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# Preface

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“When it comes to gender, everyone sighs”. Many readers of this *IDS Bulletin* will have heard that statement – made by a development bureaucrat in a progressive Northern agency – over the past 15 years or so. They may even have joined in. Some will view the statement as a triumph – gender is on the agenda. Some will view it as a hollow victory – gender is on the agenda, but only in a mechanistic way, as a polite and safe gesture, abstracting from issues of power and politics. Building on a long history of collaboration between the Institute of Development Studies and the University of Sussex on issues of feminism and development, this *IDS Bulletin* brings together reflections on the broad territory between these two views. The authors explore the disappointments and extract the positives, using the results of this discussion to strategise about how to best reposition feminist engagement with development in the new geopolitical context.

I began research on power relations between men and women in the 1980s, challenging the view of the unitary model of the household that behaves as if all members have equal preferences and leaves no space for the play of differential power. Like the authors of this *IDS Bulletin*, I too have been surprised by intractability of gender inequality and the lack

of progress in the understanding of gender and other power inequalities within mainstream models, frameworks and organisations. There have been successes, but too often the focus has been on differences in outcomes between men and women and not on the power relationships and their origins which shape these outcomes.

The content of this *IDS Bulletin* gives me cause for optimism, however. The forces that generated the many good things that came from gender and development are regrouping and getting re-politicised and re-energised. They highlight the need for the gender and development agenda to become much more transformational. Using the new language of rights, the scope for new forms of partnership, and noting the haphazard respect for rights in a post September 11th world, the feminist thinkers and actors in gender and development represented in this *IDS Bulletin* rededicate themselves to the continuous challenge and critique of policies that shape development as well as the power relations between men and women. Moreover, they aim to provide alternatives to those policies and to create new development visions. I wonder what the response will be when somebody mentions gender in bureaucratic circles in 20 years time? I would bet against a sigh.