How is Gender Relevant to Development? Key Insights and Practical Tips

The integration of gender into research can feel like a new challenge for researchers in Higher Education (HE). The international development sector has, however, been learning about the ways that gender is relevant in all aspects of poverty alleviation and development for several decades.

As part of the University of Edinburgh genderED project Integrating Gender into GCRF Bids: Getting to Sufficiency we have produced several thematic summaries describing how gender is relevant to different development themes, such as the environment or economic development. These guides are intended to support HE researchers who are tackling these challenges for the first time. This document provides:

1. **a simplified and abridged** summary of over four decades of learning that has taken place within the development and humanitarian sector, about the **relevance of gender in development; and**
2. a simplified and abridged summary of best practices **to tackle gender issues in development projects**.

It aims to provide a starting point for **researchers unused to including gender issues in their own work** and provides some links to more detailed resources.

Learning about Gender (In)equality in the Development Sector

Development practitioners have learned through experience that **women are over represented amongst the world's poor, that they suffer more gender based violence and that they have less control over resources** (UN Women, 2014). This **makes them more vulnerable to disasters and shocks and makes it harder for them to exit cycles of poverty** (Kabeer, 2015; Care International, 2019). Failure to understand the full implications of gender inequalities in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMIC) countries has in the past meant that development projects inadvertently deepened gender inequalities (Ahmed, 2005; Kabeer, 2015, 2016). Approaches to taking gender into account in development projects have, as a result, evolved over time.

During the 1970s the dominant approaches to gender equality in development, often called 'Women in Development' or 'Women and Development', prioritised women's inclusion in the economic system as a route to improved collective economic welfare. In this way, development interventions during this period tended to depict women as agents of development, rather than beneficiaries in and of themselves. Thus, these kinds of interventions did not focus heavily on the intrinsic value of gender equality or its pursuit. Critics, particularly women in LMICs raised several arguments against this approach. Firstly, they argued against 'using' women to achieve wider economic goals. Secondly, they criticised the simplistic assumption that all women experienced the same inequalities (Cotzee *et al.*, 2002). Thirdly, critics argued that these approaches overrode the concerns of *women in developing countries,* who may identify economic and social exploitation from external countries or powers (i.e.

colonial legacies[i]) as a more serious problem than gender inequalities in their own societies (Mohanty, Russo and Torres, 1991).

During the 1980s responses to these critiques led to a conceptual shift away from simply focusing on 'women', to thinking more about the ways that gender inequalities vary in different socio-cultural local contexts (Oyemumi, 1997). This paved the way for the current paradigm, Gender and Development (GAD). This means that development practitioners now focus on social expectations concerning appropriate behaviour for the sexes, the ways that they vary from culture to culture and the dynamics holding them in place (see 'Key Terms' below).

Methodologies stemming from the Gender and Development paradigm also emphasise **drawing on local knowledge and perspectives to identify priorities for development policy and projects** (Kabeer, 2015).

Key Terms

Gender - Gender is a social scientific term used to describe shared social ideals of femininity and masculinity, associated behavioural expectations and relations between the sexes. These shared ideas vary across time and place, and between cultures. They are reproduced in individuals (e.g. gender identity), institutions and wider society. The two most common gender identities are 'man' and 'woman'. Transgender and non-binary gender identities are however becoming increasingly visible. We use 'people of all genders' as an inclusive term, in keeping with UKRI language.

Sex - Sex is biologically determined and refers to reproductive organs and characteristics. Male and female are the most common sexes, although a small proportion of the population has intersex characteristics.

Intersectionality - intersectionality is a social scientific term used to draw attention to the ways that different identity markers (such as race, caste, disability, age, migration status, or sexuality) intersect with one another to structure privileges and disadvantages.

Gender and the Eradication of Poverty

In parallel, development practitioners have noted specific patterns in economic growth. The income of the world's population has grown markedly since the late 80s with one striking exception – **the bottom 5% of people whose income has remained static** (Milanovic, 2012). This phenomenon has led development practitioners to argue for a strong focus on the needs of the absolute poorest and for analysis of the reasons that growth and wealth has been so inequitably distributed (Kabeer, 2015; Rethinking Research Collaborative, 2017; Cochrane and Rao, 2019). These analyses have led to a recognition that tackling gender inequality as a cause of poverty, is an essential strategy in the eradication of global poverty (UN Women, 2014, p. 12).

Current Best Practice in the Development Sector

As a result, current best practice in the development sector entails taking account of: 1) the ways in which unequal relations *between* men and women in politics, economy and culture shape poverty and inequalities; and, 2) how these unequal relations between men and women in politics, economy and culture, shape the benefits that different people might derive from the development process (Kabeer, 2015; Oxfam, 2019).

UK legal and international frameworks for development reflect this learning. The International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 stipulates that UK development assistance should contribute to the reduction of poverty in ways that are likely to contribute *to the reduction of inequalities between individuals of different genders*. The UN Sustainable Development Goals have commitment to the promotion of gender equality embedded across all of the 17 goals, in addition to the standalone gender equality goal. This means that goals, for example, to ensure access to affordable and clean energy include a commitment to gender equality in access to affordable and clean energy.

Current approaches therefore do not entail a focus solely on women. Rather they focus on the relations and hierarchies between the sexes (i.e. 'gender relations') and the practices, structures and institutions that constitute them (i.e. the gendering effects of institutions (see Krook and Mackay, 2011)). Current approaches also consider the importance of intersectionality (see key terms above), and of non-binary genders, with an increasing focus on LGBTQI issues (LGBT Net Denmark, 2012).

Planning Development Projects: Practical Tips

Gender Sensitive Situational Analysis

Building on this long sector wide learning process, current practice in the development sector includes carrying out a gender sensitive situational analysis at the planning phase of any project. A gender sensitive situational analysis is an analysis of **how gender shapes important socio-economic dynamics such as access to resources and decision-making and distribution of roles** within the local context**.** These shape experiences of poverty and routes out of it. In turn, this can affect the 'Theory of Change' underlying a project, that is, the way a development project is intended to have a positive effect (DFID PPA Learning Partnership Gender Group, 2015a). **Gender sensitive situational analysis** is, as a result, often part of **initial project planning within the development sector** and is used to **shape the priorities** for development projects.

Gender sensitive situational analysis involves gathering information from local communities to understand local socio-economic context and local priorities. It is often undertaken using participatory methods (such as focus groups) that allow local communities, and especially women, to influence and steer development priorities (Chambers, 1994; Rethinking Research Collaborative, 2015; Cornwall, 2016; Oxfam, 2019).

In the development sector, gender sensitive situational analysis can be very complex and specific. For example, some toolkits are geared to specific themes of development such as agriculture or climate change (see examples of gender sensitive situational analysis toolkits below). At its simplest level, however, **gender sensitive situational analysis usually takes account of three broad factors:**

- **access to decision-making;**
- **access to and control over resources; and**
- **gendered divisions of labour.**

Gender sensitive situational analysis involves considering these three factors *as they are relevant to the project at hand and the country and/or community where it will take place.* For example, in relation to access to clean and affordable energy this may include asking: what level of influence women and men have in decision making over local sources of energy and fuel; what degree of access to or control do men and women have over energy resources (e.g. who owns or buys fuels and controls its use?);

and what are the divisions of labour between men and women in the provision of energy (e.g. who collects fuel, who uses what and to what purpose, who benefits from it and who may suffer the effects of having to use dirty fuels?). Participatory approaches to gather this kind of need to be adequately resourced and carefully designed in order to create a safe environment where participants can voice their views and needs (Chambers, 1994). In small-scale GCRF/Newton Fund research projects running on short timescales fully implementing this approach may not be possible. In view of this, the University of Edinburgh's toolkit (see below) provides guidance on how to undertake a basic gender sensitive situational analysis sufficient for a GCRF/Newton Fund project application.

Examples of gender sensitive situational analysis toolkits:

- Care International. 2019. Handbook Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis Version 2.0
- Bridge Gender and Development Research Information, Institute for Development Studies. n.d. The Gender Analysis Framework
- Feed the Future USAid n.d. Gender Integration Framework and guidance
- Feed the Future USAid. n.d. "Harvard Analytical Framework Activity Profile Tool" (p.32)
- Oxfam Novib. 2014. "Gender Action Learning System"

Literature Review to Identify Relevant Gender Issues

Literature review, including practitioner publications from well respected NGOs and development organisations such as UNDP, UN Women, Christian Aid, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and Oxfam can also help to identify relevant gender issues and guide the gender sensitive design of projects. These kinds of well-respected development organisations often have high quality in-house research capacity so that insights from 'the front line' and 'on the ground' can be shared easily and quickly (see examples of high quality NGO online resources below). These publications often **centre the voices of the communities directly affected by development interventions.**

Drawing on the perspectives of local communities in LMIC countries, either through participatory approaches or by using resources supplied by the development sector, can be quite challenging for HE researchers in some disciplines, who are unused to these approaches. In some disciplines, particularly science technology engineering and mathematics (STEM), researchers may have been trained to distance themselves from the object of study and the human factors surrounding it (Collins, 1990, p. 205). As result, including this kind of 'local knowledge' and attempting to tackle problems 'in context' **can challenge HE researchers' preconceptions of what constitutes reliable knowledge and good research**.

However, these kinds of publications, produced by development sector organisations constitute a valuable resource for HE researchers who are not well versed in current practices and priorities in international development, who have not worked in LMIC countries, and/or who are not familiar with gender issues in development. Such publications **are often publicised through knowledge databases or the resources sections on the web pages of NGOS** who are keen to share their knowledge and experiences as widely as possible. Relevant resources can usually be found by combining relevant search terms either through the resource databases of development organisations or a simple Google search. This is the case even when seeking resources on gender issues in specific technical fields such as, for example, energy planning, Disaster Risk Reduction, or agricultural technological development (see for example Carr and Hartl, 2010; UNDP, 2013; ICUN Global Gender Office, 2018).

Examples of High Quality NGO Online Resources

- UNDP Research and Publications
- UN Women Digital Library
- Christian Aid Policy and Practice Resources
- Oxfam Resources
- Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) Publications
- Practical Action Knowledge Centre

Involving Local Women's Civil Society

Local women's civil society and gender equality campaigners based in target LMICs can also often offer high quality, locally relevant, experienced-based insights, which may be highly specific to your area of research even when it is very technical (e.g. construction or IT). Consulting these kinds of organisations is important for two reasons. Firstly, it is well documented that women are often excluded from 'mainstream' political processes and professional and civil society organisations such as trade unions (Buskens and Webb, 2009; David, 2015; DFID PPA Learning Partnership Gender Group, 2015b; Hemachandra, Amaratunga and Haigh, 2018). **Only consulting 'mainstream', 'gender blind' or purportedly 'gender neutral' civil society organisations risks duplicating the failures of early development interventions that did not take full account of the exclusion of women, and how gender hierarchies maintain cycles of poverty** (UN Women, 2014; Kabeer, 2015).

Collaboration with such organisations can help to quickly identify local gender equality goals and issues and prevent unnecessary duplication of information gathering/consultation. These kinds of organisations can often be found by drawing on the networks of gender and development experts (see below) or can be identified through discussions with existing local partners. Women's civil society/gender equality campaigners can also **support gender sensitive dissemination strategies** to ensure that the results of research projects are shared as equitably as possible.

Including Gender Experts: Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Similarly, publications and expertise from scholars specialising in gender can make a significant contribution to the design of your project. GenderED the University of Edinburgh's hub for the study of gender and sexualities provides a searchable database of gender experts based at Edinburgh. It is important however to include this kind of expertise in the **early stages of your project design**, rather than as a last minute add-on, for two reasons. Firstly, inter-disciplinary research is time consuming as researchers with different disciplinary assumptions take time to understand each other's priorities and attitudes to excellence (Lyall and Fletcher, 2013); secondly, as explained above, current best practice development models strongly recommend that gender issues be included at the outset of a project whilst goals are being formulated.

Our Toolkit

The University of Edinburgh recognises that including gender in GCRF/Newton Fund applications presents new challenges to HE researchers and has sought to provide resources to help Principal Investigators and Research Managers tackle these new challenges. Our Toolkit 'Developing your GCRF Gender Equality Statement provides a **simplified version of gender sensitive situational analysis and tips on literature review, and applies them directly to the GCRF's 5 point Gender Equality Statement, which is now a compulsory part of all GCRF/Newton Fund applications**. This guide provides a concise

practical process, which will help Principal Investigators respond to the new requirement for a Gender Equality Statement.

Attributions

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[i] Colonialism, and its legacies are the subject of a very large body of research spanning history, science and technology studies, politics, literature, art and much more (Giddens, 1987; Mills, 1997; Mohanty, 2003; Collins and Bilge, 2016; Emejulu and Sobande, 2019). Broadly speaking, the term colonialism refers to practices of domination, which involve the subjugation of one people to another. The cultural and political legacies of European countries' practices of invasion, slavery and economic exploitation spanning the sixteenth to the twentieth century, include continued poverty in 'developing' countries and racial hierarchies. These legacies are frequently encountered in development interventions and partnerships (Mohanty, Russo and Torres, 1991; Mohanty, 2003; de Jong, 2017).