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**Sex for pleasure, rights to participation, and alternatives to
AIDS: placing sexual minorities and/or dissidents in
development**

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Summary

This paper addresses a contradiction that lies at the core of the relationship between rights and participation. Participatory development emphasises ideals of consensus, of openness to differences and to resolving any conflicts these might create, and of the importance of grounding development solutions in communities' own knowledge and preferences. Yet, as many writers have now demonstrated, terms like “the community” and “full participation” mask dissent and disquiet, exclusion and disempowerment. Nowhere is this more the case than in contexts where non-normative sexual preferences and identities are the focus for prejudice, discrimination and even acts of violence that directly violate human rights.

This paper takes the tension between rights and participation as a starting point for exploring the relationship between rights, sexualities and development. It explores the evolution of discourses on sexualities in development, examining the ways in which the participation of sexual minorities and/or dissidents comes to be framed by the development industry. It focuses in particular on the ready placement of sexual minority rights and well-being struggles within an HIV/AIDS framework. It goes on to identify and consider alternative strategies for realising sexuality rights. It examines how rights-based approaches to development (RBA) might be adapted to this purpose, and how the affirmation of sexual pleasure as a basic human right might offer the promise of the kind of changes that are needed. The author considers which, if any, of these “new” development agendas provides the most promise for negotiating the rights and well-being of sexual minorities and/or dissidents and for their inclusion in processes of decision-making that affect their lives, their families and their communities.

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Preface

Sexuality has been sidelined by development. Associated with risk and danger, but never pleasure or love, sex has been treated by development agencies as something to be controlled and contained. With the urgency of the need to tackle HIV/AIDS, greater resources have become available for work that breaks the silence about sex. Space is opening for a recognition of the centrality of sexual rights to well-being, and in some contexts to survival. More work is needed, however, to move beyond the confines of narrow problem-focused thinking about sexuality towards approaches that take a more positive stance on sex and sexuality.

Sexuality is a vital aspect of development. It affects people's livelihoods and security as well as their physical and psychological well-being. Sexual rights are a precondition not only for reproductive rights, but also for gender equality. Sexual minorities, whether those with same sex sexualities or transgender and intersex people, are the targets of forms of exclusion and violence that directly infringe their rights as human beings. Sexual rights are, however, also an issue for heterosexual majorities. In many situations, women's and sometimes men's access to economic resources depends on marriage. In some communities, sex outside marriage is purported to be immoral, and sex within marriage obligatory. Women's mobility can be restricted due to fears of sexual violence or in the name of protecting their chastity. Sex workers are routinely denied basic human rights, being harassed rather than protected by police and placed at further risk rather than "rescued" by trafficking interventions.

Rare is the environment which allows people to live out a fulfilling and pleasurable sexuality of their choice and that empowers people with a sense of their right to say "yes" as well as "no" and enjoy safe, loving relationships free of coercion, risk or pain. The current world climate of rising conservatism around sexuality, from the USA, the Vatican and Muslim states has only served to exacerbate matters at a time when renewed commitment is needed. This series of working papers, funded by Swedish Sida, the UK Department for International Development and Swiss Development Cooperation, enters the debate about sexual rights from the perspective of development. Together, the papers seek to challenge orthodoxies and bring fresh thinking to the challenge of making sexual rights a reality.

Andrea Cornwall and Susie Jolly

IDS

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Introduction

Faced with the threat of arrest for engaging in “abominable acts” of homosexuality, Ronald Lwabayji fled his hometown of Kampala, Uganda in 1999. Earlier that year, the country’s President, Yoweri Museveni, had ordered a crackdown on homosexuals following widespread (but false) reports about the marriage of two gay men. ‘God created Adam and Eve,’ Museveni said, ‘I did not see God creating man and man’.¹ Museveni is still President, and the anti-sodomy laws – a legacy of British colonialism – remain in place, as they do in most former colonies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. But a visit to Uganda in early 2004 renewed Lwabayji’s optimism that his home country may become (or, rather, return to being) a safer place for people engaged in non-heterosexual sex.²

For the last five years Lwabayji has been working with other African activists trying to organise a continent-wide support and advocacy network for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered/transsexual peoples. His efforts to connect formal and informal groups in Africa were slowly building, and his attempts to obtain financing from donor agencies in the North were met mostly with hesitation and resistance. Even those organisations sympathetic to gay rights struggles were reluctant to support any activities that appeared to contradict (if not challenge) the anti-sodomy laws that exist in most African states.

In 2002, however, Lwabayji’s cause received a boost. Re-casting sexual minority rights as an HIV/AIDS issue, he was able to earn the attention and eventually access funding from international donors to hold a workshop bringing together representatives from gay and lesbian groups from 18 African States. At that meeting, held in February 2004, the ‘All Africa Rights Initiative’ (AARI) was born. Some weeks later, Lwabayji returned to Uganda on the request of members of the country’s much-praised National AIDS Council, who sought out his expertise in planning prevention services directed at men who have sex with men (MSM). The newly-elected co-chair of AARI is now working with other members of that group and with other organisations, like Human Rights Watch, to enact programmes that will result in stronger rights for sexual minorities in Africa. Museveni, it should also be noted, has backed away from his original position advocating the imprisonment of gays and lesbians.

It is perhaps an uneasy idea, but HIV/AIDS has in some ways become a boon to sexual minority rights advocates working in many developing countries. That is, the international consensus reached about the urgency of the HIV/AIDS crisis has provided, as is the case with Lwabayji’s experience in Uganda, an opportunity to bring visibility to and *perhaps* offer attention to the welfare of people engaged in non-heterosexual sex. As Lind and Share observe,

An irony of the development field is that while sexuality has rarely been discussed other than in terms of women’s reproductive rights and health, or in terms of social “problems” such as

¹ ‘Arrest homos, says Museveni’, *The New Vision*, 28 September 1999: 1.

² Lwabayji, R., 2004, Interview, Washington, D.C.

prostitution or the AIDS epidemic, funding from agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has helped to institutionalize and make visible Latin American LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender] movements.

(2003: 56)

In Bolivia, for example,

AIDS became a new justification for international development assistance in 1988 when USAID awarded the [Ministry of Health] a three year, \$500,000 assistance grant to begin HIV/AIDS surveillance work and to provide some basic training for preventative education . . . rumblings from overseas arriving via mass media, together with development dollars . . . began the process by which the traditional silence on homosexuality unravelled.

(Wright 2000: 97)

As Timothy Wright says, 'The AIDS epidemic has fostered the sudden foundation of gay organizations in unlikely places' (2000: 107).

Across the world, more HIV/AIDS policy planners are paying particular attention to people engaged in non-heterosexual sex, although they have been mostly concerned with MSM, and usually not with Women who have Sex with Women (WSW). In a 1998 report 'AIDS and men who have sex with men: point of view', the UNAIDS Joint Program notes,

sex between men is the main route of transmission of HIV in some parts of the world. In some other places it is a secondary route of transmission. Nearly everywhere, it is a significant and interconnected part of the epidemic and needs to be taken seriously and into consideration.

(1998: 2)

Among the detailed list of actions regarding MSM and HIV/AIDS proposed by in a 1998 technical paper published by UNAIDS are calls for political leaders to 'accept that sex between men exists and is relevant for AIDS prevention, care and support work', and for national AIDS programmes and other partners to encourage the creation of gay organisations and strengthen existing networks of men who have sex with men (UNAIDS 1998: 3).

Just as the crisis of HIV/AIDS has indelibly shaped the culture and politics of gay movements and communities in contemporary North America and Europe, so too is it posed to have a similarly powerful impact in articulating knowledge about sexuality and the organisation and representation of sexual practices in developing countries. For many, the visibilisation of sexual minorities and/or dissidents, and the opportunities for organising around sexual identity made available by the focus on HIV/AIDS in development are to be celebrated. This paper offers a more cautionary approach, and attempts to highlight some of the contradictions in the relationship between rights and participation in the evolution of discourses on sexualities in development. It does so by examining the ways in which the participation

of sexual minorities and/or dissidents comes to be framed by the development industry, and focuses in particular on the ready placement of sexual minority rights and well-being struggles within an HIV/AIDS framework. It goes on to identify and consider alternative strategies for realising sexuality rights, particularly through the adaptation of rights-based approaches to development (RBA), and including the affirmation of sexual pleasure as a basic human right. Which, if any, of these “new” development agendas provides the most promising terrain for negotiating the rights and well-being of sexual minorities and/or dissidents, and for their inclusion in processes of decision-making that affect their lives?³

1 Sex in development – 1950s to present-day

Identifying the best pathway(s) to future actions on sexuality rights must, I think, begin with a review of past conversations about sex. As it was in preceding colonial projects, sex has been at the heart of development. Ever since Bretton Woods institutions were created, the regulation of sex has been a critical – if generally unrecognised – component of social and economic development policies. From the 1950s to the mid-1980s, reproductive sex most interested economists and social scientists engaged in the planning of Third World nation-states.

Unfettered reproductive sex, in their analysis, was understood to create “overpopulation”, which in turn caused poverty, created lawlessness, resulted in the destruction of natural environments and, most importantly, obstructed economic growth (cf. Hartmann 1995). Specific reasons were identified for Third World peoples’ engagement in sex. Population control advocates explained that the poor were too uneducated about sex, too uncivilised and too unintelligent to make careful reproductive decisions. Reproductive rights advocates exposed the arguments of neo-Malthusians as scientifically flawed and underpinned by racism and sexism (cf. Correa and Petchesky 1994; Hartmann 1995; Sen 1994; Mies and Shiva 1993). They insisted that men and women living in the Third World should be allowed to exercise control over their reproductive choices, and also emphasised economic reasons for higher population growth rates: poor people were having children for sustenance and survival. Reproductive sex was the only kind of sex that mattered to the population control lobby or to early reproductive rights advocates; very few accounts entertained or privileged the idea that people engaged in sex for pleasure, and/or might even be engaged in non-heterosexual sex. Few accounts were also concerned with men’s sexual experiences, as reproduction was cast as a “women’s issue”.

³ Throughout this paper, a number of terms are used to describe people engaged in sexual activities that are not exclusively heterosexual, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, queer, MSM (men who have sex with men), WSW (women who have sex with women), sexual minorities and sexual dissidents. When citing research, activities or interviews, I use the chosen terms of the interviewee, activists or researchers. My own preference, however, is to collect these individuals or communities as “sexual minorities and/or dissidents”, as an alternative the narrow and sometimes essentialising terms coined by gay and lesbian movements in the West, and as an acknowledgement of the diversity of experiences of people engaged in non-heterosexual sexual practices; in some countries, they may be distinct minorities, in others, as Shivananda Khan (Naz Foundation International) has argued, homosexuality may well be a “normal” practice (1996). Regardless of their visibility or numbers, however, it is also clear that these practices are viewed as “dissident”. For a more elaborate discussion of this issue, please see my ‘All the wrong places: looking for love in Third World poverty – notes on the racialization of sex’ (1998).

Attention to HIV/AIDS crises in the 1990s provoked a reconstitution of discourses on sex in development. As AIDS was initially constructed as a homosexual disease (in the West), it forced theorists and practitioners to recognise the existence of homosexual practices. The acknowledgement of homosexual sex consequently revealed the rarely noticed fact that people engaged in sex for reasons besides reproduction, and were agents capable of producing and pursuing sexual desire. Still, as was the case with population control programmes, concern was with the containment and control – and not the free or fulfilling expression – of sexual desire. Population controls were introduced to stop the poor from having children; AIDS prevention and sexual health programmes sought to stop the poor from having sex altogether (this approach is still being pursued, as in the George Bush administration’s official “pro-abstinence” policy, and in very many other nation-states AIDS prevention programmes across the World).

Nevertheless, the AIDS crises have forced development theorists and practitioners to notice two things: first, that men and women living in Third World countries have sexual desires which are important for a number of reasons (although, as most continue to insist, primarily because of the concentration and spread of HIV/AIDS among men who have sex with men); and second, that some men and women living in the Third World engage in non-heterosexual sex.

2 HIV/AIDS and “opportunities” for action

This resulting, increased visibility afforded to same-sex sexual activity has also opened up new spaces to think about the welfare of sexual minorities, if not to necessarily explicitly advocate for their well-being or human rights. Evidence that denial about and inattention to the situations of MSM is exacerbating the HIV/AIDS crisis, has compelled development organisations to act, and donors such as the Dutch agency HIVOS and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) have in recent years begun to prioritise attention to this group of sexual minorities and/or dissidents in their work. In SIDA’s strategy paper *AIDS: The Challenge of this Century*, the authors note,

In Australia, Sweden and other countries, homosexuality has been successfully de-stigmatised, and support by public institutions is therefore possible. In other parts of the world, however, sex between men takes place in obscurity and may even be illegal. There, the discrimination of men who are known to have sex with men may effectively deprive them of the support they need to adopt safe sex practices.

(Egerö, Hammarskjöld and Munck 2001: 23)

One simple rationale is most responsible for this newfound interest in sexual minorities and/or dissidents by development actors, as this contextual framework established in the AIDS Alliance report, *Between Men* makes clear,

Sex between men – in particular, anal intercourse without a condom – is one of the primary ways in which HIV and other sexually transmitted infections are passed on. In every society some men have

sex with other men, and some of these men have many sexual partners, including women. This means that anal intercourse without a condom between men also places the men's female partners and the future of their future children at risk of infection.

(2003: 3)

That report also points out that,

In a few societies sex between men is widely acceptable; in some it is tolerated; and in many it is the subject of strong disapproval and legal and social taboos. Official indifference or hostility means that there are few prevention and care programmes for men who have sex with men in developing countries. It also means that little research has been undertaken to discover how many men are at risk and how best to provide them with the information they need to protect themselves and their sexual partners.

(AIDS Alliance 2003: 4)

Therein lies the challenge put forward by AIDS Alliance and others to governments and organisations that may be opposed to the decriminalisation of homosexual practices: if homosexuals are not recognised or if their security is not assured, the whole nation may fall apart. Building this argument around the experiences of MSM is particularly effective, as it clearly identifies the threat that same-sex sex poses to heterosexuals: most MSM, studies in Africa and Asia show, also have sex with female partners (who may also in turn have sex with exclusively heterosexual male partners), so HIV/AIDS in sexual minority/dissident communities may in fact infect the whole society with the disease. This analysis makes necessary the prioritised identification of MSM as a priority target group in sexual health policies and programmes.

It is a powerful threat that has moved many agencies into action, and prompted sexual minority rights' advocates to seize upon this critical opening to advance their cause.⁴ Concern about HIV/AIDS has even led some notoriously homophobic governments to rethink their positions. Museveni's views on homosexuality, for example, appear to have softened, and Uganda's National AIDS Program has begun dialogues about services directed at MSM. In the Caribbean, St. Lucia's Minister of Health last year mused publicly about changing the country's anti-sodomy laws to curb the spread of AIDS. He explained,

⁴ I am not suggesting, however, that there is a universal consensus that HIV/AIDS prevention and care efforts must recognise MSM and WSW individuals and communities; far from it. Discussions on HIV/AIDS policy in international summits have been hesitant to recognise sexual rights. In March 2001, when the Commission on the Status of Women debated 'Women and AIDS' in preparation for the General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, the US delegation, under strict direction from the Bush administration, proposed sexual abstinence as a solution. In May, during the informal session for the same HIV/AIDS UNGASS, Islamic countries rejected the proposal that groups affected by HIV/AIDS – sex workers, drug users, men who have sex with men (MSM) – be named openly in the text. Several States also objected to the participation of a representative of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) in a roundtable discussion organised by UNAIDS. Despite these important barriers, however, there is clearly considerable momentum towards the recognition of same sex practices in sexual health policies in most, if not all, countries in the world.

There are closeted homosexuals infected with HIV/AIDS. They cannot come out openly to receive treatment because of a fear of being discriminated against because they are homosexuals. Do you think it's fair to make homosexuality a criminal offence? I don't think it's fair at all. Why not make infidelity a criminal offence? Why criminalize homosexuality?

(Quoted in Olibert, *St. Lucia Star*, 23 August 2003)

In the midst of all the suffering that HIV/AIDS has caused for sexual minorities, it would also appear to have offered the promise of greater liberation; as Lwabayi told me, 'without HIV/AIDS, there would be no way to talk about gays and lesbians' in Uganda, or in many other countries. But there are indeed other ways in which to engage conversations and actions towards the achievement of rights for sexual minorities and/or dissidents. And, furthermore, the placing of discussions on sexuality entirely within an HIV/AIDS framework is not an unproblematic event, and is deserving of more critical attention.

2.1 Implications of placing sexuality in an HIV/AIDS framework

If past to present debates best suggest the direction of future actions, the outlook for defining and achieving sexual rights within an HIV/AIDS or sexual health framework does not appear to be very ambitious. Even among those actors who have most energetically championed sexual rights in more radical sexual health organisations, very narrow discursive frames have structured debates. As noted in the introduction, within this framework, the rights of sexual minorities and/or dissidents are seen to be important only insofar as they matter in causing or alleviating HIV/AIDS. It is also usually insufficient to make the point that sexual minorities and/or dissidents are especially vulnerable to the disease. Rather, agencies such as AIDS Alliance must point out that it is members of the larger, "normal" society (i.e. the women with whom MSM have sex, and also the exclusively heterosexual men that have sex with women attached to MSM) whom are at risk. Recall the statement about MSM made in 'Between men',

In every society some men have sex with other men, and some of these men have many sexual partners, including women. This means that anal intercourse without a condom between men also places the men's female partners and the future of their future children at risk of infection.

(2003: 3)

This is a point emphasised over and over again in documents from NGOs, the World Bank and UNAIDS: action must be taken to curb HIV/AIDS among MSM, not because that in itself is meaningful and important, but because they are seen as sexual deviants who might infect the whole community. Given the higher risk for male-to-male transmission, a gendered order has also resulted, with most attention going to MSM populations, and almost negligible attention to women. This has meant that WSW receive very little of the funding available to sexual health efforts, and must therefore confront both heterosexist biases in the women's movement and sexism in gay male groups in their attempts to organise; the message, effectively, is that WSW do not matter since they are not perceived to be a high-risk group.

In this section, I want to draw attention to two critical ways in which the placement of sexuality issues within an HIV/AIDS framework narrows the terrain of conversations about sex in development, and in so doing presents a limited analysis of the situation of sexual minorities and/or dissidents results in problematic policies and programmes. First, I discuss the reductive understanding of the impact of notions of sexuality and sexual identity that is articulated in the HIV/AIDS framework. Second, I identify some of the issues that are left unconsidered in this approach, and raise questions about the application and promotion of heteronormative ideals and a universal (and, I would add, colonialist) notion of sexual organisation in development strategies and processes.

2.2 The consequences of sex and sexuality (beyond HIV/AIDS)

In the dominant discourse on sexual health, women engaged in same-sex relationships are deemed unimportant because the epidemiological risks for transmission of the HIV virus between WSW are thought to be low (although this is an arguable point, since risk will depend on the kinds of sexual activities that the women pursue), and also because WSW may not be engaged in reproduction (again, an arguable point). But HIV/AIDS and reproduction are not the only consequences of sex and sexuality. The security of sexual rights may also determine one's accessibility to work, and psychological and physical well-being, including freedom from violence. The institutionalised regulation of sexuality influences basic survival, channelling development funds and efforts into arenas which prescribe adherence to certain sexual practices and kinds of identities. In both explicit and implicit ways, it also determines one's right to participate in development processes and in the formulation of development programmes and strategies, across all spheres. As fears about the spread and implications of AIDS have been the primary inspiration for development agencies' attention to the conditions of people engaged in non-heterosexual practices in the South, concerns about the needs, welfare and rights of sexual minorities, etc., have usually been framed in this context. But people engaging in non-heterosexual sex have broader needs and face challenges beyond HIV/AIDS.

Participatory research completed by the Bandhu Social Welfare Society of Bangladesh in 2002 identified some of the human rights violations suffered by MSMs and examined the impacts of their sexual practices and identities upon their general welfare (Naz Foundation International 2002b). The 124 men interviewed for the study named many hardships experienced which were linked to their sexual practices and identities (see Box 2.1). Many of the men stated that their family had reacted negatively with beatings, forced marriage and disinheritance. Nearly half of the respondents (48 per cent) stated that fellow students or teachers had harassed them in school or college because they were effeminate, and most of them believe that their study habits suffered as a result.

Kothis,⁵ the study also pointed out, had low levels of education and literacy, and suffered high early drop out rates. 'It is clear from the in-depth interviews as well as from the [focus group discussions] that economic deprivation was a result arising from harassment during education', the study stated (Naz

⁵ '*Kothi*' is a self-defined label used by feminised males who actively attract masculine males for sex through exaggerated feminised behaviour.

Foundation International 2002b). For example, in one focus group discussion held in Mymensingh, six out of seven participants stated that one of the main reasons why they left school was the harassment that they faced. 'How can you study when all the time the classmates are making fun of you?' is a common refrain. Many also stated that they were forced to turn to prostitution as a source of livelihood. One university graduate said 'My results in the finals were not good, and therefore I have to work in an NGO. Otherwise I would have gotten a good government job. I just could not study due to all the mental torture that my classmates subjected me to. Even the professors used to make fun of me in class'.

Box 2.1 Key findings of Bandhu Study on men who have sex with men

Of 124 MSM interviewed for the Bandhu Study,

- 56 per cent have a monthly income of Taka 1,000 to 3,000 (US\$ 0.60–1.70 per day). Only 8 per cent of the respondents earned more than Taka 5,000 a month (US\$ 2.80 per day).
- 64 per cent reported facing harassment of one kind or the other at the hands of the police.
- 48 per cent reported that they have been sexually assaulted or raped by policemen.
- 65 per cent have reported that they have been sexually assaulted or raped by *mastaans* ("thugs").
- 71 per cent of the total respondents stated that they had faced some or the other form of harassment from *mastaans*. Other than rape, these are: extortion [38 per cent], beatings [45 per cent], threats and blackmail [31 per cent].

A study of MSMs in Senegal similarly concluded that MSMs face difficulties and experience challenges that go beyond sexual practices (Horizon Program 2002). This study was conducted by the Senegal national AIDS Control Council (CNLS) Horizon Program, and so sought to capture information about sexual health *only*. Nevertheless, in interviews with over 250 men, researchers found that

Forty-three per cent of MSM had been raped at least once outside the family home and 37 per cent said they had been forced to have sex in the last 12 months. Thirteen per cent reported being raped by a policeman. Nearly half of the 250 men interviewed had experienced verbal abuse (including insults and threats) from their family. Many also reported physical abuse (e.g. blows, stone throwing) by family and community members, and the police.

(Horizon Program 2002: 2)

Jody Miller also reports widespread violence, high rates of sexual abuse and economic hardship characterise the lives of men employed as sex workers in Sri Lanka (2002). In a study of the well-being of gays and lesbians in Botswana, Ehlers, Zuyderduin and Oosthuizen found that a majority of the gays, lesbians and bisexuals they interviewed reported varying degrees of distress (2001). Many sexual minorities worried about being jailed or blackmailed, admitted problems with drugs and alcohol, or were suicidal.

The lives of the people who form part of their families and wider communities are also affected by the experiences of queers, sexual minorities and/or dissidents. One Naz study about the female partners

of MSM asked MSM to think about the influence of their behaviours on the lives of the women to whom they were married or partnered (Naz Foundation International 2002a). While that study was more concerned about the implications of pursuing this conversation *for* MSM, it did allude to issues that more broadly concern the social-economic organisation of whole communities, including: sexual health needs of the women engaged in sex with MSM, gender roles, child rearing and development, the commercialisation of marriage (and also centrality of marriage in organising economic relations), and crime. As the men interviewed in this study most often believed that their sexual behaviours had no effect on their wives – many of them blamed their wives for any negative outcomes – and as the study itself appeared more concerned with representing the perspective of MSM, it chose not to broach some difficult questions.

Finally, women engaged in same-sex practices also face discrimination and violence. Studies on the vulnerabilities of WSW are few and far between, even among sexual health organisations, including within the more progressive organisations like Naz and AIDS Alliance. One practitioner who preferred to remain anonymous described the attention given to WSW in her agency's sexual health work as 'less than a drop in the bucket' (2004). A search at the UNAIDS.org website conducted in March 2004 turned up 479 entries about documents related to MSM, but *not a single one* on WSW. Additionally, since much of the focus in human rights work has been on anti-sodomy laws, there has been little discussion of lesbians or other WSW in that work.

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, however, has begun to record a series of violations that are specific to WSW. An aptly-titled 2000 report, 'Written Out: How Sexuality is used to attack Women's Organizing' provides detailed evidence of efforts to cast any women engaged in political activism for women's rights as lesbians and so normalise violence and discrimination against them. On 25 February 1998, for example, the government-controlled Tunisian newspaper *Al-Hadath* printed the pictures of six prominent feminists under the title, 'Why aren't these women married?' (cited in 'Written Out' 2000). A 2003 report, 'Justice for Women: Discrimination Against Lesbians' identifies efforts at the sustained discrimination of women in education, employment and health care in Costa Rica. More than half of the lesbian-identified women, the report noted, were from lower-income groups (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission 2003: 15), and that 39 per cent had to hide their sexual orientation at work, for fear of dismissal (2003: 14). Almost three-quarters of the respondents continued to live with their parents because they could not be economically independent (2003: 11). Testimonials from Costa Rican women also provided evidence of violence by police, breach of civil rights and job insecurity.

The construction of sexuality deeply informs the whole organisation of communities; as Foucault has pointed out, discourses on sex affect everything from the identification and treatment of mental disease to the gendered and racialised organisation of national economies (1980). Although groups like Naz and AIDS Alliance have begun to raise broader questions about the social welfare of MSM (and not, yet, women), the scope remains relatively narrow, and the influence of sexual regulation on the everyday lives of people, though powerful, remain overlooked.

2.3 Challenges to heteronormativity and universal sexualities

Outside of discussions on HIV/AIDS, there have been few efforts made to challenge the overwhelming heteronormativity of development policy and planning, or to engage in discussions of the rights of gays, lesbians and others not engaged in exclusive heterosexual relationships to participate in the development of their communities. In both traditional and contemporary development models, gender roles for men and women have been largely produced from an assumption of universal heterosexuality. Besides some HIV/AIDS promotional materials, usually produced by NGOs, representations of the world's "poor" in development implicitly and explicitly define them as heterosexual. While sometimes posing important challenges to the ways in which the roles of men and women are represented, participatory development and rights-based approaches have yet to pose serious challenges to heteronormative assumptions.

In their research, Lind and Share show, for instance, how the promotion of gender equality policies have sometimes worked against the interests of lesbians and unmarried women in many countries because of their assignment of heterosexist gender roles for men and women (2003). For example, in many countries, Gender Affairs departments are relegated to Ministries of the "Family" and support heterosexist notions of male and female roles. In this construct, 'what is "natural" becomes conflated with heteronormative values of sexuality, gender and modernization and modernity' (2003: 62). While gender policies are largely seen to benefit women, Lind and Share instead observe,

merely celebrating women's increased visibility in politics and development does little to challenge the systemic binarism that relegates women to the reproductive sphere in the first place, nor the inescapable economic dependence on fathers and husbands engendered by it.

(2003)

Instead, ' "family" and "heterosexuality" merge', they argue, 'tightening any space for kinship to broaden its meaning and welcome LGBT people, same-sex desire and homosocial relationships into the community'. And not just the state is at fault. Lind and Share explain:

Women, who are often excluded from formalized production networks, sometimes establish informal and communal ties with other women in their communities. These connections are typically based on institutionalized heterosexuality – a privilege queer women do not always have access to, depending on their relations with their families and communities.

(2003)

One could make the same argument about male sexual minorities and/or dissidents; inability to meet the expectations of masculinity in dominant heteronormative frameworks denies their access to participation and resources in the community. In the dominant, heteronormative development frameworks – including the HIV/AIDS work, which makes visible but often casts MSM behaviour as abnormal – no room is made available for recognising the existence of people engaged in same-sex relationships, or for advocating for their participation and rights.

This may be a further-reaching error on the part of planners than one might have imagined. As Shivananda Khan's research for Naz Foundation International demonstrates, it may be incorrect to assume that the majority of people are exclusively heterosexual. His studies of male homosexuality in South Asian cultures suggest that homosexuality may indeed be a "normal" behaviour shared by a larger population than a small minority of gay men. Male-to-male sex in India is, Khan says, 'symptomatic of male homosocialability and homoaffectionalism in South Asian cultures, where public shame and masculine dishonour configure denial and invisibility' (1998: 5). So while official texts may not recognise homosexual practices as "normal", they may in fact be better characterised as potentially universal.

Additionally, contrary to western cultures' more limited notions of sexuality as being tied to a fixed identity – a notion that is now also very actively contested in the West – Khan says a number of negotiations underlie and frame homosexual practices in South Asian communities. He says,

The fluidity of South Asian males' sexual experience, the framework of sexual invisibility, gender segregation, South Asian homosocialability, male ownership of public space, South Asian shame cultures, sexual invisibility, community "izzat", compulsory marriage and procreation, the current lack of personal identity-based sexual behaviours, South Asian gender constructions, male and female roles as frameworks of adulthood, and so on have a central impact on sexual behaviours.

(1996: 1)

To merely collapse these multiple and moving processes into a simple homosexual:heterosexual dichotomy – especially one exclusively tied to sexual desire – is therefore deceptive.

In 'Constituting the Global Gay: The Queer Origin of Labels in Zimbabwe', Oliver Phillips explains how the vilification of homosexuals by President Robert Mugabe effectively introduced notions of heterosexuality in that African country as well:

Mugabe has not only been responsible for producing a conception of homosexuality in the Zimbabwean context, but also that of heterosexuality. All those Zimbabweans who have previously not even considered this notion of a "sexuality" suddenly find themselves blessed with one – by designating others as "homosexual" you automatically designate the norm as "heterosexual". Many Zimbabweans suddenly come to see themselves as "heterosexual" where they had no such consciousness before.

(1997)

Certainly, words like "gay," "lesbian," "homosexual" and even "heterosexual" have no direct translation in many languages; they are probably not apt descriptions of the ways in which sexualities are organised and experienced.

Khan's study, as well as many others from Latin America, Africa and other parts of Asia (Chan 1997; Kulick 1997; McLean and Ngcobo 1995) confirm again and again that people who participate in alleged "homosexual" practices do not necessarily identify as "homosexuals", nor may they necessarily comprise a

fixed minority. Zhou Huashan suggests that China has a tradition of same-sex love (especially between men) which did not encounter as violent hostility as in the West, and points out that homophobia in China originated in colonial Christian influences in the nineteenth century (cited in Jolly 2000: 83). That is not to say that all kinds of homophobia expressed in China or in the Third World may be excused as the result of colonialism (or Christianity), but rather to merely shift the conversation and in doing so disrupt the notion that non-western models of sexuality do (or must) follow the “evolution” of sexuality that Western models were thought to experience.

There is now much more debate about the framing and interpretation of sexual choices, identities and behaviour. For example, Alan Sinfield lists several drawbacks to the constitution of those people of non-heterosexual sexualities as a fixed minority group,

One is that it consolidates our constituency at the expense of limiting it. If you are lower-class, gay lobbying and lifestyle are less convenient and may seem alien. If you are young, or entertaining new practices and commitments, the call to declare a sexual identity imposes the anxiety that exploration of your gay potential may close options forever. And if you are a person of colour, the prominence of a mainly white model makes it more difficult for you to negotiate ways of thinking about further sexualities that will be compatible with your cultures of family and neighbourhood, while dealing with racism in the white gay subculture.

(1997: 20)

This model, Didi Herman further contends, grants legitimacy to gays and lesbians ‘not on the basis that there might be something problematic with gender roles and sexual hierarchies, but on the basis that they constitute a fixed group of “others” who need and deserve protection’ (cited in Sinfield 1997: 20). Such is the view often proposed in the HIV/AIDS framework – that MSM (and sometimes WSW), are deserving of “social protection” because of their particular vulnerabilities. Patriarchal interpretations of “femininity” and “masculinity”, prescribed gender roles for men and women, and the implied characterisation of non-heterosexual activities as “marginal” or different from the norm all remain unchallenged.

3 Sex for (and rights to) pleasure

Of all the serious ramifications of this structuring, the reduction of sexual rights to reproduction (for women) and/or AIDS (for men) is particularly worrisome because it necessarily characterises sex between Third World peoples as a negative activity, with very negative social consequences (too many children, AIDS), and undermines the fact that *sex*, for most people who engage in it willingly, *is a pleasurable activity*. Even when development discourses have moved beyond the focus on personal and reproductive health in discussing sex, attention has remained focused on negative implications of particular sexual behaviours and choices, forgetting, almost entirely, that sex may (and usually does) bring pleasure to individuals as well. But the expression of sexual desire does not, as this story would imply, necessarily result in doom and gloom.

Sexual rights are almost always discussed as a measure to alleviate a problem, not celebrate a positive experience. As Sonia Correa points out,

To call for sexual rights as a protection against pregnancy, rape, disease and violence, is a different matter from affirming these rights in relation to eroticism, recreation and pleasure.

(2002)

This second interpretation was in the minds of women who struggled for Paragraph 96 in the Beijing Platform. But, she says, there are political and conceptual obstacles that make it difficult for the discourse on sexual rights to shift towards this “positive concept” interpretation,

In the political domain, persistent attacks by conservative forces on sexuality-related issues constantly push them back under the cover of more acceptable (well-behaved) reproductive, health and violence agendas. In addition, within the health field the dominance of biomedical frameworks constantly pressures “sexual subjects” to remain contained in disciplinary domains (particularly epidemiology and behaviourist frames).

(Correa 2002)

The emphasis on a “negative interpretation” of sexual rights, Correa says, can be traced ‘back to the fusion of gender and sexuality within a perspective that views opposition to the sexual objectification of women as the core element of feminist theory’ (2002). However, as I have argued elsewhere (Gosine 1998 and 2002), the negative descriptions of Third World peoples’ sexualities are also a consequence of racialising processes that have been institutionalised in development discourses, and through the implementation of policies like population control. Race-based anxieties, fears and fantasies about sexual desire, including of non-white people’s “limitless fertility” very explicitly frame population, development and environmental policies, following the logic of strategies at and since the moment of the colonial encounter (Gosine 2002). Stoler observes, ‘the management of sexuality, parenting and morality [was] at the heart of the colonial project’ (1995: 226). Reasons for emphasis on the “negative interpretation” of Paragraph 96 are far more elaborate than Correa’s analysis suggests, as are its consequences for thinking about and organising for sexual rights.

How, then, does a positive valuation of *sex as pleasure* challenge this history – and present the promise of a better alternative? The affirmation of eroticism, recreation and *pleasure* within rights-based and participatory frameworks reconfigure conversations about sex in development, and in so doing, advance debates on and reveal new strategies for realising sexual rights. Two possible consequences are especially important: the production of a broader conversation about sexuality rights, and a recognition of the agency and abilities of people from the Third World to make choices about their own lives.

3.1 A broader conversation

Valuing *sex as pleasure* results, first, in the generation of a broader discursive landscape that more fully represents the multiple relationships and events that shape and determine sexual choices, and which must be necessary considerations in securing sexual rights. As already noted, attempts to discuss and affirm sexual rights have met difficult roadblocks in international human rights and development negotiations. Conservative actors have been unyielding in their defence of controls against free sexual expression. Faced with such strong and organised opposition, supporters of sexual rights have limited their advocacy efforts to very particular issues and situations, none of which energetically privilege eroticism or sexual pleasure. However, failure to do so has undermined the urgency and significance of sexual rights security to the general well-being of men and women living in the Third World.

Consider the working understanding of sexual and reproductive rights that currently guides policy and programme decisions at the UNFPA;

- Reproductive and sexual health as a component of overall lifelong health.
- Reproductive decision-making, including choice in marriage, family formation, and determination of the number, timing, and spacing of one's children; and the right to the information and the means to exercise those choices.
- Equality and equity for women and men to enable individuals to make free and informed choices in all spheres of life, free from gender discrimination.
- Sexual and reproductive security, including freedom from sexual violence and coercion, and the right to privacy.

(UNFPA 2004)

The understanding of sexuality and sexual health presented by these principles is, thanks to feminists' efforts, broader than previous interpretations espoused by the organisation. This list of sexual rights includes, for example, freedom from sexual violence, rights to privacy and the right to information, and emphasises individual choice – issues that feminists and others have long struggled to see recognised by the organisation since the 1970s. However, this list still falls terribly short in capturing the full significance of sexual rights security to individual and national development. Compare the UNFPA's 2004 list to the one drawn up by participants attending the 13th World Congress of Sexology in 1997;

- The right to freedom, which excludes all forms of sexual coercion, exploitation and abuse at any time and in all situations in life. The struggle against violence is a social priority. All children should be desired and loved.
- The right to autonomy, integrity and safety of the body. This right encompasses control and enjoyment of our own bodies, free from torture, mutilation and violence of any sort.

- The right to sexual equity and equality. This refers to freedom from all forms of discrimination, paying due respect to sexual diversity, regardless of sex, gender, age, race, social class, religion and sexual orientation.
- The right to sexual health, including availability of all sufficient resources for development of research and the necessary knowledge of HIV/AIDS and STDs, as well as the further development of resources for research, diagnosis and treatment.
- The right to wide, objective and factual information on human sexuality in order to allow decision-making regarding sexual life.
- The right to a comprehensive sexuality education from birth and throughout the life cycle. All social institutions should be involved in this process.
- The right to associate freely. This means the possibility to marry or not, to divorce, and to establish other types of sexual associations.
- The right to make free and responsible choices regarding reproductive life, the number and spacing of children and the access to means of fertility regulation.
- The right to privacy, which implies the capability of making autonomous decisions about sexual life within a context of personal and social ethics. Rational and satisfactory experience of sexuality is a requirement for human development.

The most noticeable addition in the WCS declaration is, of course, the element of sexual pleasure. ‘Sexual pleasure, including autoeroticism’, the Congress members state,

is a source of physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual well-being. It is associated with a conflict-free and anxiety-free experience of sexuality, allowing, therefore, social and personal development.

Additionally,

Human sexuality is the origin of the deepest bond between human beings and is essential to the well-being of individuals, couples, families and society. Therefore, the respect for sexual rights should be promoted through all means.

Sexual health, they concluded, ‘is a basic and fundamental right’ (1997).

3.2 Applying definitions of sexuality rights: a Caribbean case study

Consider how the application of these frameworks differently interpret the situations of Sidney, Peter and Pablo, three men whom I met and interviewed while conducting research in the Caribbean in 2003.

- **Sidney C.**, a primary school teacher, was 30 when I met him, in St Lucia, in May 2003. Our first meeting was actually in cyberspace, via the popular website gay.com. Sidney used the website’s

chatrooms to meet men, especially visiting male tourists, but was not, he said, “gay” (or “bisexual”) himself. Although he “very much” enjoyed sex with men, Sidney planned to get married later that year to a girl from his local Church group. Children would soon follow, he said, as he settled into a “normal” life – which would probably continue to include short-term sexual encounters with men.

- No marriage plans were in the works for **Pablo M.**, a 23 year-old art student living in Barbados, to whom I was also introduced through the same site. Pablo had sex exclusively with men, identified himself as “gay” and was in search, he said, of “that one true love”. It was a search made more challenging by the fact that Pablo has to keep his sexual preferences hidden from most others, save a few close friends.
- **Peter V.** is almost seven years’ Pablo’s junior, but little about his sexual preferences is secret. He lives in Suriname with his parents, but has been sexually involved with boys and men since he first entered his teen years, and is now a regular fixture at Paramaribo’s local gay bar – the only such bar that legally exists in the Caribbean, and the site of our first meeting. His parents know he is gay, as do his classmates, his teachers and friends. He has “nothing to hide”, Peter told me, although he has been the victim of homophobic violence on more than one occasion.

Under the UNFPA’s definition, only the men’s reproductive capacity and education about and ability to engage in safe sexual health practices are determined to be important. Thus, conversations about sexual rights end with the distribution of condoms, knowledge about how to use them, and the establishment of accessible health clinics which allow for discreet visits. (Violence, when mentioned in conjunction with sexuality, usually explicitly refers to male violence against women, and is therefore irrelevant in this scenario.) Clearly, however, none of the three men are able to freely engage in sex: each is threatened by violence (both Sidney and Pablo are vulnerable to state-sponsored violence should their sexual activities be discovered); each has fewer rights, because of their sexual choices, before the law; and of the three, only Peter, perhaps, has rights to sexual health, sexual education or to freely associate with peers.

Working within the UNFPA framework, there is very little *explicit* basis for further engagement or action. Although the UNFPA’s definition emphasises choice, very clear parameters are established: men and women must see themselves as reproductive agents, and are assumed to be engaged only and entirely in heterosexual sex. As only one of the three men, Sidney, sees himself as a potential reproductive agent, only some aspects of his particular sexual rights are deemed important; so as long as they are properly using condoms, the sexual rights of Peter and Pablo have already been achieved. Finally, despite the use of gender-neutral and gender-inclusive language, men’s sexualities and sexual rights have usually not factored into UNFPA analysis or policy. This is not because women’s rights are privileged over men’s but because men’s rights are already assumed to have been achieved. (Heterosexual) women also become the main focus because of the particular way in which the UNFPA’s articulation of sexual rights situates subjects: as victims or as passive recipients of information and knowledge – the roles in which women are usually cast in dominant patriarchal paradigms.

Evaluating their situations against the criteria set out at the WCS, however, clearly many more issues emerge and much more work needs to be done for the achievement of the three men's sexual rights. This is a perspective long shared by those Non-Governmental Organisations working on the ground and more closely connected to everyday realities of their constituents. Groups like Naz, the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAP), and the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP) have in their promotion of sexual health recognised the importance of valuing sexual pleasure to the success of their programmes. Aids Alliance International, for example, produces magazines which aspire to provide sexual health education but also provide forums for people to meet clients; ASAP's website provides chatrooms for surfers to meet; safe sex workshops by ASAP, Black CAP and Naz emphasise not just prevention but also the enjoyment of sex; and all of the organisations arrange events that serve to celebrate sexuality and sexual pleasure at the same time that they pursue education programmes.

Those groups also view the people with whom they work in a quite different way than most mainstream development strategies have done; they recognise the agency – and thus, the ability, particularity and autonomy – of “the poor”. The very recognition of *sex as pleasure* and individual agency of men and women in the Third World (and, consequently, of their knowledge, abilities and creativity) opens up new ways for thinking about and planning for the achievement of sexual rights. Authority for decision-making and analysis is turned over to the subjects themselves, and a much broader set of goals are established. Such a “reversal” – as Robert Chambers might call it – also privileges local knowledge and information about sexual rights, including the very strategies used to name and describe sex.

4 Rights to participation

Discussions of “rights” rarely enter into discussions of sex and sexuality in the HIV/AIDS framework, and apart from some NGOs (Naz, AIDS Alliance), there is very little concern with the participation of sexual minorities and/or dissidents in the formulation of health policies, or design of care and prevention programmes. However, notions of “rights” have become increasingly prominent in the articulation of development projects in the last decade. In this section, I want to briefly comment on the potential of participatory and rights-based approaches to engage discussions about and actions to advance the welfare of sexual minorities and/or dissidents, and in so doing, provide an alternative terrain for hosting and exploring this work.

Once dismissed as ‘a shout from the radical fringe’ (Vieira de Cunha and Junho Peno 1997: 1), calls for the democratic participation of men and women in the analysis and planning of their communities are now being made by such mainstream actors as the World Bank, and mandated in the United Nations' adoption, in 1998, of a ‘Rights Based Approach (RBA)’ to development. RBA positions the “poor” as citizens, rather than beggars, and identifies the state as a duty holder:

A rights based approach to development describes situations not simply in terms of human needs, or development requirements, but in terms of society's obligations to respond to inalienable rights of individuals, empowers people to demand justice as a right, not as charity, and gives communities a moral basis from which to claim international assistance when needed.

(UN 1998: para 174, Ch 5)

The British Overseas Development Institute (ODI) further adds, 'a rights based approach to development sets the achievement of human rights as an objective of development' (1999: 1). Additionally, RBA insists on special protections for vulnerable or minority groups (although UN documents have not gone so far as to include sexual minorities and/or dissidents in this group).

Some critics contend that this attention to "rights" and participation is a cosmetic gesture, merely evidence of the successful co-optation of the language of a more radical agenda. That this focus on individual rights and communities agency has emerged in the context of rapid economic globalisation – at a time when the powers of states, the key site of previous development projects, are in decline – surely suggests that there may be more to the energetic embrace of RBA than goodwill; critics ask: do rights-based and participatory approaches really recognise people as "citizens", or construct them as consumers making limited choices within particular neoliberal economic projects? Is the emphasis on individual rights a necessary reaction to the realignment of social networks of power? Important questions must be asked about the motivations and ambitions of RBA and other participatory approaches.⁶ But the shift in development theory towards a focus on rights and participation has clearly opened new spaces to think about old questions, and opportunities to reconsider conventional ideas and pursue new goals. Women, ethnic minorities, aboriginals and other marginalised peoples have seized upon the notions of justice, fairness, equity and freedom articulated in RBA and participatory approaches to challenge dominant economic development processes and to advance an agenda of social liberation.

Calls for rights-based approaches have gained strength at the same time that attention to sexuality matters, including sexual and reproductive health, sexual violence and HIV/AIDS were becoming more prescient items on development agendas. However, outside of HIV/AIDS prevention work, development practitioners have appeared reluctant to frame sexuality issues through RBA. While examples of HIV/AIDS organisations engaged in an analysis of, or programmes directed at, providing services for, or enhancing the welfare of MSM (and, sometimes, WSW) are plentiful, there are few accounts of initiatives which advocate rights for sexual minorities through RBA or participatory frameworks.

Correa locates the starting point of discussions about sexual rights in the debate on conflict and systematic rape that took place in the Human Rights Conference of Vienna in 1993 (2002). Calls for the recognition of sexual rights for women followed at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, but text on sexual rights did not survive brackets until the 1995 Beijing conference, when a paragraph was adopted that defined the human rights of women in matters related to sexuality:

⁶ See Andrea Cornwall (2000a and b) for a substantive critical evaluation of participatory approaches.

The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences.

(Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 2000: Paragraph 96)

Importantly, this passage was included in the “health” – and not the “human rights” – section of the plan. Although most member states attending the conference also supported the inclusion of sexual orientation in a list of unjustified grounds for discrimination against women, it was dropped because of protests led by Islamic countries and the Holy See. At Beijing+5 in 2000, Paragraph 96 was reaffirmed, but again, it proved impossible to include sexual orientation as an unjustified ground for discrimination. Islamic countries also requested a “precise definition” of terms such as “gender-sensitive” and “diversity of women”, in attempts to avoid any inference that the document supported sexual rights orientation (Correa 2002). In 2002, attempts to assert freedom from violence as a sexual right were also spurned at the Rio+10 conference and in negotiations for the creation of the International Criminal Court. At Rio+10, health policy definitions were subordinated to religious and cultural values in Paragraph 47 of the agreement, thus protecting such practices as female genital mutilation and, effectively, rights for sexual minorities and dissidents. Similarly, calls to include systematic rape during armed conflict on the list of crimes against humanity at the ICC negotiations were also met with harsh opposition from some states (but eventually accepted). Conservative forces present formidable resistance, but advocates of sexual rights continue to push forward. Although it was later withdrawn under pressure from (again) the Vatican and Islamic states, the presentation of the Brazil resolution on sexual diversity to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 2004 was a ground-breaking gesture in and of itself, and created considerable momentum and debate.⁷

Given their emphasis on realising “the inalienable rights of individuals” and on being inclusive, especially, of marginalised groups, rights-based and participatory approaches would appear to provide not just an explicit basis for recognising sexual and sexuality rights, but also, perhaps, the most appropriate site from which to employ development efforts towards their realisation. However, successful engagement of RBA and participatory models in struggles for sexual rights will require a reframing of dominant discourses on sex. This “restructuring” must result in many shifts, including, at the very least, the following three gestures;

⁷ In 2004, Brazil proposed a resolution on ‘human rights and sexual orientation’ (E/CN.4/2003/L.92) which claims that sexual diversity is an integral part of Universal Human Rights as reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Consequently, 53 nations sat in Geneva in March 2004 to discuss, argue, vote and then publicly declare if they believe sexual orientation is a human right or not. If the resolution is approved, it will probably not cause direct changes in many countries but it will send an important message to the global community about discrimination against people on the grounds of their sexual orientation.

1. **Challenges to the prescriptive heteronormativity in development.** Just as anthropologists and gender and development theorists have critiqued as fictitious (and also detrimental) idealised notions of male and female roles, family structure and behaviour, so too must rights-based and participation approaches be willing to identify and also question (and change) the assumption of heterosexuality implicitly and explicitly pursued and promoted in development policy and programmes.
2. **Respect for sexual and cultural diversity.** Universal models of sexuality misrepresent the realities of peoples' sexual experiences, and deny the fluidity of identity. This is a discovery that queer scholars and activists in the West appear to have only recently acknowledged, as gay and lesbian organisations moved increasingly to include people whom identified as neither. But non-Western cultures have long proposed other ways of expressing and articulating sexuality and sexual identity – including their own vocabularies—that both recognise the fluidity of these concepts, and also make room for all kinds of different arrangements. In India, for instance, *Hijra* are neither male nor female, but neither need be described in Western terms; they are not gay, not transvestites, but *hijra*.
3. **Affirmation of sexual pleasure of a “right”.** The affirmation of sexual pleasure is not only critically necessary for the advancement of the rights and support for the participation of sexual minorities and/or dissidents. It also presents a unique opportunity for alliances and cooperation between sexual minority and/or dissident men, including gay-identified men, and feminists, for whom, sexuality rights have long been a key (if not yet successful) goal of reproductive health and rights campaigns.

Taking a cue from feminists engaged in reproductive rights struggles, the challenge it would seem, is to use the widely acknowledged link between safe sex and “de-stigmatisation” as a means to enter into dialogues about the sexuality rights and rights to participation of sexual minorities. In development circles, sexual pleasure just does not bear the same resonance as hunger, poverty, homelessness or ill-health. But sexual rights are about more than this; they are about social justice and human rights, and they are in every respect *development* issues. If the purpose of participatory development is ‘to enable local people to articulate and analyse their social conditions, and to identify and plan solutions to key problems and challenges they face’, (DFID 2000: 8), then the recognition of sexuality as a critical development issue would seem to be a necessary measure, as failure to acknowledge the importance of sexual pleasure in peoples' lives and the diversity of sexual experience serve only to deny the real and difficult challenges faced by many of the world's poor.

5 Conclusion

In the English-speaking Caribbean, as in many Asian, African and Latin American countries, state laws prohibit male homosexuality, social norms expose men and women engaged in homo-sex to violence, and powerful Christian churches condone – nay, advocate – discrimination against those who do not conform to their particular notions of sexual morality. In 2003, some Caribbean leaders made a point of publicly expressing support for maintaining anti-sodomy laws, often through the employment of nationalist and moralist rhetoric, despite the fact that the laws are rarely enforced and are themselves a legacy of

colonialism and slavery. Regardless of these regulatory devices against their pursuit, homosexual practices in the Caribbean persist, and, homosocial behaviours, in particular contexts, are tolerated, even encouraged. Indeed, one might argue that the public declarations of support for anti-sodomy laws have become necessary precisely *because* they appear so vulnerable to defeat. The organised efforts of sexual rights advocates, the proliferation of knowledge about AIDS and sexual health, and the multiplication of cultural media showcasing representations of homosexuality necessarily problematise the laws, and, perhaps more importantly, they make a public conversation about sexuality, sexual rights and sexual desire entirely unavoidable. Such is the case with the whole machinery of international development across the world: explicit conversations about sexual desire are occurring because social, cultural and political conditions insist that they occur.⁸

Within the leading development institutions, however, questions about equity and justice continue to be necessarily qualified by clear economic motivations. To justify intervention by the World Bank and other major development agencies, and investments by governments, gender equality advocates have to demonstrate why gender equality is good for economic growth, HIV/AIDS advocates have to reveal the costs of HIV/AIDS to economic growth (and in some ways, scare some actors into action); champions of youth rights have to argue that investing in youth stirs economic growth, and so on. Despite the considerable production of elegant prose about social equality and justice in new development agendas, including rights-based approaches, the modus operandi of development remains very clearly committed to the generation of economic growth, which is still, even today, recognised as the ultimate panacea for poverty. So it makes sense then, that questions about sexuality would also have to be posed in this way: what are the costs of not recognising deviant sexualities, like MSM? Armed with strong empirical evidence, advocates of rights for sexual minorities are responding in kind, very effectively justifying interventions around sexual orientation through revelation of the costs of invisibilisation of same-sex sexual practices and the marginalisation of people engaged in non-heterosexual sex, especially insofar as the spread of HIV/AIDS is concerned. That inaction is costly is a persuasive argument, and certainly one that has borne and will continue to bear powerful results, especially in certain areas, such as stimulating public health reform.

But development thinkers and practitioners must be more ambitious and engage a broader set of or even differently posited questions; we must also ask, ‘what are the social and economic costs of development policy to people engaged in same-sex sex?’ Development is supposed to benefit the most marginalised, but it is clearly failing sexual minorities and dissidents, both men and women, in quite profound ways. Besides a few interventions in AIDS, most development policies continue to operate under the presumption that all people are exclusively heterosexuals, and so people engaged in non-heterosexual relationships are not recognised as potential beneficiaries of or participants in development processes. Heterosexuality is instead imposed on everyone everywhere. As a consequence of this dual

⁸ “Development” collectively refers to the diverse body of analysis about social and economic conditions in South countries (also called the “Third World”), including the broad and diverse group of institutions, professionals, workers, activists and scholars who pursue this analysis and define and implement policies.

process of invisibilisation of homo-sex and imposition of hetero-identities, the impact of social policies on sexual minorities, especially poor sexual minorities, are not fully appreciated. As the studies cited above demonstrate, men and women in same-sex relationships are excluded from social networks, have greater difficulty finding work, experience high levels of violence, face discrimination in employment, and are barred access to education and health resources; in development, sexuality is not just a matter of HIV/AIDS care and prevention.

It is, however, always about sex. Talk of erotic pleasure might not seem to have a place in the context of discussions about policy, and even in HIV/AIDS work, policy-makers are shy to acknowledge that sex, for most people who engage in it willingly, *is a pleasurable activity*. But the advocacy of sexual rights and freedoms based on the affirmation of sexual pleasure is an important gesture as it recognises the agency and abilities of people from the Third World to make choices about their own lives, to engage in sexual relationships in ways that they deem fit, and to make smart decisions when presented with more complete information.

Many gay and lesbian activists are often surprised by the often complex and fluid notions of sexual identity in South Asia, Africa, Latin America and elsewhere; there are all kinds of indigenous words to describe all kinds of arrangements. There is no universal system of sexual organisation, no definitive set of traditions, no single vocabulary. And so, in strategising around sexual rights in development, the cues must come from the ground, from the people who live and appreciate the particularities of their unique cultural contexts. It is not about leading married MSM “out of the closet” or in assuming an evangelical position, instructing sexual minorities about the virtues of assuming gay and lesbian identities, or even of pursuing particular kinds of sexual behaviours, but in supporting the frameworks and struggles already being pursued, and affirming the rights of all people to fully participate in the organisation of their lives and communities. Homophobic leaders may get the most attention, but it is also true that there are protective traditions of respect for sexual diversity in all countries, including homosocial and homoaffectionate cultural norms in what are often viewed to be the most oppressive societies – support, not enlightenment, is what is required. In short, development policy-makers and practitioners must be bold thinkers but modest, non-moralising listeners: willing to engage all kinds of questions about sex in development, but – as mandated in participatory and rights-based approaches to development – willing to let locals lead.

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