity papers when they choose to express this gender identification in their official application forms. Thus deprived of civil status, they are denied treatment in State-run medical institutions. They are not allowed social service benefits and are refused access to public housing schemes – thereby ghettoising them in cramped slum localities with no civic amenities. For a long time the Election Commission in India refused to give them voter identity cards, denying them their democratic rights to political participation. When voter identity cards were at last issued to them they were forced to choose between either male or female as their gender, thereby negating their chosen and preferred self-definition. No governmental job has ever been given to a hijra since all jobs are reserved for either males or females. They are denied protection from discrimination in the private job market. They are effectively reduced to subsistence levels of existence, where many are forced to take up sex work as a means of survival. All this can devastate their mental, physical, and psychological health and well-being, and increase their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

In recent municipal elections in Delhi, hijras were not allowed to contest seats reserved for women candidates; but the same logic often denies them the status reserved for men. In effect the State, by refusing to recognise the gender identity of hijras, denies them visibility, voice, and existence in political and civil society. They are not just disenfranchised but denied the rights to expression, to dignity, and often to life.
(www.iglhrc.org)

In spite of such obstacles, some hijras, such as Shabna Nehru, have succeeded in winning elections. Shabna Nehru was born as intersex in Bangalore to an upper-caste business family. She says 'I belong to both genders, but was raised as a girl'. The hijra community learnt of Shabna Nehru and visited the family repeatedly asking for Shabna. Her mother died when Shabna was 14, whereupon the hijras took her to live with them. She ended up living in Hissar in Haryana state and became a popular figure in the squatter colony where she lived by helping others financially and lobbying for water supply and better roads. Born a Hindu, Shabna fought her exclusion by the Hindu caste system, and converted to Islam. Eventually she ran for city council and won in 1996. Shabna was the first hijra to run for parliament, and she did so under the slogan 'you don't need genitals for politics, you need brains.' She herself failed to be elected to parliament, but other hijras have since succeeded (New Internationalist, 2000).

3.1.3 A dilemma: If female and male are artificial categories, how can we tackle inequalities between the two?

If the notions of female and male are not biological realities, but social conventions which may be experienced as constraining, should we work towards taking apart these categories of sex? This creates a dilemma: While the sex categories may be borne out of oppressive social conventions, taking them apart might undermine efforts to measure and combat inequalities between women and men. While the notions of male and female may be imagined, inequalities between the two remain very real. Given this, some argue that we must continue to work within these categories, but with an awareness that they are temporary and taken on as a strategy rather than an essential 'who we are'. As with class, we need to work both for the interests of particular identity groups oppressed by this system (the working class/women) and at the same time for the abolition of these identities themselves (an end to the class system/end to sex categorisation) (Wittig, 1997).

In practical terms, some do depart from these categories, for example Kate Bornstein who has produced a manual on how to work away from them on a personal and political level (Bornstein, 1998, introduced in the Supporting Resources Collection). However, most GAD work continues to work within these categories. Nevertheless, some flexibility is being provoked by realities of implementation. For example, a participatory HIV prevention project in the USA divided participants into groups of women and men for a body-mapping exercise. The presence of a transgender individual raised the question of the pros and cons of such a division (Batchelor, 2000). In Bangladesh, a process of discussion and alliance between the national alliance Shonghoti³ and Bondhon, an organisation of intersex sexworkers has also raised such issues (Shireen Huq, personal communication, 2002). Some international organisations or funds such as HIVOS

³ A national alliance of women's organisations and other NGOs established to support the human rights of sex workers.

(Human Institute for Development Cooperation), NAZ⁴ and the Astraea Lesbian Action Foundation are providing resources for specific projects with transgender or intersex people. However, this largely constitutes an adding of the category 'intersex' to categories of female and male. As far as I know, no development organisation has tried to function with a perspective which moves away from the categories of female and male.

3.2 Learning gender: Childhood and beyond

3.2.1 Girl babies in the UK learn not to go too far

Once the sex of a baby has been decided, parents and others, consciously and unconsciously, start to teach the child how to behave as society expects someone of their gender to do. Even before we can walk, we are treated differently. Research by Exeter University's Children's Health and Exercise Research Centre finds that in the UK, boy babies are allowed to crawl further than girl babies before being picked up. Girls are discouraged from taking exercise from the very beginning of life onwards, and as children, are almost half as physically active as boys. This leads to health problems amongst women in later life (BBC News online, 2001). This illustrates how gender constraints start early and continue to impact throughout our lives.

3.2.2 'Because you are a girl': Ge Youli's story

Ge Youli tells of how she was taught to be a 'real girl' in China in the 1970s:

When I was just starting to grow up, my mother, too busy at work, took me to stay with my grandparents in Shanghai. I lived with them and a grand-aunt who had remained single all her life. Naturally, the two older women shouldered the responsibility for making me a 'real girl'. My grandmother taught me by example. She took on all the household chores without complaint: waking up at four o'clock in the morning to line up to buy food, coming home after six o'clock with a big basket of goods, preparing breakfast for the entire family, then doing the laundry, the cleaning, the cooking and the dishwashing. My grandfather, then retired, stayed idly at home, doing almost nothing to help her other than managing the family finances. But my grandmother never uttered one word of complaint. My grand-aunt taught me by precept. She didn't allow me to make any noise at meal times or to speak loudly. She gave explicit instructions about what behaviour was appropriate. Sometimes feeling too restrained, I would venture to ask her, "Why don't you subject my elder brother to your discipline?" She would answer me coldly "because you are a girl!" My brother played outside every day after school, but I was often confined to the house learning how to sew or helping my grandmother prepare meals or do the cleaning. At the table, grandma would pick out the most delicious food for my brother, while teaching me the virtue of self-discipline and tolerance (Ge, 1995:6-7).



Ge Youli Today
(personal photo)

⁴ An International HIV/AIDS and sexual health technical support agency working in South Asia

As a child in her family environment, Ge Youli felt constrained by the pressures to behave as a 'girl'. While her grandmother and great aunt were busy trying to pass on the cultural norms they deemed appropriate for their granddaughter, of self discipline, tolerance, housework and sacrifice, Ge Youli resisted. She grew up to become a feminist activist, working to change norms in China and beyond.

3.2.3 Growing up white and male in Zimbabwe

A man recounts growing up white in Zimbabwe. The only black person he met in early childhood was the family domestic worker:

She used to call me "Sir" even though she was old enough to be my grandmother. It never occurred to me that she was a human being with children of her own...She was not supposed to look after her own children, she was supposed to look after us... My mum and her friends would sit and discuss blacks as "they". While there were a minority of black children in his school, all the teachers were white, and favoured the white children. 'I was growing up in a racist community but I did not know that it was racist. I assumed that the way we did things was the way they were supposed to be done. I assumed the rest of the world was like us (IPS, 2002:27)

This man's ideas about race and gender came from interacting with the domestic worker, his mother and being at school. The messages he got from them were that racism was normal and that women should look after children. His class and race position in the colonial economy made it possible for his father to earn enough not only to support the family, but to employ someone to do domestic work. His school environment reproduced relations of rule by favouring white children. All these factors contributed to the perpetuation of racism and certain gender relations as norms. However, when he grew up, he came to question the normality of racism, and started to challenge this way of thinking and behaving.

3.2.4 'They said I was a freak': Martha Valdivia's story

Martha Valdivia, a woman with disabilities in Nicaragua remembers when she was five years old:

'My mum and dad only took care of my siblings...They kept me hidden so no one could see me, and said I was a freak. I wanted to die.' When she grew older, and did go out, her family would 'close the doors of the house in the evening so I could not come back in, leaving me alone in the street. Once someone tried to rape me there.' (Valdivia, 2000:9-10)

Ostracism at home and violence in the street taught Martha Valdivia her life was not worth living. She learned she was a 'freak' and inferior to able-bodied people like her siblings. People with disabilities in Nicaragua (as elsewhere) are faced with prejudice and poverty. The economy has been damaged by the US sponsored Contra war and economic embargo of the 1980s, and World Bank structural adjustment programmes of the 1990s. Lack of opportunities coupled with discrimination makes people with disabilities particularly dependent on families, and vulnerable to abuse, which undermines their self-esteem.

However, Martha Valdivia was not to be beaten. She fought back against the rapist 'I fought him for two hours and I didn't get screwed. I'm buying a gun for my security.' She has now become an organiser for disabled women with the NGO Solidez, and declares 'I feel independent, free, happy, because I'm a fulfilled woman, I live my own life, and am soon to be a mother.' She has changed her own life, and is working to change the situation and perception of other women with disabilities in Nicaragua.

3.2.5 Anorexia and Body Image: Starving to death in the USA

Judy Sargent, a recovered anorexic, describes her experience: 'I suffered from severe anorexia nervosa for ten years, was hospitalised 26 times, and landed myself in intensive care units on multiple occasions' (www.angelfire.com/ms/anorexianervosa/index/html).

The USA leads world figures on eating disorders such as starvation dieting (anorexia) and dieting and bingeing (bulimia), and in the USA 90-95 per cent of anorexics and bulimics are women. At its extreme, these disorders can lead to death, with 1000 American women dying each year according to the American Anorexia and Bulimia association. However, an estimated 15 per cent of young women in the US who are not diagnosed with an eating disorder have substantially disordered eating attitudes and behaviour. Studies show expectation of body weight and appearance, particularly oriented towards girls, come from parents, peers, the dieting industry, and images in the media. The majority of models and beauty contestants meet the medical criteria for anorexia: body weight 15 per cent below that recommended as normal (Dittrich, 2002). One eating disorder 'recovery' website advises: 'Stay away from fashion magazines!' (www.somethingfishy.org).

Anorexia used to be considered a white woman's disease in the USA. However, largeness, once considered attractive among black people, has now acquired the same stigma as among whites, and rates of anorexia have risen in the black population. Some studies show correlation between rates of anorexia among ethnic minorities in the USA and levels of acculturation into mainstream white culture (Dittrich, 2002).

3.2.6 Marriage and sexuality: One Indian woman's dilemma

Pressures to express our sexualities according to particular norms are strong in every society, although what counts as 'normal' differs according to time and place, and according to the historical factors at play. The expectation may be that we should be having heterosexual sex (eg. within marriage), or that we should not be having any sex (eg. if we are old, have a disability, are not married, or are with someone of the same sex).

A woman in Bangalore writes to Sakhi, the only openly lesbian organisation in India:

I was attracted to boys but...five and a half years [ago] I met a girl. (She is from another city.) I took [an] instant liking for her and so did she. We fell in love and got involved emotionally and physically. Though madly in love I felt the society would never accept our relationship. So I decided it would be better if we split. I told her this and gave her [a] reason (that I was involved with a boy). She had depression for almost two years after this because she just could not accept it. I did try in the last two years to get involved with boys and finally have decided to get married to a boy who has proposed marriage to me...The problem is that I really feel that I am deeply in love with that girl and if you ask me what I want then I would want to spend my life with her because I feel happiest when I am with her...If I marry I will be making my parents happy but I will not be truly happy. If I decide to spend my life with her I will be the happiest person but I will make my parents unhappy. Please tell me what I should do... (Rosenbloom, 1996:79)

This woman is torn between conforming to cultural expectations of marriage, and following her heart but breaking away from social custom. This illustrates the pressure for people to channel their emotions and sexuality in particular ways which are accepted by their parents and society. Families are the strongest influence in many settings, putting moral and emotional pressure on children and other family members. One of the most well-known cases is of Gita Darji and Kishori Shah, two nurses in Gujarat who hanged

themselves rather than allow Gita's marriage (arranged by her family) to separate them. However, such pressures go beyond the family to include laws and state institutions. In India, colonial homophobic laws remain on the statute books: 'Unnatural sexual acts' are illegal under section 377 of the Indian penal code, instituted in India in the 1830s under British rule. This law is used by the courts and police to threaten sexual minorities. Police have also taken it upon themselves to punish lesbians, with reports of rapes of lesbians by policemen (and other men), to "cure them of their lesbianism" (Bondyapadhyay, 2002:6).

Tanuja Chauhan and Jaya Verma, two Indian women, held a Hindu wedding ceremony in their hometown of Ambikapur in April 2002. Their marriage is not legally recognised, but the two have vowed to spend their lives together.



(Photo from www.thegully.com/essays/gaymundo)

3.3 Culture forms people and people form culture

These snapshots illustrate how people's ideas of what is 'normal' and how they see themselves and others, are formed by local, national and global structures such as family hierarchies, education systems, the global economy and colonialism. What is 'local' is not sealed off from influences from elsewhere, nor is it insulated from change over time. Nor is 'local culture' a single body of beliefs and practices that everyone agrees with. The stories above show that within families, communities and nations, there are many different and even contradictory ideas of what is 'normal'. However, the creation and transmission of these norms always involves imbalances of power – whether adult to child, parents to daughter, teacher to student, media to viewer, state to subject, UK colonial legacy to Zimbabwe and India, USA or World Bank relations to Nicaragua. Norms are transmitted in the form of representations such as stereotypes of gender and race, portrayals of people with disabilities as freaks, and of same sex relationships as unacceptable. Despite this, people do not simply submit to the influences of their environment. They may come to react against taken-for-granted norms and subscribe to different ways of seeing the world and their relationship to others. This shows that people can have some agency and can make choices in deciding whether to stick with those norms they grew up with or choose or even create new ones.

4. Challenging cultures of gender

In the previous section I discussed how people form cultures and cultures form people, and looked at how individuals are formed by, yet also resist and change, norms of gender, sexuality, race and disability. In this section I look at examples of development action which challenge cultural norms, opening spaces to undo the ways we have been constructed as men or women. Using an understanding of culture as structured by power and representation, I look at this action in terms of the people and power dynamics involved, and the representations created and challenged. This approach helps to show how these actions seek to change cultures, and what makes these efforts effective. Further case studies are included in the Supporting Resources Collection of this Cutting Edge Pack.

4.1 Creating spaces for different voices: Redd Barna Uganda

Some methodologies have been developed which recognise that dominant cultures benefit some groups and individuals in the community, and are more costly for others. Some participatory approaches in particular aim to create spaces for those marginalised by cultural norms to express their views and take action. Through trial and error, Redd Barna Uganda (the Uganda branch of the Norwegian Save the Children NGO), has over time developed a planning approach based on group action plans and community action plans. This planning process takes explicit account of the different interests within communities among smaller interest groups such as young men, young women, children, older men and older women. Each group separately discusses and analyses its situation while facilitators record issues raised on a matrix. The 'Issues Matrix' is a table outlining the issues of concern of the different interest groups. Only after each group has come out with its list of issues is there discussion that brings different groups together, and joint community actions taken. Where agreement cannot be reached on joint action, each group pursues its own group plans and monitors their implementation. The Issues Matrix provides the basis for further monitoring. As the Matrix is updated, newer issues are included and existing issues re-prioritised according to different individuals and contexts. In this way, the communities gain a better understanding of their own patterns of development (Mukasa and Mugisha, 1999).

In the community of Nakoloke, through this process, Redd Barna found that a key barrier to gender change was negative stereotypes (especially of younger women), which were accepted by men, *and* by women. For example, men perceived women to spend much time gossiping. However, after analysing and comparing men's and women's daily time schedules, the men were surprised to find women had little time left to gossip, mostly doing many activities at the same time, while men had large chunks of time unaccounted for, especially afternoons and evenings, often spent in trading centres and bars. They jokingly referred to these gaps as 'planning' times for family and community.

Extract from the issues matrix of Kyakatebe

Issues raised initially	C	YW	YM	OW	OM
Lack of clean water	x	x	x	x	X
Orphans	x	x	X	x	x
High level of school drop outs	x	x	x	x	
HIV/AIDS		x	x	x	X
Land shortage fragmentation	X	x	x		x
Lack of fuelwood		x	x		X
Environmental degradation		X	x		x
Lack of local organisation		x	x	X	
Situation of single mothers	X	x			
Punishment at school	x	X			
High rate of teenage pregnancies		X		x	
Taxation					X
Drunken teachers	X				

Notes: C=children, YW=younger women, YM=younger men, OW= older women, OM=Older Men.

Source: Guijt and Shah, 1995

Discussions revealed that men saw 'mothers' and 'women' differently, which they attributed to the women who raised them. While mothers had some status in the home, younger women and girls were at the bottom of the family hierarchy. This could explain men's less aggressive reaction to the issues raised by older women than by younger women in the participation process. Younger women were listened to even more impatiently than the children. Their participation in some cases led to mistrust from husbands who accused them of having affairs on the way to and from meetings, and led to domestic violence. However, there were also some positive impacts, for example access to much desired family planning information, a major breakthrough in Nakaloke. This enabled the women to regulate births, but also gave them greater control over their sexuality. One woman noted they now enjoy sex more as they are not afraid of pregnancy (Mukasa, 2000).

In the above case, stereotypes were challenged, and positive changes were provoked through the separate discussion groups. However, these changes met with some resistance, even violence from husbands who were threatened by their wives' more independent behaviours. Such resistance is likely to be an issue in any attempt to change cultures, particularly dominant cultures.

4.2 Circumcision with words: Fighting from Kenya

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is so difficult to stop because it is integral to the integration of girls and women into their communities. If a woman is not circumcised, she is seen as unclean and promiscuous, and no one will marry her. The practice signifies the cultural and spiritual initiation of girls into their families and communities.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) in Kenya

- Women who have undergone FGM are twice as likely to die during childbirth
- An estimated 50-60 per cent of women in Kenya undergo FGM
- In 1996, a motion brought before parliament to ban FGM in Kenya was defeated by an overwhelming majority

(Maendeleo ya wanawake organisation, 2001)

Different forms of FGM remain widespread in many countries, in spite of well-documented negative health effects, and opposition from many African organisations.

Westerners have also opposed FGM, but these attacks have sometimes been patronising, racist, or sensationalist, and have thus been counterproductive, hindering positive action, and provoking charges of western imposition.

Iman *et al* (1978) argue that while western critiques have been offensive, action still needs to be taken against FGM:

Westerners have criticised clitoridectomy and infibulation in ways that are demeaning, racist and offensive – and, as such, justifiably open to attack. But the offensiveness...of the critique does not then make amputating the nerve and muscle of the clitoris, cutting off the lips of the vagina, or sewing closed the lips of the vagina into practices which are safe, desirable or necessary for little girls and young women, no matter how long ago they started in Africa. This would be like Chinese women defending the pain and deformities of foot-binding on the grounds that it was an ancient Chinese custom! It ignores too the absolute rejection and horror of clitoridectomy and similar practices, as in Lesotho, or among the Akan, well before westerners 'discovered' genital mutilation in Africa. As with twin-killing and slavery (both practised in parts of Africa for several centuries), not all customs are things to value...Custom and culture should be evaluated in terms of their worth, and, being aspects of human societies, are subject to historical change...Much of what passes for 'African culture and tradition' was constructed during the period of direct colonial domination (Iman, Mama, and Sow , 1987:17).

Below I present an example of an internationally supported project which tries to avoid these problems.

This project started with Annicetta Kiriga, from the village of Tharaka, just outside of Nairobi. In 1993, due to concern about her own daughter, she became involved in Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (MYWO), an organisation which researched and took action on FGM in Kenya. In 1998, they joined forces with the Programme for Appropriate Technology and Health (PATH) Kenya office, an international NGO, to test a programme substituting training on empowerment, health and human rights for the FGM ritual. Annicetta and the mothers named the project 'circumcision with words'. Initially, thirty girls participated. Activities were as follows:

- PATH and MYWO trained village elders to do the training, and explain the project to men.

- PATH and MYWO trained boys in schools, and boys made a pact to stand by their sisters and support them.
- A pact was made with the girls, their parents, religious leaders and elders, that the initiation ceremony would take place but not the circumcision. This received widespread but not unanimous support in the community.
- Girls were still teased and ostracised, so PATH and MYWO organised peer support groups for girls and their families.

Success in the first village enabled the project to spread to other villages. However, each community is different, and allowing each to go at their own pace and respond to their own needs was found to be key to success.

Word of mouth and media coverage spread the story, and other communities made requests for this programme. In 2000, several UN agencies signed up with PATH and MYWO to extend the programme to all Abagusii communities – the ethnic group with highest rate of FGM in Kenya.

Lessons learned:

- Buy-in from leaders – do not just ensure their support, involve them, involve elders and village chiefs in training.
- Target men and boys – marriageability is a key issue. Fathers and future husbands must accept the girls if the project is to work. Men and boys can become key supporters through training.
- Preserve cultural tradition – eradication will not work. Change traditions in ways acceptable to community members.
- Respond to local demand – ideally, activities should be initiated in response to local demand. Each community should be enabled to make their own plan and set the pace.

'Answers must come from communities, and we must remember that in each one, change takes a different form' – a PATH staff member.

4.3 Allying with men who resist gender norms: PROMUNDO in Brazil

In many places, domestic violence is a widespread problem, and men hitting their wives is often considered normal. How can men challenge such cultures of gender violence? This was the question explored in an action research project by the Instituto PROMUNDO, a Brazilian NGO, working in low income settings in Rio de Janeiro. To start with, focus group discussions were held each with 8-10 young men. In each group one or two men would usually question prevailing views on gender. PROMUNDO found that these more questioning young men tended to have relationships with someone who modelled alternative ways of being a man, and be involved in alternative peer groups which were non-gang and more respectful of women. These men were also reflective, and able to consider and talk about the negative influence of male violence in their own families. PROMUNDO organised these questioning young men into a group. With PROMUNDO, they decided to write and perform a play and write a photonovella to be distributed after the performance. Both tell the story of a man who beats his wife. She then takes the children and leaves him. He is left reflecting upon his own actions, and is invited by a neighbour to join a men's discussion group on domestic violence. The intervention started in 2000 and is ongoing, but shows already that men have differing views, and that men can change their attitudes and behaviour.

PROMUNDO chose to work with young men because research around the world shows that young men's interactions with their partners in their early relationships may set the tone for their relationships with women over their life span. Viewing women as sex objects, using coercion to obtain sex, and viewing sex from a performance oriented perspective often begins in adolescence and continues into adulthood. Thus PROMUNDO tries to influence young men's taking on of norms before they are set in a pattern of lifelong violence.

If it is true that many men in various settings around the world are violent toward women and subjugate women in a variety of other ways, there are in many settings at least some exceptions. And it is these exceptions who can offer us insights on how to deconstruct negative aspects of masculinity and reconstruct or emphasise the positive aspects (Barker, 2002:6).

4.4 Lesbian and gay organising in Southern Africa: Challenging homophobia and racism

Homophobia – or prejudice against homosexuality – is a cultural norm in many countries, where people are subject to violence or discrimination on account of their sexuality. Organisations such as Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) and the South African National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE) have been working to change such norms in Southern Africa.

Sexual minority organisations established during apartheid in South Africa, and in the post-colonial era in Zimbabwe, were themselves white and male dominated, for reasons such as the relatively greater resources and security of white men to organise around homosexuality. Since then, in order to represent those with same sex sexualities in their countries, and in order to combat homophobia effectively, such organisations have had to challenge themselves.

Founded in 1989, GALZ functioned largely as a low-profile, social support group primarily for white men, until a takeover by the black membership took place in 1995. This occurred due to the emergence of politically proactive, self-identified, black gay and lesbian Zimbabweans, in part to contest declarations by President Mugabe that African gays did not exist, and that homosexuality was a white man's disease. The shift to greater participation and control by black members also corresponded to the requirements of international funding. GALZ, now with a membership of over 300, of whom 85 per cent are black, has transformed from a social to a political body, receiving funding from organisations such as HIVOS (Netherlands). White people are generally less attracted to GALZ because it has become a more grassroots organisation providing support for people from townships, unemployed, and non-professionals. However, Keith Goddard, a white man, was elected to the position of Programme Manager by the organisation's members (Goddard, cited in Jolly, 2000).

Few women have joined GALZ, due both to the general social constraints on women which inhibit them from hearing about and contacting such an organisation, but also due to sexism among GALZ men. A project to run workshops in rural areas on culture, gender, and sexuality, hopes to attract more women to the organisation (Goddard cited in Jolly, 2000:33-34).

Under apartheid South Africa, the gay movement remained white, male dominated, and in some cases, deliberately distanced itself from the anti-apartheid struggle. With the end of apartheid in 1994, the NCGLE was launched as a coalition of 41 lesbian and gay organisations. Initially, their mandate was to secure the

equality clause in the constitution outlawing discrimination on the bases of sexual orientation, which they achieved.

The NCGLE has pursued an explicit strategy to reach out to rural areas, and to increase representation of black people and women within the organisation's membership and leadership. International and local funds have been mobilised to:

- Stimulate formation of local branches
- Provide leadership training for black and lesbian activists
- Relocate offices to townships and inner city areas
- Lobby for anti-discrimination legislation in the workplace (which has won over new constituencies to the organisation).

As a result, progress was made. By 1998, several new black and lesbian organisations had been established and affiliated to NCGLE. White men no longer formed the majority of the NCGLE membership or leadership, however their influence remained disproportionate, and the need continued for organisational efforts to become more representative (Jara and Lapinsky, 1998). Since then the NCGLE has been reorganised and renamed 'The Lesbian and Gay Equality Project'.

4.5 The role of the outsider: Musasa in Zimbabwe

How control can shift from white people to black people in organisations in southern Africa is also an issue in the Musasa project. Sheelagh Stewart tells the story of how she and another white Zimbabwean woman, Jilly Taylor, set up the Musasa project against domestic violence in Zimbabwe. While they were 'insiders' in the sense of being Zimbabwean, as white people they were 'outsiders' to the communities with whom the Musasa project primarily worked. Their awareness of their position led them to take a cautious approach at the start of the project. They deliberately portrayed the organisation as a 'helping' organisation for victims, and avoided direct criticism of cultures of violence.

Within three years, as planned, the running of the organisation was handed over entirely to black Zimbabweans and Stewart and her colleague withdrew. Gradually the rhetoric, programme and priorities became more radical, with direct criticism made of the 'patriarchy' and customs of *lobola* (dowry). While this was due in part to the more established nature of the organisation in terms of media and political acceptance, and a more secure funding base, Stewart also attributes this radicalisation to the shift to black leadership. She says, as white Zimbabweans 'we were extremely careful about what we criticised... This caution was probably appropriate, both in terms of the needs of the organisation at its inception and in terms of the ambiguous position of white Zimbabwean criticism of black Zimbabwean culture' (Stewart, 1995: 34).

This experience raises questions such as whether outsiders need to take a different approach to insiders in tackling cultural norms. Another important question is whether outsiders should take the initiative where local capacity is lacking, or if this just becomes an excuse for failure to observe, identify or develop local capacity, or for acting on outside priorities. My feeling is that the answers depend on the context, but where outside initiative is taken, an explicit strategy needs to be set for increasing local control. Where collaboration is on a continuing basis, the relationship needs to be examined to ensure a process by which the dominant partner cedes power.

4.6 Lessons learnt: Strategies for cultural change

In this section I have given examples of work which in some measure succeeded in challenging cultures of gender. In Uganda, the power of Redd Barna combined with a sensitivity and strategy of organising villagers separately according to age and gender, allowed younger women to be heard, and for stereotypes to be broken down. PROMUNDO chose to work with young people who they found are less likely to have internalised gender norms in relationship patterns. PROMUNDO identified young men who were more accepting of non-violent gender norms, and mobilised them to educate their peers. MYWO and PATH tried to change rather than eradicate the FGM ritual, giving respect to the role of this tradition in people's lives. They also worked within the structures of authority (fathers, elders) and at the plan and pace of each communities.

The Musasa project against domestic violence, established by white Zimbabweans, set a time limit for white control of the project, and handed over to black leadership within three years. Lesbian and Gay organisations in Southern Africa have been facing similar issues. Their transition from white to black leadership, and towards greater inclusion of women has required political will, capacity building for excluded groups, and a reorientation of organisational priorities. Similar challenges are being faced by some international organisations as discussed in sections five and six.

The lessons of these experiences are:

- To find ways to allow marginalised groups to be heard
- To support initiative and control by those groups with relatively less power
- To ally with people who oppose oppressive norms, including young people, and also those with some authority (eg. men, fathers, elders)
- That caution in challenging norms may be needed, particularly by outsiders

These examples show that a sensitivity to, and strategic interaction with, the power dynamics involved, and a willingness to tackle stereotypical representations of gender, can make cultural change possible. This cultural change takes place at many levels. The interventions described in this section have focussed on changing gender norms in people's lives by working at community or national level. At the same time, such interventions also have implications for and effects on cultures of Gender and Development (GAD). They can have a vital effect on GAD cultures, re-rooting them in the realities of implementation. However, efforts to change GAD cultures from the ground up need to be complemented by changes in development organisations and in representations and ideologies internationally. The following section describes dominant ideologies within GAD. Section six presents efforts to tackle these ideologies at an international level.

5. Cultural norms of gender and development

Development action changes cultures by trying to introduce alternative ideas or practices. Development also relates to culture in terms of the cultural values implicit in development theory and practice themselves. Mainstream development policies and practices are themselves laden with cultural assumptions, such as the equation of development with an idea of modernisation, of progressing from a 'traditional' to a 'modern' society. Many such assumptions come from the north. Global norms of neo-liberal economic policies come in part from the World Bank and US institutions. 'International' human rights derive from western conceptions of the individual. Gender is no exception. The thinking emerging from southern organising and discussion around gender is often excluded from international debates. Dominant trends in GAD come more from northern based research institutions, government and non-government organisations than out of national or local research, action or priorities in the south.

Therefore when we consider the issue of culture this involves us in questioning assumptions about the sort of development which is currently being promoted, and the vision of the world which motivates it (Sweetman, 1995:1).

In this section I do question such assumptions and vision. I consider examples of norms that have gained international currency in GAD, and look at how they have been constructed and what impact they have.

5.1 Questioning the division into north and south

Drastic material inequalities between (and within) north and south persist. However, the way the north-south division is conceived of is itself problematic, and may not help in addressing inter-regional inequalities:

Neo-colonial discourse is based on the 'imagined category' of the 'west' versus the 'rest' (Moore, 1994) or the 'third world' whereby the latter is 'depicted as inferior, traditional, in need of emergency assistance...non-democratic, and/or potentially dangerous' (Marchand and Parpart, 1995:224).

The colonised world becomes homogenised and 'Other', in the imaginations of people in the north, and as needing to become more like them. Lessons for development are seen as applicable throughout the south, and best practice as transferable within the developing world. These problematic conceptions of north-south divisions include ideas regarding gender relations. I trace below how these have been played out in development research, ideology and practice⁵.

5.2 'Third World Woman' as victim in western feminist research

Mohanty charges western feminist research with producing an image of a homogenous 'third world woman'

⁵ North and south have become problematic terms, given the way they are used in development ideology. Nevertheless, I continue to use these terms in this report for want of a better way for talking about regional differences. I try to use them critically, and with an awareness of their limitations.

as victim without agency, oppressed by family, culture and religion. Western women are seen in contrast as liberated, and as a desirable model to emulate. Such research 'colonise[s] the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world' to construct a singular image of 'an "average third world woman" ...[who] leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family oriented, victimized etc.), in contrast to the liberated western woman' (1991:56).

Mohanty says her critiques can also apply to third world scholars writing about their own cultures, particularly urban middle class scholars who take their own position as a norm in writing about rural or working class sisters. Her argument holds for anyone who tries to set up their own standards as the criteria by which others should be judged deficient. However, it is possible to escape this trap: some researchers, including westerners, have avoided colonising the subjects of their research by starting from local particularity rather than colonial preconceptions.

Mohanty's piece was published in 1991. Since then, some research has responded to critiques such as hers, for example considering resistance to gender norms by women and men in southern countries (see the Muslim Women and Development Action Research project featured in the Supporting Resources Collection). However, ideas of southern women as victims do persist in development research and thinking, as in the following example.

5.3 North-south power dynamics in gender training

Assumptions about liberated western women providing the model for their oppressed southern sisters have persisted in development practice. Matlanyane Sexwale (1994) describes attending a 'Tools for Gender Trainers Workshop' in 1993, organised by the Population Council and the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), which brought together 40 trainers from all over the world. She found the workshop typical of gender training, in that it was technical rather than political, giving no space for discussion of power issues. This meant certain problematic dynamics remained undiscussed, for example, continuing interactions based on the principle that northerners should educate southerners about appropriate 'civilised' gender relations, while ignoring the need for change in their own organisations and in the north more generally. She found that gender training 'tends to reproduce rather than challenge domination' (Matlanyane Sexwale, 1994 :63).

One problem was the 'hegemonic and patronising ways' with which some women from funding organisations pursued their agendas during the conference, which alienated Latin American, Caribbean, Asian and Pacific women. Another issue arose when people were divided into regional groups. Those based in North America and Europe argued for their name to be changed to 'the global group' as their work was international. This was accepted without challenge within the workshop sessions, but much discussed in the corridors and off-scene. Many of the trainers from other areas were also involved in activities beyond their region, but were happy to be categorised within their region. Why were Europeans and north Americans more global than others? 'Was it the usual north-south dynamics at play? Was it racism? Was it the power of naming being exercised?' (Matlanyane Sexwale, 1994:59)

Another aspect of her experience, in this training and in other fora, was being treated as an 'informant' by 'white northern women who approached me and attempted to suck information out of me' (Matlanyane Sexwale, 1994:60). Northern participants attempted to collect information from the southern participants for subsequent missions and publications. Matlanyane Sexwale finds ideas and methods from the experience

and knowledge of black and LACAAP⁶ women, which may not have been written up or published, are often appropriated without credit:

Years after black (and some white) women have been writing texts of protest against the non-validation of black women's writing in publishing and the academy where white supremacist, Eurocentric beliefs about knowledge and its production dominate, it is appalling to discover that the field of gender training is dominated by practices that invisibilise black women (Matlanyane Sexwale, 1994:65).

However, subsequently Sexwale ran international training workshops for KIT, which suggests the possibility of gender training taking on the issues she raises.

5.4 GAD: More space for understanding local contexts?

GAD can go some way towards addressing the problematic north-south division, by providing a framework for consideration of local context, rather than assuming a homogenous southern region. However, how far it succeeds in doing so is debatable. Nonetheless, GAD certainly marks progress on previous development thinking.

In the 1950s-1960s third world women were considered largely as tradition bound obstacles to development. These women were seen as 'as exotic specimens, as oppressed victims, as sex objects or as the most ignorant and backward members of "backward" societies.' (de Groot 1991:115 cited in Marchand and Parpart, 1995:13). This representation had serious impact in denying southern women benefits from development action.

In the mid-1960s some feminist economists noted that development was not happening as hoped, particularly for women. 'Women In Development' (WID) thinking emerged, focussing on women but largely failing to challenge western gender stereotypes such as the sexual division of labour.

Later critiques did emerge, and more space was created for some input from southern organisations. 'Empowerment' approaches came out of organisations in the south such as Development Alternatives for Women (DAWN), which contributed to the emergence of the GAD approach. GAD constituted a change from former development thinking, with emphasis on the constructed nature of gender, and a shift to focus on gender relations rather than looking at women alone. Both these provide avenues for consideration of context – how gender has been constructed locally, rather than imposition of northern gender stereotypes, and looking at women and men in the context of their social relations.

However GAD was not necessarily welcomed by southern or northern organisers, some of whom feared it would lead to diversion of resources away from women focused projects (Baden and Goetz, 1995). And while GAD did depart from WID thinking, it largely remains within the framework of modernisation on a northern model as with previous development ideologies. Implicit assumptions persist that the third world should develop to become more like the first, and that southern women should become more like women in the north. In much of the development industry, including in gender and development, north-south power imbalances may continue to be played out without being addressed. However, increasing awareness of

⁶ Latin American Caribbean Asian and Pacific

these imbalances has prompted efforts for increasing local and national ownership of development activities through decentralisation, participation and more equal partnerships.

5.5 What does this mean for development?

In this section I have looked at the problematic ways in which a division between north and south is set up in development thinking, with a gulf in lifestyles assumed between each region, and homogeneity assumed within. I have discussed as an example of the construction of this divide how southern women have been portrayed as victims, and northern women as liberated, and a model from which to learn. These problematic representations of north and south hinder development action from addressing real needs. However, many in GAD are changing in response to critiques. In the following section I describe examples of positive action to address these issues.

6. Forging new cultures in GAD

In this section, I discuss efforts to respond to problematic representations of north-south differences, and the power dynamics that go with these. I first present the experience of ACORD in changing its own organisational structures and mission.

6.1 Organisational change – ACORD moves to Africa

ACORD is an international NGO with its head office in the UK. ACORD works in African countries on themes of conflict, livelihoods, gender and HIV/AIDS. Regional and Pan-African workshops of ACORD staff and stakeholders raised the issue of north-south dynamics within the organisation. Like many 'international' organisations with headquarters in the west, top-level decision making was dominated by western staff who were not sufficiently in touch with grassroots action.

In 1995, in response, ACORD decided not to recruit expatriate western programme coordinators if any good national candidates were available. Debates continued on these questions, and in 1998 a task force developed five options for ACORD's future including one which closed it down! The choice was made to make its human capital, some 650 staff, more relevant to the needs of Africa. In 1999, a Pan-African Workshop launched a process of 'moving the strategic leadership, identity and management from the UK to Africa' (ACORD, 2002). The same workshop initiated a shift in ACORD's mission from meeting basic needs to promoting social justice.

All key decision making positions are now being moved to Africa and the profile of ACORD's staff has become more African through a process of capacity building and internal and external recruitment. The relocation will be completed by 2004.

The change in mission, organisational restructuring and relocation, intersect with ACORD's Action Plan on Gender. This ensures women staff can access training and promotion opportunities (currently nine of the top sixteen posts in the organisation are held by women, of whom seven are African). The gender action plan also requires that every programme has a gender strategy on which they are required to report annually (telephone interview with Debra Vidler, ACORD director for organisational development, June 28th, 2002).

6.2 The north learning from the south

Most development initiatives continue to assume that the north is better off, and in some senses a model to learn from and strive for. Oxfam Great Britain has challenged such representations including in their LINKS newsletter (November 1998), recognising that the UK faces problems of poverty and gender inequality just as does the south:

- The gap between poorest and richest in UK is larger than in Sri Lanka or Ethiopia.
- Gender roles are problematic, and feminisation of poverty is an issue in the UK as well as in developing countries, with women continuing to do the bulk of the housework and carework, usually managing but rarely controlling the household budget, and earning 30-40 per cent less than men doing similar jobs.

Geraldine Terry, Oxfam Great Britain poverty project officer, comments:

[One] thing which links women on low incomes here and in the south is that they tend to put themselves last after their children and husband, if they have one – for instance, on days when money is short they'll skip meals so that they can feed the kids. I think women in Britain are generally worse off than women in the south when it comes to access to child care. There is relatively little state provision of pre-school child care in Britain, yet the old family networks - getting grandmothers, aunts, sisters and so on to look after your children while you're at work – have by and large broken down in Britain, whereas they're still strong in many societies in the south. (Oxfam, 1998)

In 1997, Oxfam GB started a UK poverty programme in the north of England. This included north-south learning exchanges, such as the Scottish gender budgets group, 'Engender', learning from South African work in this area. As with gender work in the south, Oxfam encountered mixed reactions. The programme found allies in women's centres, many of which are run by women from Asian communities particularly Bangladeshi and Pakistani. The commitment of these centres strengthened the programme. However, outside the women's centres, many were resistant to ideas of gender. Terry recounts:

It's harder to raise the issue of gender with a mainstream project, such as a centre serving all parts of the community. Sometimes people equate gender analysis with feminism, which they see as either threatening or 'old hat'. In my experience, younger women, and most men, in the voluntary sector tend to react negatively if they think you're talking about feminism. You can almost see their eyes glazing over! What does interest them is talking about "male exclusion", which tends to be seen as a newer, and therefore more interesting problem than women's poverty and exclusion (Oxfam, 1998)

This experience illustrates some commonalities with GAD work in southern countries, and explodes the myth of a gender liberated north relative to an oppressive south.

6.3 Images in International NGO advertising

The north-south power dynamics are again an issue in international NGO fundraising, where northern based NGOs usually choose a representation of the south designed to elicit funds from the northern, mainly middle class public. Some organisations continue to present southern women as victims, using 'victim images' of thin, disabled, or disadvantaged women and starving children, or pretty and vulnerable girls. There is often a tension between the marketing and fundraising departments of NGOs, which find this kind of image effective in raising money, and the programme/development education departments, who are more aware of the negative impact of such images on public understanding and on development practice. Such images imply the donor is in the attractive position of saviour, helper, superior, civilising agent, dutiful global citizen, western philanthropist, compassionate friend, or in any case an active relation to these women and children, who wait passively for his/her generosity. This echoes colonial ideas of the 'white man's burden' being to 'civilise' the third world.

Some organisations have responded to critiques of the portrayal of the south as victimised women and starving children in fundraising images. One example is of Christian Aid in the UK. As early as 1989, Christian Aid launched a fundraising campaign in the UK whose main strategy was to present images of

people as agents not victims, and to link the international to domestic issues, so as to suggest common cause with those portrayed, rather than imply a tragic 'other' waiting for help.

Keep the health service going.

At 9 am, six days a week, Elisabeth, like many other health workers in Bangladesh, cycles off to the local villages. She carries out an immunisation programme, teaches villagers about sanitation and the dangers of unclean water, and often has to treat infected wounds.

spend time with the mothers of sick children, showing them how to prepare nourishing food. Providing funds to take care of the health of the poorest is a vital part of Christian Aid's work in the Third World. Please give us the money to keep the health service alive and well.

She keeps a careful record of the progress of pregnancies. By detecting abnormalities early, the maternal mortality rate is being lowered considerably. Health workers like Elisabeth

 GIVE NOW! BANC 25-300 0200
 OR POST THIS COUPON
 To: Christian Aid, PO Box 95, London E8 1HT.
 I would like to keep the health service going.
 I enclose my gift of £100 £50 £20
 £10 £5 £2 £1
 I enclose a cheque/PO or
 Please debit my bank/Postcard/Debit card account no. _____
 Please post Coupon Form
 Signature _____
 Name _____
 Address _____
 Postcode _____ 2002
Christian Aid
 CHANGING IN ACTION WITH THE WORLD'S POOR

(Photo courtesy of Christian Aid)

One image from this campaign shows a photo of Elisabeth, a Bangladeshi health worker, racing along on her bike. Elisabeth wears a big smile, and neat clean salwar kameez suit, with a white scarf draped over her shoulders. The text relates that Elisabeth is a health worker in Bangladesh and describes her role in the rural health service. The slogan 'Keep the health service going' resonates with the discussion in the UK around the National Health Service (an issue of contemporary concern). Parallels are drawn between the underfunded British health service, and the health service in Bangladesh. Elisabeth is a central image, named, an agent, active, and helping others. She is portrayed as a partner in development, and not necessarily totally dependent on British donations.

So does this promotional poster escape the dichotomies of power so evident in the more common victim images? In my view, this image is undoubtedly a radical departure from and improvement on victim images. However, a closer look reveals other problematic implications. Elisabeth may be a do-gooding charity worker herself, helping the less fortunate and more ignorant villagers. Women habitually do care-work, so her role as a care worker is limited in its challenge to gender stereotyping. Elisabeth is a Christian name in a predominantly Muslim country. Does this suggest a particular type of beneficiary of Christian Aid's support, or is the familiar name of the British Queen chosen for an audience who might be alienated by a more 'Bangladeshi-sounding' name?

Efforts to escape the victim images may signal a departure from existing stereotypes, but risk creating new ones, such as the romanticised southern woman empowered according to the measures of northern cultures, or the 'merry peasant', happy with their traditional way of life. Pictures of protesting women are increasingly used in publicity materials, which could suggest either a more positive view of southern women or/and that it is only thanks to the donor that they have become empowered and had their lives transformed.

How viewers see any development image will be influenced by the overall context of northern domination. Almost any image of the south produced for a northern audience can thus become problematic. A recent Christian Aid campaign tackles this problem by portraying the donor rather than the recipient. The image below shows a white man's bottom. He is bending over to pick something up, and doing manual labour, probably with tools (the handle of an out of focus spade is visible in the upper left corner). He could be seen as turning his back on, and as the text suggests, forgetting that, like him, people in Rwanda need tools, work, money and a future.



Another image from the same campaign shows a lipsticked woman's mouth eating a donut. The caption is again 'FORGET, FORGET, FORGET'. Included in between each of these words are comments about training sugar farmers in Honduras, which the viewer could choose to forget or remember.

(Photos provided by BDDH Partners, courtesy of Christian Aid).

As I have understood them, these images could be taken to be members of the UK public who are being asked to donate to Christian Aid. The pictures are self-reflective in that they direct 'western eyes' from looking at a third world other to looking instead at themselves, and what they have in common with those in

Rwanda and Honduras. The viewer is then prompted to consider whether they will act upon this train of thought (give money to Christian Aid) or forget. The images might also be suggesting seeing the world from the perspective of people in Rwanda or Honduras, who see the British donor turning his back on them, or eating her donut and forgetting.

While innovative, these pictures remain within certain British gender stereotypes: male as manual worker wearing low slung trousers, and female as lipsticked consumer. Nonetheless, these indicate an interesting new angle in NGO advertising imagery, and one which may provoke British viewers to shift their thinking.

6.4 Sexual pleasure only for the north?

Another aspect of the portrayal of north-south difference is the interpretation of sexuality. Love and sexual pleasure are taken for granted as part of sexual relationships in the north, but are often absent in development representations of sex and sexuality in the south. Instead, sexuality is usually either ignored, or discussed in terms of disease and violence, or in terms of reproductive decision making based on material interests. Again the 'third world woman' is assumed homogenous, with a uniform heterosexual sexuality in which reproduction is the key consideration.

However, a discourse around sexuality and human rights is now emerging in development arenas, such as in the debates at the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), and at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) which talked about rights related to security, health, equality, and decision-making in heterosexual and homosexual sexualities. There is an increasing awareness that ignoring sexuality leaves many – both women, and men who do not conform to sexual norms such as accepted forms of heterosexuality – vulnerable. Nevertheless, while the subject is now entering the arena of international discussion, sexuality is usually constructed in these international fora and documents as being about violence and rights, and not about pleasure (Miller, 2000).

Human rights frameworks increasingly provide space which can be used by those working on sexuality, as seen in the UN Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995). This has occurred at both national and local levels. In Turkey, Women for Women's Human Rights talks about sexual pleasure as a human right as part of its programme on 'Human Rights and Legal Literacy Training for Women'. In Namibia, Sister Namibia, a women's rights organisation, co-ordinated a national and collaborative process of producing a Women's Manifesto. One of the most controversial issues at the beginning was whether or not to include language on sexual rights and the rights of lesbians. Sister Namibia held discussions and role plays in regional workshops which found that the vast majority of participants supported use of human rights to empower women, regardless of their sexual orientation (see Supporting Resources Collection for more details on both these cases). As described in section four, Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe, and the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality in South Africa have mobilised around rights to advance the cause of lesbians and gays in Southern Africa.

Such initiatives illustrate that changing cultures of sexuality is a priority for some organisations in southern countries, and that developers would do well to listen to diverse views on sexuality, rather than assuming it is not an issue, or imposing their own model of sexuality.

6.5 GAD can change

This section has presented examples of changes in cultures of development, with some international organisations taking up the challenge to act upon north-south and gender inequalities. In an initiative launched by African members, ACORD has relocated its head office to Africa, and changed its mission. Oxfam has promoted learning from the south by the north, and set out to counter the myth that northern women can lead the way to liberation for women in the south. Christian Aid has challenged (some) stereotypes in its recent fundraising campaign. International fora have provided new spaces for discussion of sexuality as a development issue. These experiences testify to the possibility of substantive change in cultures of development.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Culture is the forgotten dimension in development. For a long time 'other' cultures and not 'ours' have been promoted through, among other things, foreign development paradigms...However, rejecting western paradigms does not entail uncritically returning to the past. What is called for is a critical fusion of the two, to construct a world which is friendly to contemporary Africa. On the importance of the healthy link between the past and the future, Verhelst (1989: 63) observes that, 'we must hold the past sacred, but the future even more so.' (Makuvaza, 1998:43)

7.1 Key points

- Charges of western imposition are often made in response to gender interventions. These accusations may be accurate, or simply an effort to obstruct transformation of gender relations, or both!
- The thinking and practice of development – including GAD - are laden with cultural values. Cultures of colonialism still influence development today. However, change is possible. Many individuals and organisations are challenging such representations and forging new cultures in GAD.
- Development will always impact on cultures, and development interventions always impact on gender. They either change things (for better or worse), or sanction and reinforce the status quo. Ignoring gender in development is just as much a cultural assumption as putting it on the agenda. Cultural impact needs to be conscious and considered, and one directed at challenging oppressive norms of gender, sex, sexuality, and north-south dynamics.
- Cultures are products of people, place, politics and history, and change over time. Different people have different views about the cultures in which they live, and within any country or community there are many cultures. Culture and tradition can enable or obstruct, and be oppressive or liberating for different people at different times. There is nothing sacred about culture, and value judgements need to be made about which aspects of culture to hold on to, and which to let go of.
- However, who makes such judgements is an important issue. 'Outsiders' need to be cautious about how they judge other people's cultures. However, this does not mean standing back in 'respect' of 'local culture'. Instead, developers need to make space for discussion of cultures by 'insiders' and enable people to identify and take action against practices they find oppressive.

7.2 Recommendations for implementation

Awareness of power dynamics and willingness to tackle gender stereotypes have been found to be effective in challenging cultural norms. Successful strategies include:

- Starting from insider initiative where possible (and take action where you are an insider eg. in changing your own organisation!)
- Being cautious if an outsider about criticising other people's cultures

- Questioning one's own assumptions, and whether these correspond to the realities and priorities of the people whom you seek to benefit
- Making spaces for those usually silenced to be heard, for example through separate discussions for marginalised groups, and participatory approaches
- Allying with those who resist oppressive cultural norms, such as women's organisations, and men opposed to gender violence
- Working with young people who have not yet set certain patterns of behaviour
- Aiming not to eradicate, but to alter and replace local traditions in ways acceptable to community members
- Communicating with, and seeking support from, those with relative power who may be suspicious of change (eg. men, elders)

7.3 Recommendations for organisational change

Cultures of development are just as subjective as any other, and need to be submitted to scrutiny and challenge. The ways a north-south divide is represented in research, advertising, and practice disempower those supposed to benefit from development action. However, some development organisations are attempting to tackle north-south power imbalances. Lessons from these experiences include:

- On an organisational and individual level, developers need to examine and challenge their own cultural assumptions, power dynamics and images used. This examination should include issues of north and south, race, sex, sexuality and gender. Common assumptions in GAD need to be questioned, such as: 'Northern women are better off than southern women', 'Eradication of Female Genital Mutilation is the top priority', 'Sexuality is not relevant to development', 'Sex consists of male and female only'.
- Participation and leadership of previously excluded groups (eg. women, black or southern staff members) should be ensured through capacity building, promotion, recruitment, and relocation of decision making positions to areas where these groups live.
- Organisations need to be prepared for possible changes to priorities and mission if previously excluded groups genuinely gain decision making power.
- Old stereotypes and new ones can be challenged in fundraising – educate and raise money at the same time!

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