

# Reframing Gender Justice in an Unequal, Volatile World

## IDS' Directions for Future Research on Gender and Sexuality in Development

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At a time of major changes in global politics and trends, and major shifts in international development following the establishment of the global Sustainable Development Goals in Agenda 2030, the Gender and Sexuality cluster at the Institute of Development Studies engaged in collaborative discussions and consultations over nine months with partner organisations, networks, external experts and policymakers. Following this process through most of 2016, this brief outlines our priority directions for future research on gender and sexuality in development in an increasingly unequal, polarised and volatile world.

### IDS at a critical juncture

IDS has played critical roles in convening debates and pushing progress in gender and sexuality over the past 40 years – from influencing the shift from ‘women in development’ to ‘gender and development’, getting sexuality, pleasure and poverty into the development discourse, politicising the field of integrating men and masculinities into gender, or getting the issue of undervalued care work onto the agenda.

Most of the strategic demands voiced by women’s groups made it into Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: to ‘Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’. Furthermore, key principles underpinning the SDGs – indivisibility, universality and inclusivity (‘leave no one behind’) – signal a significant shift towards a more holistic development paradigm, with implications and potential for more transformative formulations of and responses to issues of both gender and sexuality.

However, while highlighting key issues for pushing on women’s empowerment, SDG 5 remains rather silent on issues of sexuality in gender, or how men and masculinities need to be addressed

for progress on equality. In addition, there are a number of potential risks: de-politicisation of the ‘leave no one behind’ principle; presenting women as a ‘vulnerable group’; and framing empowerment as something we ‘do’ or ‘grant’ to people, rather than as a process that women or others claim and own, and which requires fundamental shifts in power structures. Several targets remain deeply controversial and are already qualified by the clause ‘as nationally appropriate’, which effectively gives governments an ‘opt-out’. This also affects SDG 5.

### Gender and sexuality issues in a changing world

Several major changes in global politics and trends interact with and influence the potential of achieving the post-2015 agenda.

### Deepening economic inequalities

While global extreme poverty has halved over the past 20 years, concentrations of deprivation are developing in increasingly ‘fragile’ areas, as well as in middle-income countries failing to achieve inclusive growth and social protection. The post-2008 economic recession has further heightened concerns about inequalities and the ways in

which women and other groups may be impacted disproportionately, including groups marginalised on the basis of sexual orientation or non-conforming gender identities.

### Unequal labour market participation and care economies

Despite progress in women's labour force participation over many decades, women still earn between 10 per cent and 30 per cent less than men. Women work disproportionately in the informal economy, with lower incomes, and outside the protection of laws and regulations for decent work. Also the gendered division of labour has changed little over time; the invisibility of men in policy on gender and economic empowerment and the recent 'feminisation' of anti-poverty programmes have been linked to a continued resistance from men to progress in women's economic opportunities, or male backlash, leaving much need for better understanding of how to build gender justice 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. In recent years, we have also witnessed 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 within and across countries are reshaping gender relations and norms in both 'sending' and 'receiving' communities in ways that remain under-researched.

### Political polarisations and transformations of sociocultural spaces

Recent decades have witnessed a downsizing of the role of the state in many settings and, more recently, a general increase in populist politics, often with nationalist overtones alongside a resurgence of male supremacist ideologies. 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. Simultaneously, the expansion of mobile technologies and digital spaces are not only transforming how people navigate their personal lives but how they experience the state and engage as citizens.

### Sexuality and gender justice

The global landscape on gender, sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights has changed rapidly. An unprecedented number of countries have decriminalised same-sex relations and outlawed marital rape in their criminal codes. New medical technologies are increasingly available that give many more women and girls control over their bodies than in the past. Yet, there is also a growing backlash against sexual health and rights; and sexual health programmes are still often focused on family planning for (presumed to be) monogamous heterosexual women and girls.



▲ IDS' new directions for gender and sexuality.

PHOTOS © AFZAL HOSSAIN (TOP-LEFT), ALAN GREIG (TOP-RIGHT), JUAN O'FARRELL/IDS (BOTTOM-RIGHT), VILEAD (BOTTOM-LEFT).

## IDS' new directions for gender and sexuality

Considering the positive and negative influences of current trends on progress or regress in sexual and gender justice terms – and conceiving of directionality and dynamics within complex adaptive social systems – we have built on past areas of strong work to identify four priority streams for further investigation in the coming years.



### Women's economic empowerment and migration

While effects of both internal and international migration may be economically beneficial, they may also lead to tensions between migrant and host communities, particularly when people's movement brings questions around economic opportunities and distribution to the forefront, as host and migrant communities are perceived to compete over resources, assets, state services and access to markets. New research must explore the strategies used by migrant women living in economically insecure contexts – and women from host populations – to negotiate gender roles (particularly around care arrangements) and to explore how all women can be economically empowered in such contexts.



### Men and masculinities for peace and equality

Despite some progress on gender equality, patriarchal resistance remains strong in many areas. A shrinking of civil society space and a co-option of certain women's rights movements into less progressive agendas often compromises meaningful engagement of men with women's agendas or other social justice agendas. Better knowledge on effective processes and strategies needs to inform new work with men and boys,



beyond changing attitudes. IDS plans to focus on three areas – addressing gendered violence, equalising care work, and supporting women’s participation in public life – to explore how men can work alongside women’s movements and other social justice movements to build positive strategies for transforming patriarchal processes and for personal change.



### **Gender, sexuality and digital development**

Digital spaces have opened transformational opportunities for connection, anonymity and the accessing of vital information

and resources. Yet at the same time, concerns about democratic legitimacy and questions about whose voice is being heard in digital spaces are continuing to grow. Addressing the safety and security implications for those in contexts with cultural sensitivities around issues of sexuality and gender is becoming particularly urgent. We will aim to help grass-roots organisations to use and navigate the technology more safely, sustain their activities, and protect themselves while influencing broader audiences and policymakers more effectively.



### **Sexuality and poverty**

Multiple dimensions of poverty and marginalisation experienced by sexual and gender minorities remain under-explored. The Sexuality, Poverty and Law programme and partners have

built a qualitative evidence base that influenced global debates, taken forward in quantitative studies by the World Bank. There is a need to unpack the diversity of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities and to broaden the evidence base to examine their roles within informal and micro-businesses and the barriers to social mobility. Within conflict and disaster contexts, research must uncover how the sexual and economic rights of LGBT, sex workers and youth are affected. These questions can be explored in both online digital and offline spaces with mixed, interactive and participatory methodologies.

### **How do we engage?**

Building on a long track record of projects and research programmes, the Gender and Sexuality research cluster at IDS comprises an interdisciplinary group of experts, including anthropologists, economists, social scientists and political scientists, as well as digital media, policy and communication specialists. The group possesses strong qualitative and quantitative skills in academic, operational and action research, online platform development, policy engagement, organisational training and postgraduate teaching. Cluster members are proficient in some dozen languages and work in more than 30 countries.

Drawing an important lesson from past programmes, we have learned that future development and creative progress relies not only on pursuing distinct work streams through their own steps and logic, but also requires learning across streams of work to draw broader lessons and renew approaches for greater impact. Building on the collaborative process already started, we aim to create specific opportunities for learning and reflection – both across the streams and reaching out to partners and policymakers.

The IDS Gender and Sexuality research cluster has built up a wide network of partners and collaborators and will continue to engage with organisations to co-create the scope and design of our research in ways that serve knowledge co-creation, implementation purposes and advocacy strategies. We intend to build on research collaborations we have established as well as identifying and forming new relationships.


Our way of working is characterised by a strong will to learn together with our partners and stakeholders; to design the research, discuss its findings and evaluate processes and impacts together; and to agree on dissemination channels and tools that maximise the impact of our joint work and strengthen the capacity of all stakeholders.





**▲ Women’s march on Washington DC, January 2017**


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## Key research questions for the future

 How can women's social and economic empowerment programmes effectively empower women in economically insecure contexts among and around migrant populations?

 Alongside women's (and other social justice) movements, how do we work best with men and boys to build positive strategies to transform negative masculinities and patriarchal processes?

 How are gender and sexual rights activists engaging with digital spaces to develop political strategies and express their identities? And, what are the causes and consequences of digital sexual and gender-based violence, and what can be done to reduce it?

 What are the causes and consequences of economic exclusions based on transgender identity, sex work, sexual orientation and/or sexuality? And, of different intersecting combinations of marginalised identities?

## Next steps

We are now embarking on a series of steps to communicate these directions and the connections between them, as well as to update and strengthen our partnerships and internal capacity, while exploring strategies for resourcing the work. So, IDS invites like-minded partners, allies and supporters in all forms to join us in refreshing our approaches for addressing these complex challenges in gender and sexuality in an increasingly unequal and volatile world.

To explore some linkages between these different streams of work (and to some other work) that have contributed to our thinking in these new directions, please visit the redesigned website 'Interactions for Gender Justice'  
<http://interactions.ids.ac.uk/>



▲ 'American Graffiti', The Meatpacking District, Manhattan.

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