Battles Over Booklets: Gender Myths in the British Aid Programme

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1 Introduction

Between 1986 and 1999, the British Government's development cooperation Ministry[1] published a series of information booklets to publicise its policy in relation to women and development (ODA 1986, 1989, 1992, 1995; DFID 1999).[2] These were colloquially known in house as "WID [Women in Development] glossies". They aimed to provide the government's policy position at the moment of publication. Three years or so later that position had shifted and a new booklet was required (DFID 2000).

The cover of the 1986 publication has a photograph of a group of sullen, immobile sari-clad women, one very obviously pregnant and in a rural setting. The cover on the next booklet, in 1989, shows a more modern image of women: technicians in white coats, in a laboratory and on a research station. In 1991, it is a lively young woman teacher in a *shalwar kameez*, sharing a joke with a group of laughing girl pupils. The fourth booklet, published for the Beijing Conference in 1995, reverts to tradition: a sari-clad woman frowns in concentration as she makes a basket. Finally, in 1999 the title *Breaking the Barriers* returns to the educational image. A group of school girls *and boys*, is depicted, thus representing the shift in British aid policy from WID to Gender and Development (GAD).

The choice of these covers was a small, but significant element in a repetitive contest within the Ministry about the pictorial and textual content of each booklet. These contests were an important arena for the making, confirming and disputing of the government's evolving policy on women. It was a battle between those who wanted each booklet to stop further change by drawing a line in the sand and those seeing it as a pointer towards a more progressive policy.

I write this article as an erstwhile biased protagonist, a social development adviser and gender specialist,[3] involved in the politics of a hierarchical and initially highly patriarchal organisation. Fellow protagonists and I saw ourselves more as guerrillas than missionaries (Miller and Razavi 1998). Thus, I describe dreary, bureaucratic arguments over the choice of words and pictures as "battles" because that is how I *felt* it to be – battles to illuminate, challenge and change the norms and meaning embedded in government policy (Fraser 1989). Although I cannot represent the UK gender and development lobby, it seemed to me that many women in that group also saw it as a battle, in which the construction of the policy document was a key field of engagement.

In the next section, I describe each booklet's policy context. I then provide a historical account of the specific policy processes that shaped each booklet and follow this by analysing the stories, that is the myths and fables, that the booklets contain. I conclude by briefly touching on the advantages and perils in deploying such stories as an instrument to policy change.[4]

2 The policy context

Policy tends to be a response to interest. If no-one outside the Ministry is interested, an issue will probably fade away and disappear. That interest can come from another part of the government machinery, from Parliament, the business sector, or from civil society. Foreign or international interest may also require a policy response. Communicating that response is a process whereby what is said, how it is said and to whom it is said shapes the nature of the policy. The frequency of the WID booklets can be explained by the *attitudes of policy-makers* inside the Ministry and by the *sources of the external pressure*.

Officials can manage the effects of external

pressure. They can be very influential in encouraging or discouraging Ministerial interest in an issue. In my time[3], all three Ministers were favourable to the theme of gender, but either did not see it as fundamentally important or thought it politic not to express too much enthusiasm. Most senior civil servants never saw gender as genuinely significant, warranting a change in the content of policy dialogue with aid-recipient governments or requiring a shift in expenditure patterns. Some officials described gender as a tedious matter of "political correctness".

Apart from the influence of officials, Ministerial interest on a topic tends to be related to the frequency of Parliamentary Questions, comments in the media, the number of letters from the general public and the energy of the relevant lobby group. Ministers must respond by answering the Questions and letters and by making speeches to the lobby. Officials may also propose that a concern for the matter be demonstrated through appropriate publications.

In the case of gender, Ministers made few speeches,[5] compared for example with those on the environment. Ministers tend to speak to lobbies representing formal organisations, such as trades unions, the churches or business associations. However, the gender lobby was a loose network of (usually marginalised) representatives from development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and universities, not sufficiently numerous to make up an audience for a speech. Speeches also take up time. Even when an official writes the speech, the Minister must be physically present to make it. A booklet on the other hand requires no more Ministerial time than a rapid read and signature to the personalised foreword. Furthermore, the Ministry received a steady trickle of letters and enquiries from the general public concerning its policy on women and each time such a letter was received, an answer had to be sent. An up-to-date booklet performed a labour-saving function. WID booklets were thus a satisfactory means of responding to a not very politically significant domestic pressure.

While for most senior managers the booklets could placate a lobby without influencing their own practice, for social development advisers (the gender specialists in the Ministry), the booklets' stories were statements of aspiration, potential instruments for changed behaviour and attitudes. If the stories were sufficiently convincing, giving the impression of gender-sensitive practices *already* occurring in the Ministry's projects and programmes, middle management readers might come to believe they were laggards and be stimulated to catch up with the (mythical) mainstream portrayed in the booklet.

Apthorpe comments that policy documents are more to please and persuade than to inform and describe (1997). The text of the WID booklets reflected the internal tensions between senior managers' wish to please (but not change) and the social development advisers' wish to persuade (and change). In the case of the WID booklets, there was one audience to please and another to persuade. Senior management was trying to please the external lobby and the gender specialists were trying to persuade the Ministry staff. While allowing management to keep the whole issue of women in an apparently safe symbolic domain, the myths provided scope for subaltern subversion. Our political intent was Sorelian – that the booklet should make real what was still largely imagined.[6]

3 The history of the booklets
3.1 The first booklet, 1986
I joined the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) in late 1986, shortly after the appointment of a new Minister, Chris Patten. On the left of the Conservative Party this was his first Ministerial post and he was keen to show himself open to new ideas and approaches, including the role of women in development. He had inherited a Ministry which included many older staff who had started their career in the colonial service. Natural conservatism had been reinforced by the severe cuts inflicted on its aid budget in the early 1980s. Many of those in the most senior positions were, by conviction, neo-liberal economists. It was also an organisation where the wives of many senior managers stayed at home and did voluntary work. Women in the office knew their place as filing clerks and secretaries. The few in senior positions dressed in grey and brown, working quietly in efficient obscurity.

The international women's movement and the Women's Decade had however already made some impact on the ODA. It had recruited a "social development adviser" to represent the country at the 1975 United Nations Conference on Women in Mexico, and ten years later there were two such advisers working at the head office on societal aspects of development, including "women's issues" (Eyben 2003). The Ministry was responding to the

pressure of an external lobby largely consisting, since the 1970s, of a loose network of women academics working in the field of gender and development studies, joined by some women in development NGOs and in the British Council.

By 1980 the lobby had formed itself into the 'Decade Network' with a keen interest in the performance of the British aid programme. At the 1985 United Nations Conference on Women in Nairobi, the Network actively lobbied the UK Government representatives and ODA responded with its first WID booklet in early 1986, prior to Patten becoming Minister. The booklet was also responding to a Parliamentary interest from the All Party Group on Population that was concerned about "birth control" in developing countries.

Another source of external pressure was the Women in Development group of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD.[7] First established in 1983, it had become a strong network, providing mutual support to often-beleaguered women responsible for their agencies' WID policies. This support included a friendly rivalry over "WID glossies", symbolic expressions of evolving policy among the membership. Following Nairobi, the DAC group had agreed Guiding Principles for Women in Development and a system for monitoring these. The DAC group had judged the British performance in implementing these Principles as one of the worst among its members. Officials hoped that the booklet would mollify that source of criticism.

The booklet describes 'how the ODA looks after women's interests' (ODA 1986: 6) and contains three key messages:

1. The ODA never attempts to influence the social policies of recipient governments nor to undermine national culture and traditions.[8]
2. Improvements for women can only be achieved if there is greater prosperity for all.
3. In certain circumstances, it is essential to consider the role of women.

The conservative tone reflects both the absence of an internal feminist lobby inside the ODA and of a Minister with any interest in the topic and was badly received by the Network. Yet, the booklet was an important step. While it appeared to be merely stating what had been until then unexamined policy, the statements themselves

illuminated the possibility of alternative policy.[9] That there was now available a written policy to attack galvanised the lobby to propose changes. Patten's arrival, combined with the fortuitous appointment of a feminist social development adviser, provided the opportunity.

3.2 The second booklet, 1989

Patten instructed his officials to start a dialogue with the gender lobby.[10] In the first few meetings of the Patten era, the contrast between the "dark grey suited male" officials and the women lobbyists appeared to me very striking. The men were clearly very uncomfortable with these women, who were so very different in behaviour from their own wives and secretaries. They wore long earrings and flowing, brightly coloured garments. They cut their hair very short like men, or, flagrantly feminine, wore it loose down to the waist. Their bangles jangled discordantly when they thumped the table to make a vociferous point. Certainly, the default, normative discourse of aid with its emphasis on efficiency and modernism appeared to be harder to maintain when challenged by these disorderly women.

The dialogue required a new booklet that could attempt to refute the principal tenets of the first. By late 1988, there were three social development advisers working out of London on projects across the globe (Eyben 2003). Our energy and enthusiasm had led to the integration of WID issues in an increasing number of existing projects as well as to our taking the lead in designing some new ones. We had also established cordial informal links with the lobby, playing a brokerage role between the Ministry's male managers and the disorderly women. The hostile encounters of the past were becoming a distant memory. This was the context of the second booklet (1989). It was written to publicise the Ministry's decision to adopt a WID strategy, as required by the DAC Guiding Principles. The booklet's introduction stressed that 'we are listening to those who can advise us on what more should be done' (ODA 1989: 7).

Social development advisers wrote the first draft, exercising considerable self-censorship, but also seeking through the apt choice of words and stories to communicate a radical shift in policy. The economist in charge of social development advisers modified the text and shared this second draft with the gender lobby who (with behind-the-scenes

encouragement from the social development advisers) proposed amendments and changes that would have led to a much more radical text than the initial first draft. The negotiations over these eventually resulted in a final version that looked very much like the first draft.

Our biggest challenge was to convince senior managers that women's unequal status was a socio-cultural, rather than a biological construct. By early 1989, management was persuaded that the new booklet could contain language that appeared to reverse the policy position taken in 1986. Whereas *then* the ODA would never interfere in other people's cultures, the Ministry was *now* prepared to admit that culture might be a problem – 'and not only in developing countries' (ODA 1989: 5). Nevertheless to reach agreement on the text was a long and difficult process and the cracks show. Thus, while:

> The cultural and legal status of women is often circumscribed, resulting in narrower occupational opportunities, limited property rights and restricted social outlets.

We also read:

> The governments of most developing countries accept that women are disadvantaged ? They recognise that development is hampered while half the population is unable to participate fully in economic and social activities, but usually wish to improve the position of women within their countries' cultural tradition. (ODA 1989: 5)

3.3 The third booklet, 1992
By 1992, we had repaired our damaged reputation in the DAC WID group[11] and relations with the lobby had become very fruitful. With younger staff coming into the Ministry, and most by now having participated in gender training courses, the issue of women had become routinised and less threatening. One senior manager wrote to another: 'It is about time we give women a fair crack at the whip'.

It was the intensive programme of gender training that served as the primary impetus for the third booklet. The readership were the staff attending the training courses that had been designed and initially run by Caroline Moser and myself using her gender planning methodology (Moser 1993). The foreword by the new Minister,

Lynda Chalker, confirmed the Patten approach to dialogue with the lobby.

3.4 The fourth booklet, 1995
The UN Women's Conference in Beijing set the scene for the fourth booklet. While the booklet was interested in influencing ODA staff, the writers had little difficulty in identifying projects and programmes to include as examples of progress on gender and development. A large number of ODA country programmes were themselves supporting government and civil society preparations for the Conference. Aid-recipient countries were a key audience for the fourth booklet.

The booklet covered a wider range of themes than in previous versions, reflecting the UK response to the strategic areas of concern in the draft Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations 1995). It was also a more expensive and larger product, demonstrating the enhanced access to budgetary resources of the social development advisers now running our own policy department. It was the booklet with the fewest myths and stories. The apparent success of mainstreaming obviated the need for stories to either please or persuade.

3.5 The fifth booklet, 1999
Two years after Beijing, in 1997, the Overseas Development Administration was transformed under the new Labour Government into the Department for International Development (DFID). Clare Short, as Secretary of State, replaced Lynda Chalker. Social development advisers were keen to produce a new glossy to confirm the new government's commitment to the Platform for Action. The two-year delay in publication was due to the social development group putting their energy to mainstream gender into the new White Paper, the major policy document on development aid that the new government was to produce (DFID 1997). As ever, despite a supportive Minister, the civil servants drafting the White Paper did not attribute much significance to the issue.

The purpose of the fifth booklet was primarily to remind DFID staff that gender still mattered in the new era. At the same time, it had to reflect not only the DFID commitment to Beijing but, as discussed below, the new emphasis on tackling gender inequality as an aspect of eliminating global poverty.

4 Themes, myths and fables

Although much of the content of the booklets changed radically over time, some policy issues, myths and fables continued to appear from one publication to the next. By policy issue, I mean a topic such as family planning or structural adjustment. I take "myth" to mean something poetic or metaphysical that is used to provide a normative explanation for the state of the world and the social order.[12] Fables are less normative and grand than myths. Like myths, the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that they may not necessarily be founded on fact but the dominant meaning is a story (true or not) that is told to convey a lesson.

What were the sources for our stories? Primarily they came from our two external interest groups, the gender and development network in Britain and the DAC WID group. The latter may have played a very influential role in the international circulation of gender myths. Sharing and comparing our glossies facilitated the spread of the stories across the world of official development assistance.

Although I saw the booklets as aspirational statements, some elements of reality were also required. Typically, each booklet provided some current gender myths illustrated with examples of projects and programmes funded by British aid. These examples were fables that had a basis in truth. Because we could not too often use the same fable, we needed real world changes to be able to write the next booklet.[13] The impetus of the need to produce a new booklet (to demonstrate change) contributed to our efforts to reshape or introduce new projects in the country programme expenditure. Thus, for example, in the second in the series (1989) it was with great satisfaction that I was able to include at the last very minute before going to press the first ODA-funded rain-fed farming project that had just been approved by senior management.[14]

The battle about the booklets concerned the disputed interplay of themes, myths and fables. The result was that each booklet contained a dominant descriptor of women with minor and sometimes contradictory descriptions entering into the text and/or the illustrations. A dominant descriptor in one booklet emerges as a minor theme in a subsequent one, and vice versa. The myths and fables in each booklet serve to support and justify the descriptors. In 1986, the dominant descriptor was that "women have babies". In 1989 women are "agents of development". In 1992 they have a triple role and in 1995 they have rights. In 1999, women are "poor". I briefly look at each of these.

4.1 Women have babies

That women have babies created fables that other women – voluntary health workers – are needed to stop them having too many babies and to teach them to feed the babies properly when they do have them. The *voluntary woman worker* appears in various guises in the 1986 and in the 1989 booklets. In 1990, Caroline Moser and I visited a British-funded health programme in India. We observed the performance of power when the male doctors harangued serried ranks of women voluntary workers. I was determined that fable should disappear from future editions of the booklet, if not from the real world. In the 1995 booklet, a gender analysis is introduced into the theme and the low demand for family planning is attributed to men not allowing women to go to clinics. Men are also part of the problem in 1999 when women are understood to be especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Women in their reproductive role continue to appear in other guises. Domestic water supply projects are a response to women's needs and therefore unsustainable without women's involvement (ODA 1986, 1989, 1995). In 1986, just as women need water so they need firewood and, by collecting it, they damage the environment. In subsequent editions, we were able to promote women to the status of environmental managers, hinting at the earth mother figure that conserves and protects nature.

4.2 Women as agents of development

By the late 1980s, the DAC WID group had decided to use the efficiency argument as a way of 'talking to the boys' (Elson 1998) who ran the official aid business. In any case, it suited our own self-image better than the previous representation in which WID issues were confined to "safe motherhood". The message of the 1989 booklet, typified by the cover illustration, was that to include women in projects led to greater efficiency and effectiveness. 'If they themselves are healthy and knowledgeable, if they have greater access to knowledge, skills and credit, they will be more economically productive' (ODA 1989: 6). It was thus 'essential to recognise the role of women – as both agents and beneficiaries

of development' (1989: 22). A new descriptor appeared as part of this argument, namely that women are the dominant influence on the next generation. This reappears in 1995, when investing in women's human development contributes to social and economic progress.

Despite the new and strong efficiency theme in the 1989 text and cover, the old fables lingered on in some of the illustrations. Community workers were still teaching women nutrition and health (ODA 1989: 6, 37) and visiting them in slums (1989: 16). They were still having babies (1989: 25, 26) and benefiting from clean water (1989: 23). The photographs had been selected by staff in the Ministry's information service and when challenged, stated with some truth, that it was difficult to find in the photographic archive illustrations of women in the way the text of the booklet was seeking to portray them.

4.3 Women's triple role

Women's triple role appeared in the 1992 booklet as a direct outcome of Moser's influence on the Ministry's emerging gender and development policy. In her training, Moser had also stressed Molyneux's strategic and practical gender needs framework but this was a concept that senior management refused to incorporate into the booklet. In the Ministerial foreword, reference is simply made to "women's needs" as being possibly different from men's needs without specifying whether these were strategic or practical. Nevertheless, in the same foreword strategic change is introduced as a minor theme through the assertion that 'women are prime movers in the process of change', thus justifying the consequential statement '… and yet women's needs and opinions are ignored in deciding how to plan change'.

We introduced strategic gender needs implicitly in the four key issues that the booklet states as the challenge to women in development: legal rights, access to education, access to planning public services and social status. Once again, the illustrations lagged behind the text. They reflected the message of the previous booklet. Like generals, our photographs were always fighting the previous war. Every picture shows women as productive agents of development, not struggling for their legal rights nor seeking to change their social status. The only educational representation was the photograph on the front cover that I had taken on a visit to Pakistan.

4.4 Women have rights

By 1995, the two main protagonists – myself and my supervisor, a senior economist – had both been promoted and we were equally more influential, respectively as Principal Social Development Adviser and Chief Economist. More was at stake. Top management, previously unconcerned by what had always seemed a marginal issue, was applying pressure to prevent too radical a shift. Thus, this new battle shifted to a more intensive pitch in the effort to represent ODA policy to the wider world that would meet in Beijing. The key issue was the language of rights. The title *Making Aid Work for Women* was an explicit challenge to the efficiency argument that makes women work for aid.

Following the 1993 United Nations Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, in 1994 the Minister, Lynda Chalker, accepted an invitation to speak at the University of Oxford's Queen Elizabeth House on the subject of women and development. Her speech emphasised that women as well as men have rights. Top civil servants strongly disliked this rights language and instructed the Chief Economist to control its use. The Minister was discouraged from putting Beijing into her diary.[15]

The text and illustrations in this booklet reflect this conflict. Chalker's foreword starts with the old, comfortable myth of village water systems needing women to maintain them. Later, the language changes to incorporate for the first time a Gender and Development approach. Echoing the language in the draft Beijing Platform for Action, it speaks of transforming the partnership between men and women, while 'because most women in many countries have fewer choices open to them than most men, we need to make a special effort to support their empowerment' (ODA 1995: 3).

Overall, despite the breadth of the subject matter, the use of myths and fables was in decline, although some old ones were reprocessed and new ones introduced, including women as peacemakers, reflecting the increase in conflict taking place around the world following the collapse of Communism.[16]

Again, the booklet's text was partly subverted by the illustrations. The cover page shows a woman making a basket and this picture is reproduced again on p. 6 under the rubric "Creating opportunities". Elsewhere, however, the new message of equal gender relations is illustrated by pictures of boys and girls at school and of men listening to family planning advice.

4.5 Women are poor

The dominant descriptor in the 1989 booklet of women as agents of development was supported by a minor descriptor of women as poor. This reflected part of the wider shift that was beginning to take place in development thinking at that time. The gender lobby had raised the issue of the negative impact of structural adjustment programmes on women. The language of the booklet had to be very carefully chosen to reflect the government's neo-liberal position, while recognising a need to refocus the attention of international aid on poverty. Thus, in this booklet appears for the first time the myth that 'women make up the greatest part of the poorest of the poor'.

That women are poor became the dominant descriptor in the 1999 booklet. Others have noted the constraints the poverty framework imposed on addressing gender equality as a human rights issue (Jackson 1998). While the emphasis on gender inequality as barrier to poverty reduction may have contributed to the reappearance of efficiency arguments, the greater use and abuse of gender myths can be attributed to the personal interest taken by the new Minister, Clare Short, in the production of the booklet.[17] Because of their potential to communicate messages to a wide audience, she liked fables to support policy statements. In the field of gender and development, she found a rich seam to mine and a large number of myths reappeared from earlier booklets.

Mythical numbers appear in support of the efficiency argument. It is *70 per cent* of women who are poor (p. 1) and women in Africa typically spend more than *five hours a day* travelling mostly on foot to meet the basic needs of their families (p. 15). Investment in education for girls is the single most effective way to reduce poverty (p. 9). Women also protect the environment, maintain peace and keep societies together, make up most of the labour force and pass on knowledge to the next generation (all on p. 1). They also have a better track record than men in paying back loans (p. 4).

The myths sometimes sit uncomfortably with the detailed social analysis and textual descriptions of the various projects and programmes that the booklet describes DFID as supporting, in relation to the Beijing objectives. There is a discursive disjuncture between the politician and the gender analyst. The former prefers the resonance and emotional potency of myth and fable, with less interest in the actual "facts of the case" and the latter attempts to provide a grounded description of gender relations in a specific context. Nevertheless, common ground between the two is apparent in a section of the booklet that robustly breaks old barriers with the triumphant political slogan 'More power for women', illustrated by a full-page photograph of two smiling women raising clenched fists. This has come a long way from the static group of sullen and silent pregnant women portrayed on the cover of the first booklet.

5 Conclusion

Various contributors to this *IDS Bulletin* have discussed myth-making as a struggle for interpretative power. Because myths are resonant, enduring and good for galvanising action, they are particularly attractive to activists and politicians such as Clare Short. They are also ambiguous and perilous. They can be reduced to slogans, captured by non-feminist and conservative forces that may then use them for their own ends, as with the message of the efficiency myths that women must work for aid, rather than aid work for women.

The strength of myths is that they can be simultaneously believed and not believed. Reflecting on the battles of the booklets, I realise that, while I rationally exploited some of the available myths as a means to getting gender on the agenda, at the same time their power encouraged action and energy that could not be sustained by dry and rigorous analysis alone. The sense of relative powerlessness in an indifferent, if not infrequently hostile bureaucracy, made symbols and images important spiritual resources to the small group of people working to mainstream gender within the Ministry. The drafting of a "WID glossy" was the occasion for a discursive battle with a symbolic outcome. Pfeiffer notes that such a symbolic outcome may be achieved even when the underlying facts and decisions remain unaltered and that for various reasons such symbolic outcomes may be all that is desired by those making demands of or within the organisation (Pfeiffer 1981: 179–209). I am still reflecting to what extent that was true in this instance.

Notes

1. This was the Overseas Development Administration until 1997, when it became the Department for International Development (DFID).

2. A sixth booklet 'Poverty Elimination and the Empowerment of Women' was published by DFID in 2000, as one in the international development targets strategy series and is not included in this present analysis.

3. I worked as a social development adviser in ODA/DFID's head office from late 1986 to 1999.

4. I am grateful to Elizabeth Harrison and Jane Esuantasiwa Goldsmith for commenting on earlier drafts of this article, and especially to Jane for providing background information concerning the gender and development lobby. Space constraints prevented me from describing in the detail that I would have wished the evolution of the relationship between officials and the lobby group – perhaps the subject of another article.

5. The only one I recollect was Lynda Chalker's speech at Oxford University's Queen Elizabeth House in 1994.

6. Sorel on myths: 'We should be especially careful not to make any comparison between accomplished fact and the picture people had formed for themselves before action'. (Sorel 1961: 42)

7. The DAC is the coordinating mechanism for official bilateral aid. Within the DAC separate working groups pursue particular themes of common interest to all bilateral donors in an effort to improve collective performance. The DAC WID Group was one such.

8. As Goetz pointed out (cited in Razavi and Miller 1995) the reservations about interfering in other peoples' cultures with respect to the role of women did not apparently dampen aid bureaucracies' enthusiasm for interfering in other ways, such as population control.

9. See Nancy Fraser's discussion on how the very act of articulating normative constructs exposes the hegemony and thus weakens it (Fraser 1989: 172–3).

10. The Network, to increase its numbers and legitimacy, invited to this first meeting with Patten, women from a wider part of the UK voluntary sector, whose organisations, such as the Girl Guides movement, were members of international section of the Women's Organisations Interest Group (WOIG) within the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). The international section of WOIG subsequently became the development section of the National Association of Women's Organisations and was the means by which the gender and development lobby continued to meet Ministry officials during the whole period under discussion.

11. The ODA chaired the group for the first time in the period 1991–3.

12. I am drawing here on the discussion of the different meanings of myth in Weiner (1996).

13. I use 'real world change' in the sense implied by Pfeiffer (1981) when he refers to changes in allocation of resources.

14. This was one of the first ODA projects to seek to mainstream participatory approaches and in which the project documentation sought a role for women that went beyond supporting them in the production of handicrafts. What subsequently took place and the broadening of the agenda by the women community workers is discussed in Jackson (1998).

15. She did go – and personally distributed copies of the booklet at a meeting of all the Commonwealth heads of delegation.

16. Negotiations over Bosnia were taking place among government representatives during the Beijing conference.

17. Until 1997, the battle about the booklets had been between civil servants with the Minister signing off on the agreed text. Under Short, the principal contest on this (and many other matters) was between the Minister and her civil servants. Unlike her predecessors, she took an intense and micro-level interest in the production of all policy statements. Gender policy was no exception. She read and annotated every draft of the booklet.

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