Gender and sexuality in a changing world

Both progressive and regressive forces are shaping the challenges and contestations of gender and sexuality in our rapidly changing world, and within development policy and practice itself. In the current political, economic and social turbulence we face, IDS and our partners must therefore orient new work on gender and sexuality issues in relation to these critical forces and trends, some of which we briefly discuss below.

Deepening economic inequalities

While global extreme poverty has halved over the past 20 years (United Nations 2014a), economic inequality has increased in some two-thirds of countries across the globe since the year 2000. Concentrations of deprivation are developing in increasingly fragile states and sub-state areas, as well as in middle-income countries failing to achieve inclusive growth and social protection, with little investment in urban infrastructures and mounting environmental degradation (Barder and Evans 2014). The post-2008 economic recession has further heightened concerns about inequalities and the ways in which women and other disadvantaged groups may be impacted disproportionately, including groups marginalised on the basis of sexual orientation and/or non-conforming gender identities. Furthermore, collective struggles for women's economic rights have been somewhat sidelined in development research and policy over recent decades, as the focus has increasingly shifted to framing women as workers and contributing to economic growth as producers, farmers and consumers.

◄ Nepal, Kathmandu. A man pushes his bicycle, loaded with melons, past a billboard advertisement for Oman Air's first class service.

Unequal labour market participation and care economies

Despite progress in women's labour force participation over many decades, this has somewhat stagnated globally between 1990 and 2012, with women still earning between 10 per cent and 30 per cent less than men, globally and on average (World Bank 2014). As labour markets have become increasingly deregulated, women's participation is also disproportionately occurring in the informal economy and in lower income brackets, outside of the protection of laws and regulations for fair pay, employment conditions or anti-discrimination (UN Women 2011; Razavi *et al.* 2012). The same applies to sexual minorities and other marginalised groups who face additional barriers and often lack social capital or community or legal protection (Wood 2016).

In many contexts, the persistent gender pay gaps in many formal and informal labour markets and resilient divisions of tasks, jobs and roles between different types of men and women, along with ongoing pressures and new opportunities for women to enter the labour market, have led to greater concentrations of women in low-paid, often informal sectors of the labour market. This includes increasing participation in traditionally 'feminised' and less-regulated sectors such as domestic services and sex work. While global advocacy for policy change and for the decriminalisation of sex work has largely been related to HIV prevention and treatment, there are growing calls to address sex work as a form of work, with emphasis given to labour protections, poverty and workers' rights (Oosterhoff, Waldman and Olerenshaw 2014).

The gendered division of labour, which assigns women primary responsibility for direct and indirect care work, has changed little over time. While there are some signs of positive change, with more men entering the care professions (e.g. nursing) and more men sharing the burden of unpaid care work, a large-scale study found that men's share of unpaid work still did not exceed 37 per cent in any of the 20 countries studied (Edström *et al.* 2015). The increasing numbers of women entering the waged workforce in most

▲ A woman tends to her children at a public works site in India.

countries, cuts to welfare spending in many societies, and men's continuing resistance to taking on significant care responsibilities makes this issue an important focus of development policy.

Improving the visibility of unpaid care work and its links with economic empowerment have formed a major feature of our recent work, adding some weight and evidence to a broader push from women's organisations and activists, which has seen results through being included as a target under SDG 5. This target highlights the need to 'recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as *nationally appropriate* [our emphasis]'.

Recent anti-poverty programmes in pursuit of the empowerment of individual women have had

> ❝The fact that women are assigned primary responsibility for care work has changed little over time.❞

significant and divergent implications (both positive and negative) on work towards gender justice, not always lifting people or communities out of poverty, but sometimes enabling more freedom in people's choices (for example, choice of occupation), women's decision-making, and the possibility of being more 'self-reliant' (Edström *et al.* 2015). The evidence is mixed, but some studies find continued resistance from men to progress in women's economic opportunities,

and no automatic translation of earnings into control and agency (Ahmed 2008; Kabeer 2007; Silberschmidt 2011). Men are largely missing from women's economic empowerment initiatives, as indeed are most sexual minorities (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2014). More research is needed to better understand how to engage different types of men and other gendered or sexualised groups towards improved gender justice outcomes for all.

Urbanisation and migration

Increasing urbanisation is a significant feature of economic growth and a majority of the world's population now live in urban and peri-urban areas. This can mean new freedoms for women – but also for young men – and changes in kinship structures, which often have major implications for norms and options around gender and sexuality. It can also mean greater exposure to violence and rights violations for women and marginalised groups, as documented in Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Liberia and Nepal (Taylor 2011).

In recent years there has been a major increase in the visibility of international migration, variously explained by environmental degradation, conflict, or discrimination, as well as by continued social and economic inequalities between countries. Large-scale movements of people are reshaping gender relations and norms in both 'sending' and 'receiving' communities in ways that remain under-researched. We know that the 'feminisation' of labour migration has been accompanied by a growing recognition of the violence faced by female migrants and other minorities at all stages of their 'journey' (Piper 2003), and by exploitative conditions of work, such as long working hours, non-payment, beatings, forced confinement, rape, sexual abuse or exploitation (International Organization for Migration 2009). Gender and sexuality play major roles in determining the causes, conditions and outcomes of unsafe migration, and understanding how this operates is key to developing prevention, mitigation and emergency responses that are both equitable

> 66 Large-scale movements of people are reshaping gender norms in both 'sending' and 'receiving' communities. 99

and inclusive. There is limited awareness about the nature of migration and challenges faced by those marginalised on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression, as highlighted by IDS' own work with partners (Wood 2016).

Political polarisations and transformations of sociocultural spaces

Over recent decades we have seen a downsizing of the role of the state in many settings and, more recently, a general increase in populist politics, often with nationalist overtones; a resurgence of religious movements with conservative agendas on gender and sexuality, alongside a resurgence of male supremacist ideologies, has been observed in many parts of the world (Hassink *et al.* 2015). In many countries we have also registered a 'democratic deficit' and lacklustre participation rates in elections, while popular political mobilisations are increasingly de-linked from formal party politics. Feminist political mobilisation within the context of development programming has also dissipated into a broader range of more issue-specific and instrumental projects, often de-linked from a deeper social justice agenda (Fraser 2009), although there are important exceptions and movements in the global South.

Socioculturally, we have seen major new trends changing the landscape and language of gender and sexuality, both positively and negatively. On the one hand, the rise of social media and internet connectivity has opened up new spaces for expression, community building and mobilisation (Gurumurthy 2013). On the other, it raises questions about whose voices are being heard, and it has created new vulnerabilities – to surveillance and to exposure – increasing risks for women, sexual minorities and other marginalised groups in different settings (Tactical Technology Collective 2014).

In tandem with these transformations of social spaces, we have also seen an increased visibility of certain 'men's rights movements' and male backlash against women's empowerment in many contexts (Hamaus, Edström and Shahrokh 2015). While there are strong identifications with more equitable masculine identities

▲ Women's march on Washington DC, January 2017.

— 'new men' — in certain countries, we have also seen an increased glorification of 'militaristic masculinity' and a valuing of violence in many areas. This has been accompanied by a rise in the visibility and reporting of homophobia and a backlash against sexual minorities and human rights in some countries (Jjuuko and Tumwesige 2013).

Linking economic justice with sexuality and gender justice

The global landscape on gender, sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) has changed rapidly. An unprecedented number of countries have decriminalised same-sex relations and outlawed marital rape in their criminal codes (UN Women 2011), while transgender identity is increasingly recommended to be taken off the list of mental health disorders (Robles *et al.* 2016; WHO 2016). New medical technologies — such as medical abortion, self-injectable contraceptives, post- and pre-exposure prophylaxis and HIV home testing — are increasingly available, while increased access to the internet and other information and

communications technologies (ICTs) is giving many more women and girls more control over their bodies than in the past. Yet, there is also a growing backlash against sexual health and rights, as well as against hard-won rights of marginalised groups (such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), young people, disabled people and sex workers).

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Although sexuality is clearly an essential part of sexual and reproductive health rights for all persons, sexual health programmes still often focus on family planning for women and girls presumed to be part of monogamous, heterosexual couples. There are few if any signs that sexual violence is decreasing in war zones, or beyond, and 1.2 billion women will have married as children by 2050 if there is no reduction in child marriage,[3] while 'anti-trafficking measures' have been abused to 'rescue and rehabilitate' sex workers against their will.