

EQUALITY FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN

Research that is blind to the various forms of social inequity such as gender discrimination can reinforce inequity and inequality.

— IDRC, Corporate Strategy and Program Framework 2005–2010, CS, para. 59

Every International Women's Day, we pause and celebrate the progress already made toward equality and justice for women and girls. The occasion also reminds us that fighting for women's rights is not a seasonal effort, but is a year-round and long-term challenge.

Gender matters. Whether you are female or male may influence your chances of going to school, of choosing your own spouse, of finding a decent job, of starting a business, or getting into politics.

IDRC recognizes that equality for girls and women is critical to development efforts. If the talents and energy of half the world's people are squandered, everybody pays a price.

IDRC has always confronted this kind of prejudice as a crosscutting theme in all its support for research. In 2006 IDRC added a clear focus to its programming by creating its Women's Rights and Citizenship program to support research that addresses the needs of poor and marginalized women and that engages meaningfully in policy debates.

Our goal remains to achieve a world where all women are first-class citizens and equal partners in development and decision-making — the whole year round.



Maureen O'Neil
President, IDRC

THE LANDSCAPE OF LAND TENURE

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights upheld the right of women to own land and property. In the years since, the calls for equity in tenure have become more frequent and the voices louder, yet women's access to and control over land and other natural resources continue to be limited in many parts of the world. This, in turn, restricts their access to credit and to power.

There are many reasons why legislation has been largely ineffective: conflicts between land tenure and

other laws, weak institutions to enforce laws and protect women's rights, and customary practices that are biased against women, among others. Most rural women also lack the education, time, or funds to fight for their rights.

Recognizing the importance of the issue, in 2005 IDRC commissioned a series of scoping studies to identify gaps in research on women's access. The studies focused on reviews of the nexus between gender and land tenure in sub-regions across Asia,



IDRC: Jason Taylor

INDIA'S MISSING DAUGHTERS

During the past two decades, 10 million girls have gone "missing" in India. Although the use of ultrasound technology to identify female fetuses — an illegal practice — is usually blamed for the missing millions, an IDRC-supported study shows that many factors are at work. Neglect of girls, whether passive or willed, continues to be a "killer." "The resulting imbalance in the male/female ratio of India's population is likely to have profound impacts," says researcher Dr Prabhat Jha.

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Africa, and Latin America. In addition to examining the gender, social, and power relations that govern tenure, the studies reviewed research capacities and analyzed the key elements of research agendas in each region. As a follow-up, a project is being developed to probe more deeply in a number of countries to recommend policy interventions and practical ways of supporting women's secure access to land.

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THE CASE FOR REPARATIONS

What happens to women who are harassed, sexually assaulted, or detained under authoritarian regimes or during violent conflict? What happens to those women who play a crucial role in the aftermath of violence, searching for victims or their remains, trying to reconstitute families and communities, and carrying on the tasks of memory and the demand for justice?

Although women are doubly victimized in times of political turmoil, they are often marginalized when it comes to post-conflict reparations schemes. In fact, many forms of violence, such as sexual and reproductive violence, forced “marital” unions, and different forms of domestic enslavement, have not been adequately recognized as human rights violations — and have been left out of reparations programs.

“Women (also) must own the reparations process, especially when it is conceived as a way of giving due recognition to victims, both male and female,” says Ruth Rubio-Marín, of the International Center for Transitional Justice and editor of *What Happened to the Women? Gender and Reparations for Human Rights Violations*. Published by the Social Science Research Council with IDRC support, the study calls for the inclusion of a gender dimension into reparations programs. It states that gender-insensitive planning and policy delivery can undermine chances for peacebuilding, reconciliation, and development in the aftermath of violence.

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CHILDREN ON THE FRONT LINE

The United Nations reports that armed conflict, more than any other force, is transforming the lives of millions of children and women. Children and their families are not just getting caught in the crossfire; many are being targeted through forced displacement and recruitment into armed groups.

Girls and women, boys and men experience these conflicts differently. Although men and boys are more frequently killed, girls and women face gender-specific impacts such as early and sometimes forced marriage, rape, and forced impregnation. Despite this, survivors of conflict demonstrate incredible resiliency as well as coping and survival skills both during and after conflict. Girls and women are notable in taking on multiple roles, such as combatant, head of household, mother, and breadwinner.

Northern Uganda, eastern Uganda, and southern Sudan are home to some of the world’s most entrenched conflicts. Research supported by IDRC in 2006 on forced recruitment of girls into armed forces in these regions documented patterns of abduction and slavery. It also generated important information on issues hindering the re-integration of girls into society, particularly protection under national and international laws.

Project leader Dr. Dyan Mazurana of Tufts University says, “to understand the kind of war economies and what is at the foundation of these conflicts and how they operate, we absolutely have to pay attention to the role of youth — boys and girls.” The information gathered will enable policymakers to respond to the most pressing issues currently facing the region.

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BEYOND VICTIMS AND VILLAINS

Why have HIV and AIDS prevention efforts in southern Africa failed to produce the expected results?

An answer may be emerging from research supported by IDRC since 1997 when the non-governmental research organization CIET focused on what it called “male resilience” in the prevention of sexual violence: why some men do not rape. The findings surprised researchers. Many participants in south Johannesburg, the location of the research project, considered rape to be normal, almost expected.

In 2002/2003, IDRC and UNICEF supported CIET’s national survey of school children, which confirmed the idea of a “culture of sexual violence” running through South African society. Many young participants did not believe that condoms could protect them against HIV; most would not discuss their HIV status with their families; and one in every 10 said they would deliberately spread HIV if they ever contracted it. Victims of sexual abuse were much more likely to express these views. With around 10% of school children forced to have sex every year, this is worrying for AIDS prevention.

IDRC-supported CIET research in South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Botswana (2004–2007) showed that some people have very limited ability to adopt prevention measures. For example, nearly one third of women said they could not insist on condom use, although they suspected their partner might be infected.

Dr Neil Andersson, who led CIET’s research, describes these women as “choice disabled.”

“The one in three who is perhaps most vulnerable to HIV infection is unable to act on prevention decisions. As a human rights issue, this is appalling and will frustrate efforts to control the epidemic. We should think about this as a reservoir of HIV infection that is missed entirely by current AIDS prevention strategies.”

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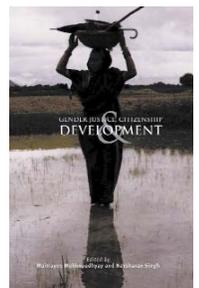
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NEW PUBLICATION

“... for every right that has been established, there are millions of women who do not enjoy it.”

From *Gender Justice, Citizenship & Development*, edited by Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay and Navsharan Singh, co-published by IDRC and Zubaan, 2007.



Read full-text online at www.idrc.ca/en/ev-108814-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html