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development - gender

Women's Empowerment
An Annotated Bibliography

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Produced in collaboration with the Research Programme Consortium
'Pathways of Women's Empowerment'

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

In March 2006, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) launched a five-year research programme consortium (RPC), Pathways of Women's Empowerment, funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). The RPC aims to understand what enables women to empower themselves and how changes in gendered power relations can be sustained. The programme will involve practitioners, policy makers and researchers from 5 regions, with the goals of revitalising discussion of women's empowerment, generating new insights into the processes and policies that contribute to positive change in women's daily lives, and exploring women's own pathways to empowerment.

This bibliography gathers together a range of materials which discuss women's empowerment from varied perspectives in order to provide an accessible introduction to key concepts, approaches and debates. Over the next five years the RPC will add to this list through identifying new and innovative resources and publishing collaborative work by the partners (see the list of partners at the end of this document). RPC publications and an updated bibliography will appear on the RPC website, www.pathways-of-empowerment.org (to be launched in October 2006).

BRIDGE is working closely with the RPC. BRIDGE is committed to global gender liberation and women's empowerment. BRIDGE seeks to provide practical information to support policy, programming and activism which promotes women's rights and gender equality.

The resource is divided into:

1. Key texts
2. Policy and practice
3. Evaluation
4. Critiques and debates

The entries in this publication also appear on the women's empowerment page featured on the BRIDGE-hosted web resource *Siyanda* www.siyanda.org. In addition, this bibliography compliments the forthcoming Eldis' Key Issues Page on women's empowerment which gives an introduction to the subject along with links to key resources www.eldis.org/gender

2. KEY TEXTS

Batliwala, S. (1994) The Meaning of Women's Empowerment: New Concepts from Action. In G. Sen, A. Germain and L. C. Chen (eds.), Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment and Rights, pp. 127-38. Boston: Harvard University Press
http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog/SENPOP.html

Since the mid-1980s, the term empowerment has become popular in the development field, especially with reference to women. However, there is confusion as to what the term means among development actors. This paper analyses the concept of women's empowerment and outlines empowerment strategies based on insights gained through a study of grassroots programmes in South Asia. The concept of women's empowerment is the outcome of important critiques generated by the women's movement, particularly by 'third world' feminists. They clearly state that women's empowerment requires the challenging of patriarchal power relations that result in women having less control over material assets and intellectual resources. Women participate in their own oppression so they must first become aware of the ideology that legitimises male domination. The empowerment process starts from within but access to new ideas and information will come from external agents. With new consciousness and the strength of solidarity, women can assert their right to control resources and to participate equally in decision making. Ultimately, women's empowerment must become a force that is an organised mass movement which challenges and transforms existing power relations in society.

Kabeer, N. (1999) Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. Development and Change, Volume 30, Number 3, July 1999. Blackwell Publishing
http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bpl/dech/1999/00000030/00000003/art00125

This paper sets out from the understanding that empowerment is a process by which those who have been denied power gain power, in particular the ability to make strategic life choices. For women, these could be the capacity to choose a marriage partner, a livelihood, or whether or not to have children. For this power to come about, three inter-related dimensions are needed: access to and control of resources; agency (the ability to use these resources to bring about new opportunities) and achievements (the attainment of new social outcomes). Empowerment, therefore, is both a process and an end result. This understanding differs greatly from instrumentalist interpretations which view empowerment purely in terms of measurable outcomes. Instrumentalist interpretations are problematic because they convey the belief that social change can be predicted and prescribed in a cause and effect way and undermine the notion that women's empowerment should be about the ability of women to make self-determined choices.

Oxaal, Z. and Baden, S. (1997) Gender and Empowerment: Definitions, Approaches and Implications for Policy, BRIDGE Report No.40
http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/Reports/R40%20Gen%20Emp%20Policy%202c.doc

What is women's empowerment? If women are empowered, does that mean that men have less power? Empowerment has become a new 'buzzword' in international development language but is often poorly understood. The need to 'empower' women responds to the growing recognition that women in developing countries lack control over resources and the self- confidence and/or opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. At the same time, the realisation that women have an increasingly important role to play in social and economic development has become widely accepted. Unless women are 'empowered' to participate alongside men in the development process, development efforts will only have partial effect. Empowerment strategies must carefully define their meaning of 'empowerment' and be integrated into mainstream programmes rather than attempted separately.

Sen, G. and Grown, C. (1985) Development, Crisis, and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives, DAWN

Third World countries are increasingly forced to rely on internal resource mobilisation to make up for sharp reductions in external aid and resources. Alongside this, development processes are often indifferent to the interests and needs of the poor. In this scenario, women's contributions – as workers and as managers of human welfare – are central to the ability of households, communities and nations to tackle the resulting crisis. However, women suffer from decreased access to resources and increased demands on their labour and time. If human survival is the world's most pressing problem, and if women are crucial to that survival, then the empowerment of women is essential for the emergence of new, creative and cooperative solutions. As part of the empowerment process, feminism and collective action are fundamental but feminism must not be monolithic in its issues, goals and strategies, since it should constitute the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. There is and must be a diversity of feminisms, responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women and defined by women for themselves. The underlying foundation to this diversity is the common opposition to gender oppression and other forms of domination.

Summary adapted from author.

3. POLICY AND PRACTICE

Martinez, E. and Glenzer, K, 2005, 'Proposed Global Research Framework for CARE's Strategic Impact Inquiry on Women's Empowerment', CARE USA, Atlanta

What contributions have CARE programmes made to the empowerment of women? CARE defines an 'empowered woman' as women who enjoy bodily integrity (is free from coercion over her physical being), has positive images of her own worth and dignity, has equitable control and influence over strategic household and public resources, and lives in an enabling environment in which women can and do engage in collective effort. Recommendations are made on how to research women's empowerment. It is important to address questions of interpretation and meaning: what do power and empowerment mean to women involved in the project? Does it mean the same for all women? It is also crucial to ensure that women are included in every step of the research process, and have voice and influence over the questions which are asked and over the ways in which the answers are interpreted. One promising technique is peer ethnographic research, in which participants undergo training in interview and observational techniques, and are then given assignments to interview peers and observe their communities. Another recommended method is giving women disposable cameras and asking them to take pictures of things or people they see as relevant to the issues being researched. The paper concludes with a table listing a range of methods and information sources commonly used for research into women's empowerment.

Correa, S. (2002) Sexual Rights: Much has been said, much remains to be resolved, lecture presented at the Sexuality, Health and Gender Seminar, Department of Social Sciences, Public Health School, Columbia University, USA http://www.eldis.org/cache/DOC19699.pdf

In the ongoing United Nations debate on human rights and sexuality, sexual rights have been conceptualised in largely negative ways – in relation to issues of protection against pregnancy, rape, disease and violence. This paper calls for an inclusion of more positive aspects of sexual rights. Sexual rights should be seen as an end in themselves, affirmed in relation to eroticism, recreation and pleasure. This shift from the negative to the positive can itself be empowering. Diverse groups must be included in debates defining sexual rights, including sex workers, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people. To make their implementation a reality, the process of building consensus around sexual rights is more important than getting references into the texts of human rights agreements.

Summary adapted from Siyanda.

Deshmukh-Ranadive, J. (2003) Placing Gender Equity in the Family Centre Stage: Use of 'Kala Jatha' Theatre, *Economic and Political Weekly*, **26 April 2003**

Women's empowerment does not necessarily take place when incomes are generated, when livelihoods are enhanced or when groups are formed. This is because within families and households, hierarchies and structures do not alter. In fact, public interventions which result in new social activity or new avenues of income generation can actually accentuate tensions within households. It is at such times that supplementary interventions are required. 'Gender Equity in the Family' is an

experimental intervention from Andhra Pradesh, India, which uses folk theatre to highlight traditional socio-cultural norms within the family. The performances do not blame the men or the women for gender inequality but show how both those who suffer from and those that perpetrate inequality are victims of social structure. The plays, skits, songs and accompanying workshops have been well-received by entire villages and opened up debate around husband and wife relationships, mother and daughter-in-law relationships, and treatment of girl children. The intervention shows that in order to change the socio-cultural space of women in the home, other members of the household need to be involved in empowerment processes.

Summary adapted from author.

Grown, C., Rao Gupta, G. and Kes, A. (2005) Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women, UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, Earthscan, London

How can the global community achieve the third Millennium Development Goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women? To be empowered women must have equal capabilities such as education and health, and equal access to resources and opportunities such as land and employment. However they must also have the agency to use these capabilities and resources to make strategic choices. This report, prepared by the UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, identifies strategic priorities and practical actions for achieving women's empowerment by 2015. These include: strengthening opportunities for post-primary education for girls; investing in infrastructure to reduce women's and girls' time burdens; guaranteeing women's and girls' property and inheritance rights; increasing women's share of seats in national parliaments and local governmental bodies; and combating violence against women and girls. Various countries, communities and institutions have implemented different combinations of these actions and shown good results. The problem is not a lack of practical ways to empower women but rather a lack of change on a large and deep enough scale to bring about transformation in the way societies conceive of and organise men and women's roles, responsibilities and control over resources. Essential for this kind of transformation are the mobilisation of a large group people committed to the vision of a gender equitable society; the technical capacity to implement change; institutional structures and processes to support the transformation; and adequate financial resources.

Ilkkaracan, I. and Seral, G., (2000) Sexual Pleasure as a Women's Human Right: Experiences from a Grassroots Training Program in Turkey, in Ilkkaracan, I. (ed.) *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies,* pp. 187-196. Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR): New Ways

Women's sexuality remains a strong taboo in Turkey. Most women have little or no access to information on sexuality as the issue is not addressed in either the formal education system or in informal systems such as the family or community. This silence around women's sexuality can leave women ill equipped to deal with sexual relations and develop happy sex lives. Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR) in Turkey runs a human rights training programme for women which seeks to facilitate an empowering perception of sexuality by emphasising the right to sexual expression, pleasure and enjoyment. The programme covers a wide range of issues encompassing reproductive rights and sexual violence against women as well as sexual expression and sexual fulfilment. Sexual violence and reproductive sexuality are purposely addressed in separate modules, thus allowing a separate space for the participants to focus solely on a positive understanding of sexual rights, including the basic right to know and like one's

sexual organs, the right to seek sexual experiences independent of marital status, the right to orgasm, the right to expression and pursuit of sexual needs and desires, and the right to choose not to experience one's sexuality.

Klugman, B. (2000) Empowering Women through the Policy Process: The Making of Health Policy in South Africa, in Presser, H. and Sen, G (eds.), *Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes: Moving Beyond Cairo***, pp. 95-118. Oxford: Oxford University Press**

An important though poorly recognised way by which women can become empowered is by playing a role in the policy-making process itself. This chapter presents two case studies which illuminate the issue of women's empowerment from different perspectives: the way in which processes of advocacy can empower women, and the way in which policies that empower women can be won through women's participation and advocacy. It first analyses the 1994 Women's Health Conference which, for most participants, was their first ever experience of a truly consultative process, and one which would later make a direct policy influence. This knowledge strengthened women's self-esteem and enhanced their belief in their own capacity to contribute to policy processes. The second case study focuses on the strategies used to change South Africa's abortion legislation and reveals the diverse tactics required to ensure that women's empowerment remains at the centre of policy content. These do not necessarily involve participation of large numbers of women. Empowerment can be through the implementation of the policy itself, for example the fact that access to safe abortion increases women's ability to control their lives in a context where it may be difficult to access appropriate contraception, or to negotiate contraception use.

Summary adapted from author.

Marcelle, G. (2002) Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and their Impact on and use as an Instrument for the Advancement and Empowerment of Women
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/ict2002/reports/Report-online.PDF

When used effectively, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can be a powerful tool for women's empowerment. They can create better opportunities for women to exchange information, gain access to on-line education and to engage in e-commerce activities. Yet to date, many women worldwide are still not fully able to benefit from using these tools. This is often due to lack of connectivity, inadequate access, illiteracy, and to language and behavioural barriers. This report is a summary of an on-line discussion held by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW) in 2002 on 'ICTs and their Impact on and Use as a Tool for the Advancement of Women'. The paper highlights successful case studies from many countries on the use of ICTs as a tool for economic empowerment, participation in public life, and for enhancing women's skills and capabilities. It also explores strategies to integrate a gender perspective into national ICT policies. The report ends with a call to all stakeholders to work on improving connectivity, access to ICT skills training and eliminating negative behavioural attitudes to women's full engagement with ICTs.

Tamale, S. (2005) 'Eroticism, Sensuality and "Women's Secrets" among the Baganda: A Critical Analysis', *Feminist Africa*: 5
http://www.feministafrica.org/2level.html

African women are often seen as victims of sexual oppression, a portrayal which is both inaccurate and disempowering. This paper contests this simplistic assumption through an analysis of the institution of Ssenga among the Baganda people of Uganda. Ssenga is a form of sexual initiation, in which traditionally the paternal Aunt tutors young girls in a range of sexual matters. The institution of Ssenga can reinforce patriarchal power over women's bodies, yet it also represents new opportunities for women to challenge sexual control. Many contemporary Ssengas promote messages about women's autonomy and economic independence, and some instruction includes lessons in oral sex, masturbation and female ejaculation. Thus in contrast to widespread representations of indigenous institutions as oppressive, traditional Ugandan institutions and customs around sexuality have been reworked by women to become potentially empowering.

Summary adapted from Siyanda.

Townsend, J., Porter, G., & Mawdsley, E. (2004) Creating Spaces of Resistance: Development NGOs and their Clients in Ghana, India and Mexico. *Antipode,* 36(5): 871-889

Development NGOs have been accused by some of being instruments of control, domesticated by the neo-liberal project. This paper argues, however, that although the majority of women's NGOs have been co-opted to serve mainstream development agendas, such groups nevertheless bring women together away from men and create social spaces for women to set their own priorities. This space has been used for self-empowerment by millions of women around the world. This can happen even where the groups are planned to be purely instrumental, in terms of income generation, most often through microfinance initiatives. Drawing on work with NGOs in Ghana, India, Mexico and Europe, the paper explores various strategies deployed by 'independent thinking NGOs' – defined as those NGOs which clearly pursue their own agendas and are particularly concerned with articulating alternative visions of society. While it is vital not to exaggerate the empowerment potential of these NGOs, these are nevertheless courageous endeavours which deserve recognition in the North.

Summary adapted from authors.

Sida (2001) Discussing Women's Empowerment: Theory and Practice
http://www.sida.se/shared/jsp/download.jsp?f=SidaStudies+No3.pdf&a=2080

In October 2000, a conference was held in Sweden to create a forum for development practitioners and researchers to discuss the latest debates on gender and power. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) noted that in implementing gender policies in development, it was time to move from treating the symptoms of gender inequality to addressing the structural factors that cause it. This document comprises papers presented by Naila Kabeer, Patricia McFadden, Signe Arnfred, Edme Dominguez and Sherin Saadallah. The key issues covered include: the need to recognise how prescribed processes of empowerment may violate the essence of the concept; how culture excludes women from sites and statuses of power; the need to incorporate the language of political struggle into gender and development; how women in Mexico are changing political culture and gendered relationships, and the strategies Muslim societies can use to alleviate gender inequality and power imbalances.

Summary adapted from author.

Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), (1999) Women in Leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions: An Analysis of Six States
http://www.pria.org/downloadfile/Bwoomi.pdf

In 1993, India passed the 73rd Constitutional Amendment which reserved 33% of *panchayati raj* (village councils) seats for women. The Amendment enabled thousands of women to enter the political arena. While some women have created political spaces to voice their needs, concerns and priorities, others are still trying to grapple with the power and authority thrust upon them. If empowerment is seen as a process by which women overcome the challenges of a patriarchal society then it is difficult to maintain that the 73rd Amendment has achieved it for women. What has emerged, however, is that women have felt empowered at different points through their experiences and at various levels. A number of women have challenged their roles as care-givers by entering the public domain, have gained new prestige, and have become role models for other women. Although it is difficult to measure how these experiences have impacted on the women in their personal lives, it is known that through participation in *panchayati raj*, women have acquired a critical gender consciousness on how they have been denied their rights.

Stromquist, N. P. (2002) Education as a Means for Empowering Women, in J. Parpart, S. Rai & K. Staudt (eds.), *Rethinking Empowerment: Gender and Development in a Global/Local World* (pp. 22-38). London: Routledge

Education is often seen as the key to women's empowerment. This chapter discusses how the concept of empowerment has been applied in formal schooling with young students, and in non-formal education programmes with mostly adult populations. Girls' access to schooling in many developing countries is often so low that the term empowerment is frequently used to mean mere participation in the formal system. This is problematic because it assumes that the experience and knowledge attained in schooling automatically prepares girls to assess their worth and envisage new possibilities. Moreover, while several governments have taken steps to modify school textbooks and provide teachers with gender-sensitive training, a gender-sensitive education is not the same as an empowering education. Empowering girls should mean offering them courses with content that not only attacks current sexual stereotypes but also provides students with alternative visions of a gender-equitable society. At present, women's empowerment reaches its highest forms in non-formal education programmes. The alternative spaces provided by women-led NGOs promote systematic learning opportunities through workshops on topics such as gender subordination, reproductive health, and domestic violence, and provide the opportunity for women to discuss problems with others. The positive effects of these spaces for developing women's confidence cannot be overstated.

UNIFEM East and Southeast Asia, (2005) Empowering Women Migrant Workers
http://www.unifem.org/global_spanner/index.php?f_loc=e_se_asia (Link to "Empowering Women Migrant Workers" on right-hand side)

This document describes UNIFEM's Regional Programme on Empowering Women Migrant Workers in Asia. Using a gender and rights-based approach, the programme sought to promote gender responsive migration policies and programmes that further the realisation of women's rights; encourage sustained policy dialogue between source and destination countries to create a better environment for women migrant workers; and strengthen the capacity of women migrant workers and their organisations to access and claim their rights. Countries covered include Nepal, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri

Lanka, and Jordan. The programme has: helped to create a new working contract for migrant women in Jordan; resulted in a public decision by the Nepalese Cabinet to protect and promote the rights of Nepalese migrant workers abroad; reviewed a provincial law on migration in Blitar, Indonesia from a gender-and-rights perspective; and set up a savings and investment programme for on-site and returning women migrants in the Philippines.

Adapted from the Siyanda summary.

Waterhouse, R. and Neville, S. (2005) Evaluation of DFID Development Assistance: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Phase II Thematic Evaluation: Voice and Accountability. Department for International Development, UK (DFID)
http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/performance/files/wp7.pdf

The concepts of voice and accountability form the core values of good governance – of ensuring that citizens have a voice in decisions made about their lives and that states and other actors hear those voices and respond to them. This evaluation makes a preliminary assessment of DFID's work since 1995 on issues of gender, voice and accountability and concludes that DFID has made a significant contribution through research and support to practical interventions. Achievements include: contribution to the opportunities for women to make their voices heard in government policy forums including locally and nationally elected bodies; increased capacity for gendered poverty analysis (e.g. through institutional support to Ministries of Gender, as well as Planning and Finance); increased capacity for gendered cost and budget analysis and formulation (e.g. through gender budgeting initiatives in Rwanda, India, Uganda); increased capacity for gender-sensitive monitoring systems (both at project level and in national processes such as poverty monitoring systems); and establishing mechanisms to ensure that women's voices are heard and that governments in particular may be held accountable to gender equality goals. The report makes recommendations for how to undertake a more systematic evaluation of this aspect of DFID's work on gender equality and women's empowerment.

4. EVALUATION

Alsop, R. and Heinsohn, N. (2005) Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3510
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPOWERMENT/Resources/41307_wps3510.pdf

Empowerment can be defined as a person's capacity to make effective choices and to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes. The extent to which a person is empowered is influenced by personal agency (the capacity to make a purposive choice) and opportunity structure (the institutional context in which choice is made). This is the definition of empowerment used in this paper. To determine degrees of empowerment various indicators are suggested: for agency, asset endowments - psychological, informational, organisational, material, social, financial or human; for opportunity structure, the presence and operation of formal and informal institutions, including the laws, regulatory frameworks, and norms governing behaviour. To illustrate how this analytical framework can be used, the paper describes how the framework guided analysis in development interventions in Ethiopia, Nepal, Honduras and Mexico. The paper also presents a draft module for measuring empowerment at the country level. The module can be used alone or be integrated into country-level poverty or governance monitoring systems that seek to add an empowerment dimension to their analysis.

Summary adapted from authors.

Malhotra, Anju, et al. (2002) Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development, World Bank, Gender and Development Group, Washington DC
http://www.icrw.org/docs/MeasuringEmpowerment_workingpaper_802.doc

How can development institutions define and measure women's empowerment? This paper presents a review of current theories and strategies to foster women's empowerment in the development context. It evaluates research to date, and points to areas for future study. The paper defines empowerment as the ability of people to make strategic choices in areas that affect their lives. Two key factors in the process of empowerment are identified: control over resources (the conditions for empowerment) and agency (the ability to formulate choices). Section one outlines the conceptual framework. Section two discusses how empowerment can be measured in practice, with an overview of various frameworks which cover economic, socio-cultural, familial, legal, political and psychological dimensions. The report argues that in practice, measuring empowerment depends on the establishment of universal standards (such as human rights), but at the same time must allow for indicators which are sensitive to context. Section three provides examples of research projects and how they have used these frameworks. Recommendations include: the need to develop a framework that can be used across settings; to address empowerment at the mezzo/community level as well as at the level of the macro (legal/political) and micro (family).

Moghadam, V.M. and Senftova, L. (2005) Measuring Women's Empowerment: Participation And Rights In Civil, Political, Social, Economic, And Cultural Domains, *International Social Science Journal*, **57, 2, pp. 389-412(24)**
http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bpl/issj/2005/00000057/00000002/art00015

There have been many attempts to measure women's empowerment in the development field, but these have had various shortcomings. There is confusion over concepts, a lack of disaggregated data, and limited information on household dynamics. Measurements and indicators to date have focused more on civil and political rights, what are known as 'first generation' human rights, than on 'second generation' economic, social and cultural rights. In this paper, empowerment is defined as a multi-dimensional process of civil, political, social, economic, and cultural participation and rights. To analyse these, a framework using six key domains is presented. These are used to assess women's participation (referring to an active social condition), rights (referring to a formal, legal condition) and capabilities (preconditions for the enjoyment of rights and enhancement of participation). The domains are: socio-demographic indicators, bodily integrity and health, literacy and educational attainment, economic participation and rights, political participation and rights, cultural participation and rights. Indicators include: life expectancy at birth, sexual and physical abuse against women, literacy rates, amount of maternity leave, and number of feminist resources in the print and electronic media.

This publication is available from Ingenta Connect by subscription.
Summary adapted from author.

Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, (1999) Handbook in Gender and Empowerment Assessment, NORAD
http://www.siyanda.org/docs_genie/Norad/NORAD-handboka.doc

NORAD's operational guidelines require assessment of gender consequences to be performed for all NORAD-funded development projects and programmes. This handbook presents a method for Gender Empowerment Assessment (GEA) which records how development projects and programmes affect women and men. It also helps determine the need to follow up the assessment if basic data is missing. GEA uses 10 empowerment factors to assess, compare and discuss project plans, results and impacts on men and women and can be used during all stages of the project cycle. An important goal with the GEA is to contribute to enhanced awareness of gender and equality aspects within development cooperation. The handbook is a supplement to NORAD's Manual for Programme and Project Cycle Management.

Pradhan, B. (2003) Measuring Empowerment: A Methodological Approach, Society for International Development (www.sidint.org) 1011-6370 46:2; 51-57; 033500 Palgrave Macmillan.
http://www.palgrave-journals.com/development/journal/v46/n2/pdf/1110445a.pdf

How do we decide how empowered a woman or a group of women are? Do frequently used socio-economic indicators such as education, income, and labour force participation adequately capture the concept of empowerment? This paper argues that while these quantitative socio-economic measures of empowerment are useful indicators as a first approximation, they are not sensitive enough to capture the nuances of gender power relations. This is because quantitative methods alone are unable to capture the interactive processes through which those in a weaker position strategise ways of gaining from the unequal relationship. Therefore in order to understand the socio-cultural context within which women's behaviour in social interaction and gender relationships takes place, an in-depth anthropological method is essential.

5. CRITIQUES AND DEBATES

Fiedrich, M. and Jellema, A. (2003) Literacy, Gender and Social Agency: Adventures in Empowerment. A Research Report for ActionAid UK
http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/litgenempedpaper53.pdf

The notion of 'empowering' poor and marginalised women has a great deal of commonsense appeal. It may seem obvious that anyone would benefit from increased self-confidence, the ability to act effectively in the public sphere, to control one's income, to plan for the future. Based on a study of four adult education projects in Bangladesh and Uganda, this paper argues by contrast that such 'indicators of empowerment' actually have little bearing on the reality of women's complex strategies for coping. The study focuses on *Reflect,* an approach to participatory adult education which aims to stimulate a wider process of change in individuals and communities. It argues that although participatory approaches are usually presented as a fundamental break with 'top-down' models of development, aid agency reports suggest that *Reflect* participants adopt the very same attitudes and practices long promoted by the development community. There is an obvious contradiction in the uniformity of outcomes reported and development processes which are meant to have become 'participatory' and 'adapted to local needs'. The paper ends by considering other development strategies which may be more effective for empowering women. In particular, it asks whether recent shifts away from a focus on individual empowerment to more politicised concepts such as rights and voice resolve, or simply magnify, these problems.

Goetz, A. and Gupta, R. (1996) Who Takes the Credit? Gender, Power and Control Over Loan Use in Rural Bangladesh, *World Development*, 24: 1

Special credit institutions in Bangladesh have dramatically increased the credit available to poor rural women since the mid-1980s. Though this is intended to contribute to women's empowerment, few evaluations of loan use investigate whether women actually control this credit. Most often, women's continued high demand for loans and high rates of loan repayment are taken as signs of women's empowerment. This paper challenges this assumption by exploring variations in the degree to which women borrowers control their loans directly. A significant proportion of women's loans are controlled and invested by male relatives, while women borrowers bear the liability for repayment. Where men invest loans badly this can undermine household survival strategies, forcing women to mobilise repayment funds from resources which would otherwise be used for consumption or saving purposes. International aid donors bear some responsibility for this process. Donors' interest in seeing the development of financially self-sustaining rural development institutions has resulted in a preoccupation with cost recovery, to the degree that loan repayment rates have become the primary index of success. A new focus is required, which prioritises the *quality* of loan use.

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Gurumurthy, A. (2003) Bridging the Digital Gender Divide: Issues and Insights on ICT for Women's Economic Empowerment
http://www.unifem.org.in/Bridging%20the%20Digital%20Gender%20Divide.htm

The progress in technology has encouraged many in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan to see the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for social transformation and economic growth. Policy documents reflect the hope that software exports will contribute to growth. Governments have stated a commitment to bridge the digital divide, and to this aim have set up information technology taskforces and e-governance initiatives to deliver public services, and have shifted state policy from a monopolistic regime towards a competitive framework. New business models are emerging to alter the economics of hardware and connectivity, targeting rural markets. Some NGOs are using ICTs for development. However many activities and discussions around ICTs for development in the region lack a vision on how to enable women to benefit from ICTs, and interaction between the Gender and Development sector and the ICTs for Development community has been limited. This document looks at specific projects and programmes in the region which focus on women's economic empowerment and draws lessons from these.

Hafez, S. (2003) The Terms of Women's Empowerment: Islamic Women Activists in Egypt, *Cairo Papers in Social Science, 24(4)*

How do Egyptian women find empowerment in Islamism when Islamists are traditionally perceived as the opposers of women's liberation? This study contends that rather than being dominated and oppressed, Islamic women are empowered as a result of their willing submission to higher levels of religious attainment. It focuses on Islamic women activists in Egypt who seek self-perfection as a means of gaining proximity to God. In the pursuit of this goal, they work to enhance the well-being of others so as to become better Muslims – organising training sessions for women, carrying out community projects, educating women in the skills necessary for employment. Through their activism, these women are entering public spheres once exclusively occupied by men and are highly aware that they are contesting male power. Yet for them, empowerment is based not on challenging male authority but from an inner satisfaction derived from helping others. From this perspective, empowerment is not a goal but a tool or method to reach a Muslim ideal. The language of most contemporary feminist scholarship is thus inadequate to describe the work of these women and the nature of their engagement with power. These Islamic women do not see themselves as free individuals who search for independence from unjust male control, but as deeply connected to each other, to the husband and the family, and ultimately to God. Their empowerment is sought *through* these connective relations rather than despite them.

Summary adapted from author.

Kabeer, N. (2005) Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal, *Gender and Development*, 13.1, March 2005

This paper discusses the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on gender equality and women's empowerment and highlights ways in which the indicators associated with this goal – women's access to education, share of non-agricultural wage employment, and political participation – can contribute to women's empowerment. Each of these indicators has the potential to bring about immediate changes in women's lives, along with long-term transformations in patriarchal power structures. But unless provision is

made to ensure that policy changes are implemented in ways that allow women themselves to participate, monitor, and hold policy makers and corporations accountable for their actions, the potential for women's empowerment will be limited. For example, while women's access to education may improve their chances of a good marriage, unless it also provides them with the courage to question unjust practices its potential for change will be limited. Similarly, while women's access to paid work may give them a greater sense of self-reliance and greater purchasing power, if it is undertaken in conditions that damage women's health its costs may outweigh its benefits. The question, therefore, is to what extent the international community is prepared to provide support for women at the grassroots – support which will ensure that they have the collective capacities necessary to participate in the policy process.

To obtain copies, contact Oxfam - Gender and Development journal, 274 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 7DZ, UK or visit http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals.

Kabeer, N. (2005) Is Microfinance a "Magic Bullet" for Women's Empowerment?: Analysis of Findings from South Asia. *Economic and Political Weekly*. **29 October 2005**
http://www.epw.org.in/showIndex.php

Opinions on the impact of microfinance are divided between those who see it as a 'magic bullet' for women's empowerment and others who are dismissive of its abilities as a cure-all panacea for development. This paper examines the empirical evidence on the impact of microfinance with respect to poverty reduction and the empowerment of poor women in South Asia. It becomes apparent that while access to financial services can and does make vital contributions to the economic productivity and social well-being of poor women and their households, it does not 'automatically' empower women. Like other development interventions such as education, political quotas, etc, that seek to bring about the radical structural transformation that true empowerment entails, microfinance presents a range of possibilities rather than a predetermined set of outcomes. Which of these possibilities are realised in practice will be influenced by a host of factors, including the extent the programmes are tailored to the needs and interests of those they are intended to reach, the nature of the relationships which govern their delivery, and the calibre and commitment of the people involved.

Summary adapted from author.

Longwe, S. (2000) Towards Realistic Strategies for Women's Political Empowerment in Africa. *Gender and Development*, **8.3, November 2000**

Current NGO and development agency strategies to support women's political empowerment are based on two assumptions: firstly, that women's increased access to resources, especially education, will lead to their increased representation in political positions; and secondly, that governments are genuinely committed to leading national programmes of action for women's advancement. This article argues that both of these assumptions are seriously mistaken. All development organisations supporting women's empowerment must recognise the true obstacles women face in gaining political power, and develop programme strategies to overcome them. The key problem is the covert and discriminatory systems of male resistance to women who dare to challenge male domination of the present political system.

In addition to focusing on the need to get women into government, NGOs could also usefully support women's organisations that are engaging in direct action – a key strategy which enables women to push for policy changes from outside government.

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Summary adapted from author.

Mayoux, L. (2006) Women's Empowerment through Sustainable Micro-Finance: Rethinking "Best Practice"
http://www.enterprise-impact.org.uk/pdf/WomensEmpowermentthroughSustainableMicrofinance.pdf

Women's access to microfinance services have significantly increased over the past two decades. By enhancing women's ability to earn an income, these programmes have the potential to initiate a series of 'virtuous spirals' of economic empowerment and increased well-being for women and their families. However, this paper challenges assumptions about the automatic benefits of micro-finance for women. For example, high repayment levels by women do not necessarily indicate that they have used the loans themselves. Men may take the loans from women, or women may choose to invest loans according to men's priorities. Likewise, high demand for loans by women may be a sign of social pressure to access resources for in-laws or husbands rather than an indicator of empowerment. Where women are unable to negotiate changes in intra-household and community gender inequalities they may become dependent on loans to continue in low-paid occupations with heavier workloads. However, these shortcomings should not discourage microfinance programmes being undertaken. The experience of current innovations in many programmes indicates a range of ways in which contribution to women's empowerment can be increased. Suggestions include the need to provide services to reduce the burden of unpaid domestic work on women, including childcare, and to ensure that repayment schedules and interest rates reflect the reality of women's economic activities and life cycles.

Mosedale, S. (2005) Policy arena. Assessing Women's Empowerment: Towards a Conceptual Framework, *Journal of International Development,* **17, 2: 243-257. Wiley Interscience**
http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/jissue/109931317

When policymakers and practitioners decide that 'empowerment'— usually of women or the poor — is a development goal, what do they mean? And how do they determine the extent to which it has been achieved? Presumably if we want to see people empowered we consider them to be currently disempowered i.e. disadvantaged by the way power relations presently shape their choices, opportunities and well-being. If this is what we mean then we would benefit from being better informed about the debates which have shaped and refined the concept of power and its operation. This paper briefly reviews how women's empowerment has been discussed within development studies, how the concept of power was debated and refined during the second half of the twentieth century and how power relations might be described and evaluated in a particular context. A conceptual framework of empowerment is then proposed which is based on women identifying their contextualised gender constraints, and the process by which women redefine and extend what is possible for them to be and do.

Summary adapted from author.

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Parpart, J. L., Rai, S. and Staudt, K. (2002) Rethinking Empowerment: Gender and Development in a Global/Local World. London: Routledge

It is often assumed that women's empowerment is best pursued at a local level, through grassroots participatory methods. While a welcome antidote to the development community's long-standing preference for state-led, top-down development, this focus on the local tends to underplay the impact of global and national forces on prospects for poor people's – especially women's – empowerment. This book calls for a new approach to empowerment, which recognises that empowerment approaches are always embedded in institutional structures and must be understood at that level. It argues for a clearer understanding of power, and rejects the simple opposition between those who have power and those who do not. Instead, it is important to think about language, meanings, identities and cultural practices when considering women's empowerment. Furthermore, empowerment should be understood as a process as well as an outcome. While attempts to evaluate outcomes in quantifiable terms are important, the achievement of stated goals cannot be taken as proof of individual or group empowerment. Instead, both the process and outcomes of empowerment should be seen as unpredictable – rather than as linear, inevitable and easily understood.

Rai, S. (2002) Political Representation, Democratic Institutions and Women's Empowerment. The Quota Debate in India, in J. Parpart, S. Rai & K. Staudt (eds.), *Rethinking Empowerment: Gender and Development in a Global/Local World*, **pp. 133-146. London: Routledge**

The debate on national quotas in India has reflected disquiet about the perceived elitism of 'the women's movement', and has challenged women's groups to address issues of difference among women based on class and caste. This chapter argues that the issue of power must be taken into account: empowerment of whom, by whom, through what and for what? There is also the issue of priorities – the question of whether this engagement with the state is appropriate at a time when the pressures of globalisation and liberalisation are increasing social inequalities within the country. Surely any debate on women's empowerment should focus on questions about improving women's life-chances rather than increasing their political representation? Most significantly, the Indian case shows that there is no simple correlation between an enhanced visibility of women in political institutions and a sense of empowerment of women in the country in general. The question of empowerment cannot be disassociated from the question of relations of power within different socio-political systems. The debates on empowerment, and attempts to put them into practice, need to be opened up to these questions.

Sullivan, O. (2004) Changing Gender Practices within the Household: A Theoretical Perspective, *Gender and Society,* **18, 2: 207-222**
http://gas.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/18/2/207

While much attention has been focused on transforming gender relations in the public sphere, changes in the domestic sphere have been less fully addressed in the theoretical literature. This paper explores the idea of 'doing gender' – understood as the interactions between men and women in the domestic sphere, which bring about transformations in gender relations. It is the interface between these daily interactive processes of change and changes at the level of ideology or 'gender consciousness' which underpins the approach proposed by this paper. Women and men's day-to-day negotiations and struggles around the domestic division of labour should be understood within such a framework, as part of a wider social process that involves slow transformative changes in consciousness and practice.

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