



# Empowerment: A journey not a destination



**pathways**  
of women's  
empowerment



For further information on the research see [www.pathways-of-empowerment.org](http://www.pathways-of-empowerment.org) or email [pathways@ids.ac.uk](mailto:pathways@ids.ac.uk)

The Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Programme Consortium was established in 2006 funded by UKaid from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Pathways received co-funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that enabled the programme to expand to include countries in conflict, post-conflict and crisis situations in our Middle East, South Asia and West Africa regional hubs. Additional funding for Pathways projects and activities has come from a variety of donors, including the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida, NORAD, GTZ, IDRC, UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNICEF, the Rockefeller Foundation, BRAC, Comic Relief, the Arts Council, Screen South, the National Lottery and the Brazilian Government. The views and recommendations in this report do not necessarily represent those of our development partners or funders.



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# Contents



# Pathways



**P**athways of Women's Empowerment (Pathways) is an international research and communications programme that has focused for the last five years on understanding and influencing efforts to bring about positive change in women's lives.

### Who we are

Pathways links centres of excellence in women's studies and gender and development in Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia, West Africa and the UK, working in partnership with UN Women. Pathways received funding from the UK

Department for International Development (DFID) and co-funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that enabled the programme to expand to include countries in conflict, post-conflict and crisis situations in our Middle East, South Asia and West Africa regional hubs. Additional funding for Pathways projects and activities has come from a variety of donors, including the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida, NORAD, GTZ, IDRC, UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNICEF, the Rockefeller Foundation, BRAC, Comic

Relief, the Arts Council, Screen South, the National Lottery and the Brazilian Government.

Under the directorship of Andrea Cornwall of Sussex University, Pathways is co-ordinated by the Institute of Development Studies, UK and collectively managed. Around 60 academic-activists belong to the Pathways network, and are involved in Pathways projects on issues of economic, legal and political empowerment, sexuality and reproductive rights, movement building and advocacy for women's rights. Pathways benefits from an advisory group of distinguished feminist activists and scholars.

Four regional hubs co-ordinate research, policy engagement and communications activities:

- BRAC Development Institute, BRAC University, Bangladesh – convenor: Maheen Sultan, for work in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan
- Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA),

University of Ghana – convenor: Takyiwaa Manuh, for work in Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone

- Nucleus for Interdisciplinary Women's Studies, Federal University of Bahia, Brazil – convenor: Cecilia Sardenberg, for work in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica
- Social Research Center, American University in Cairo – convenor: Hania Sholkamy, for work in Egypt, Palestine, Sudan.

Global institutions and international policy arenas have been a site for research as well as advocacy in work led by Rosalind Eyben. Global policy spaces are those where ideas and norms about approaches to development are proposed, defended and contested. A number of those working in international aid agencies have taken part in Rosalind's research both as researchers and contributors to workshops.

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**‘What we are exploring is an entirely different approach: one that is framed by lived experience rather than stereotypes; one that can countenance contradictions and celebrate plural visions and versions of empowerment that fit with the contexts in which they are voiced; and one that can reframe empowerment in ways that restore its power as a concept to serve the struggle for a more just and equal world.’<sup>1</sup> Andrea Cornwall, Pathways Director**

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**‘The way Pathways is structured [has] provided great scope for capacity building (being able to send people for training on statistical analysis; or using digital technology, etc) which an individual project could do on a very limited scale.’<sup>5</sup>**

**Sohela Nazneen,  
Associate Professor,  
University of Dhaka**

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### **Ways of working**

Together, we have developed a ‘Pathways way of working’ that emphasises principles of democracy, transparency and solidarity. Rather than commission individuals or institutions to carry out particular pieces of research, we have sought to build a network with multiple, horizontal links between partners. Each of the core partners acts as a ‘regional hub’, selecting their own partners and establishing agendas and activities appropriate to their region. The Pathways team at the Institute of Development Studies co-ordinates activities linking the hubs, and works with a team of dedicated

communications officers in each hub to manage a programme of communications. Pathways team members work, in turn, with a constellation of feminist scholars, women’s organisations and policy actors in the field of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

### **Our research**

Pathways began with the issues that have been at the heart of feminist research and advocacy: women’s work and access to employment and an independent income; women’s sexualities and intimate relationships; and women’s voice and engagement in political institutions and processes. Through a process

that involved dialogues with policy actors, researchers and civil society organisations in scoping workshops and thematic review activities emerged a series of collaborative, cross-hub working groups. These focused on the issues that had surfaced as priorities from our discussions with those working for change on the ground in our different regions, and in global policy arenas:

- Empowering work
- Building constituencies for justice and equality
- Changing narratives of sexuality
- Conceptualising empowerment.

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**‘Being a part of Pathways has given us the opportunity to dare, to brave into unconventional forms of doing research and giving voice to women.’<sup>2</sup>**

**Cecilia Sardenberg, Pathways Latin America Hub  
Convener**

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**‘Pathways gave me the opportunity to be part of a learning process in which I have been able to complicate and enrich my understanding of concepts and terms that are important to both academics and policymakers who are concerned with women’s rights, gender justice, and feminism. Terms I have in mind are empowerment of women, equality, the very category of women, women’s rights, and of course gender.’<sup>3</sup>** Mulki Al-Sharmani, Assistant Professor, Social Research Center, American University in Cairo

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The thematic groups provided a cross-hub mechanism for collaborative exchange and comparative research between the hubs, creating a strong South–South forum for intellectual exchange and providing important opportunities for collaboration, influence and engagement. Each group produced a series of more closely specified research agendas, grounded in dialogue with policy actors and a substantive review of the evidence. It was around these agendas for change that a series of specific projects was structured.

Methodology workshops, online exchanges and other capacity development activities

brought the thematic groups together around research design, analysis, and writing. Our emphasis from the very start was to seek creative combinations of methods that could generate insights from different angles and at different degrees of depth and breadth. Surveys involving up to 5,000 respondents were designed to explore aspects of women’s work, the trustworthiness of their findings strengthened by life historical and semi-structured interviews, and by a rigorous process of questionnaire design led by working group convenor Naila Kabeer. Ethnographic research allowed researchers to get inside institutions and

processes, and get to grips with what people were experiencing. A range of interview techniques was employed, from key informant interviews to focus groups. Our methodological repertoire included digital stories, participatory visualisation methods and participatory photography.

The strength of the evidence we present here comes from the complementarities between these diverse methodologies. Recognising that the most reliable knowledge is that based on triangulation between different methods, methodologies and researchers, and that different methods are needed to investigate different

phenomena and processes, we have sought in what we present here to make the very best use of the spectrum of methodological approaches that the social sciences offer. The quality of our insights comes precisely from this.

## Themes

Much of Pathways research addresses the key questions that were framed in our initial process of review and dialogue, deepened with sub-questions that have evolved in the process of enquiry:

- Empowering work – what is it about work that makes it empowering, and what

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**‘I participated in a training session on taking life histories, run by Ann Whitehead and held in Ghana in December 2007. Although I had done qualitative research in the field quite a bit, the training session proved invaluable and taught me many techniques**

**I had never realised I could use.’**

**Ayesha Khan, Senior Researcher, Collective for Social Science Research**

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**‘The flexibility DFID gave us with programme design meant we could create funds for strategic influencing activities. This gave us the scope to respond rapidly to emerging opportunities. For example, we were able to sponsor international participation from Rwanda, Bangladesh and the International Parliamentary Union in Brussels to attend an event hosted in Brazil’s National Congress on quota reform as the Congress debated reforms to the political system.’** Andrea Cornwall, Pathways Director

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could be done to make working more empowering for women? What are marginalised women workers doing to organise themselves to claim rights and recognition? And how do women who work and generate independent incomes experience power in their homes, their intimate relationships and in their interactions with society?

- Building constituencies for equality and justice – what enables and constrains women in their pathways into politics? Where and how have women been able to be successful in changing policies and laws in favour of women’s empowerment – and what does it take for

these changes to have positive effects on women’s lives? How does women’s ‘voice’ translate into influence that brings about change in favour of greater justice and equality for all?

- Changing narratives of sexuality – how is women’s sexuality represented in the media and everyday life? What might be done to address restrictive and discriminatory attitudes to women, on the grounds of sexuality, that have knock-on effects in the workplace, in politics and in women’s public and private lives?
- Conceptualising empowerment – what meanings and practices are associated with the idea of

‘empowerment’? How is empowerment represented in policies, programmes and popular culture? And what can we learn from the way women themselves experience empowerment to inform advocacy and action, and representations of women’s empowerment that can be more empowering for women?

Over the five-year period, other themes have arisen. We have become especially aware of the extent to which culture matters for women’s empowerment. Our work has revealed the significance of the values and norms of everyday life in shaping women’s self-perceptions and men’s attitudes towards women and women’s

empowerment, and in bounding their actions. It has also shown the tremendous influence on women of the cultures of public, political and religious institutions, as well as forms of popular culture – music, radio and television programmes and films – that are very much part of women’s lives in many of the contexts in which we work.

One of the most significant and promising new directions for work on women’s empowerment arises from this recognition of the significance of culture in shaping women’s imaginations of the possible, and challenging as well as reinforcing stereotypes.



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**‘The wonderful thing about Pathways is that it’s liberating to be part of this network, and ... rather than having been shoe-horned into a box that says you must get from point A to point B, to really work through a process of empowerment, of self-empowerment as well. [At the beginning] I would not have been able to promise Pathways that four years into the project we would have been able to get 55,000 families involved as part of a government-funded CCT [conditional cash transfer] programme that we have designed.’<sup>4</sup>**

**Hania Sholkamy, Pathways Middle East Hub Convenor**

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# Pathways

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**‘This research programme has given an opportunity for intellectual engagement among scholars from different countries which has enriched debates and produced critical knowledge regarding women’s voice and empowerment.’<sup>6</sup>  
Eileen Kuttab, Assistant Professor in Sociology, Institute of Women’s Studies,  
Birzeit University**

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# Introduction

In 2006, in response to a call from the British Government's Department for International Development for proposals for a research programme consortium that would investigate what works to support women's empowerment, a diverse international network of researchers came together to explore how positive change happens in women's lives. We set out to broaden the existing scope of development research on women's empowerment.

Many of us had long-standing involvement with activism and policy, and saw in the turn to women's empowerment the promise of refocusing development agencies on the glaring inequities that exist between women's and men's earning power, political power, power over their bodies and power to make choices about their lives. Yet we were also concerned with the mounting evidence suggesting that the ways development agencies were

operationalising women's empowerment was doing little to address the underlying causes of disempowerment.

## Studying change

Pathways set about the challenge of discovering what works to bring about positive change in women's lives. We looked at policies and programmes explicitly designed to enhance women's empowerment. We investigated other drivers of change such as the impact of the move into paid work by larger numbers of women. And we explored the empowering (and disempowering) effects of broader social and economic changes, identifying emerging influences on women's lives – and finding, in the process, some unexpected results. Our approach drew on a panorama of disciplinary perspectives from economics to cultural studies, psychology to musicology. Alongside survey data sets and ethnographic accounts, we produced short films, photography exhibitions and a popular music DVD. Taking a

multi-methods approach opened up new avenues for enquiry, enriching our understandings of women's empowerment and of what it takes to foster positive change.

## Empowerment as a journey

Five years on, Pathways has generated a rich and varied portfolio of studies: over 825 outputs, of which around 135 are journal articles, 85 are working papers or research reports, and around 170 are popular media – newspaper articles, documentary films, or photography exhibitions. Our findings have led us to understand women's empowerment as a journey, not a destination. Understanding what enables women to embark on these journeys, what pathways are available to them, which routes they take, and what assists them along the way is essential if we are to support women to empower themselves. Our work points to the importance of creating an enabling environment for





women's empowerment. The overwhelming conclusion from the body of evidence that we have accumulated in this period is that a broader transformative model that addresses the structural constraints that women face in their everyday lives is the most effective framework for women's empowerment in the long term.

### **Organising for change**

An overarching finding from our work is the significance of organising for women's empowerment. Organising is a major route to change and a key

pathway of empowerment. Women's organisations and movements are vital in building constituencies for gender justice. For women in low-paid, undervalued jobs, organising provides opportunities to gain rights and recognition and is vital in their struggles for empowerment. Women's organising has an important role to play in governance, holding states to account for their commitments, and monitoring implementation of laws and policies affecting women; as in the example of Pathways Brazil's work monitoring the new domestic

violence legislation. Pathways research shows that gains that have been achieved in relation to women's sexual and reproductive rights are substantially due to women's organising, at the local, national and transnational level. Supporting women's organising can transform pathways of empowerment into pathways to justice and equality.

### **Making policies work for women**

Our research shows that interventions directly focusing on women's political, economic and legal empowerment, and on enhancing women's sexual and reproductive rights, provide an important resource for those who are struggling for change on the ground. However, our findings make clear that no policy intervention or legislative measure can bring about women's empowerment in and of itself. Policy changes need to be accompanied by actions that support women's capacities to engage politically and the ability and willingness of institutions to respond to women's demands. These include support for women's organisations and other civil society actors to monitor the implementation of

policies, and to hold the state and other authorities to account to deliver on their commitments to women.

### **Diverse pathways**

Pathways of women's empowerment are diverse, and highly contextual: what works in one context to transform women's lives will not necessarily produce the same effects in another. Primary education and microcredit, often promoted as simple ways to achieve women's empowerment, are revealed in our research as much more contingent on time as well as place. In Ghana, for example, due to changes in the labour market, education is no longer as reliable a route out of poverty as it once was. In Egypt the legal reform *Khul* (a type of no-fault divorce where women give up any financial rights in exchange for the divorce) offers a new route out of difficult marriages for some women. Families are commonly seen as obstacles to women's political involvement. However, our research in Brazil and Bangladesh shows that the opposite can be the case; women's husbands and relatives can be an enabling factor in their political careers.



possibility. As women come to see themselves differently, they can begin to confront and overcome obstacles in their everyday lives. Working with women's empowerment calls for working with women's imaginations as well as with material aspects of their lives, and for changing the way women see themselves and are seen by others.

### Report structure

This report is organised around 12 key messages emerging from across the diversity of studies and interventions supported by the Pathways programme.

These messages have emerged from an iterative and innovative synthesis process. The synthesis process has involved the analysis of around 825 outputs, derived from 55 projects in 15 countries. This process sought both to systematise key findings, triangulating across different sources of evidence and different modes of analysis, and to ground these findings in a scan of the current policy context, so as to optimise the accessibility of findings to those who can make the most use of emerging insights in their efforts to bring about positive change in women's lives.

### Relationships matter

Our work points to a missing piece in approaches to women's empowerment: *relationships*. Women's relationships with kin, colleagues, intimate partners, children, and friends means their choices are mediated by these relationships. Relationships matter for social change. Bonds of common concern forged in struggles for rights and citizenship, and alliances between women working in state institutions and civil society organisations, are a vital

part of empowerment. Interventions aimed at creating and sustaining supportive relationships among women, and supporting women's capacities to act together are more likely to have transformative effects than those targeted at individual women.

### Shifting the horizons of possibility

Our work emphasises how vital it is to listen to what women themselves say about their lives, their options and their choices.

For example, one of the most striking and unexpected findings from Pathways research in Afghanistan and Bangladesh, is the role that watching television plays to broaden women's sense of the world around them, and provide them with strategies for negotiating power relations. This and the findings from other Pathways studies demonstrate that empowerment is not only about changing the boundaries of action, but also about shifting the horizons of

# Key findings

- 1** What is empowering to one woman is not necessarily empowering to another: understanding empowerment needs to begin from women's own experiences, rather than focus on a predictable set of outcomes.
- 2** Across very different contexts, women's ability to exercise voice and strategic forms of control over their lives is linked to being able to generate regular and independent sources of income.
- 3** Relationships lie at the heart of women's empowerment – women's families, partners, friends and colleagues, and women's organisations, networks and coalitions can be crucial in supporting and enabling women's pathways of empowerment.
- 4** Sexuality is a vital but neglected dimension of women's empowerment. Positive approaches to sexuality can be an important driver of change in women's lives.
- 5** Understanding women's empowerment calls for rigorous and imaginative combinations of research methodologies and methods. Participatory research can make a powerful contribution to both understanding and action.
- 6** Efforts to promote women's empowerment need to do more than give individual women economic or political opportunities. They need to tackle deeper-rooted structural constraints that perpetuate inequalities.
- 7** Policies and laws that affirm women's rights and open up pathways for women's empowerment are critically important. But they are not in themselves sufficient to change women's lives.
- 8** Women's organising is vital for sustainable change.
- 9** There is no one-size-fits-all approach to women's empowerment. Global institutions would benefit from listening more to local women and doing more to support existing local agendas for women's empowerment.
- 10** Fostering public engagement and debate is essential to making policies that work for women's empowerment and gender equality. The media and popular culture have a vital role to play in this.
- 11** Recognising and supporting those within the state who are responsible for the implementation of women's empowerment interventions is crucial; front-line workers can be vital agents of change.
- 12** Changing attitudes and values is as important to bringing about women's empowerment as changing women's material circumstances and political opportunities.

## Key findings

# 1

What is empowering to one woman is not necessarily empowering to another: understanding empowerment needs to begin from women's own experiences, rather than focus on a predictable set of outcomes.

Empowerment cannot be expressed as a standard formula that works equally on everyone wherever it is applied. It depends on women's situations, and is mediated by race, class and sexuality.<sup>8</sup> External assumptions about what empowerment is and is not can differ widely from how a woman experiences her own reality.<sup>9</sup> An increase in wealth or status may give women more of a say, but does not

necessarily protect them from domestic violence or from social reproach if they decide they can no longer endure an unhappy marriage.<sup>10</sup> There is no automatic association between giving women a loan or sending a girl to school and achieving an outcome of empowerment.<sup>11</sup> And women may experience empowerment through activities or situations that are widely considered to be disempowering – such as sex

work or marital breakdown, or participation in ritual or religious practice.<sup>12</sup>

Pathways research suggests the need for a more nuanced approach to measurement that enables women to identify and explore the changes they have experienced in their lives rather than being limited by a focus on existing assumptions.<sup>13</sup> Our research reveals pathways of empowerment that would be hidden to conventional

measurement.<sup>14</sup> These include the empowering effects of viewing television and insights into the relationship between religious observance and empowerment that challenges conventional expectations.<sup>15</sup>

## Women (re)negotiating religion in Bangladesh

The rise in religious observance in Bangladesh has been framed by secular society as problematic and disempowering for women. This view is based on the assumption that religious engagement accepts and does not challenge structures of gender inequality. The Pathways research team in Bangladesh interviewed three groups of women: factory workers, students and *taleem* (discussion groups on religious texts) participants. They found that women in *taleem* classes sought a textual knowledge of Islam that allowed them to understand, question and critique its customs. They used this understanding to assert themselves in religious discourse and at home. They did not see an observance of religion as incompatible with empowerment. However, the empowerment they seek may fall outside the narrow definition usually applied by development discourse.<sup>19</sup>

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**‘For me empowerment is the ability to create a new situation, a new condition, a new act, a new story for women in society. This gives us power. When we are able to create something new from ourselves, from us women: that for me is empowerment.’<sup>16</sup> Cristina Buarque, Secretary for Women’s Policies, Pernambuco State, Brazil**

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## Education: A pathway to women's empowerment?

Girls' education has come to be regarded as one of the most important poverty-reducing interventions. It is linked with improved child health and lower rates of fertility and infant mortality. However, Pathways researcher Akosua Darkwah found that education may not always lead to increased empowerment. Her research with 600 women from three age groups in Ghana examined the link between levels of education and paid work in the public sector of the economy. Findings showed that education is important in determining whether a woman works in the public sector or runs her own business. However, assuming that education is all that it takes is problematic. Context matters. Providing universal primary education without providing jobs with satisfactory working conditions hinders educated women's efforts at gaining control over financial resources. There should be a multi-pronged approach to empowering women. Education alone is not enough. Access to jobs and laws that ensure decent working conditions are essential.<sup>20</sup>



## Key point 1

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**‘It is easy to read women’s dependence on their families as disempowering, where religious rhetoric/ideals only reinforce women’s subordination. However, one needs to take account of the fact that in Bangladesh, both culture and religion stress a more family and community-based rather than individualistic view of the self.’<sup>17</sup> Samia Huq, Assistant Professor, BRAC Development Institute**

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**‘Religion has become almost like a venue or a forum for self-expression: it provides avenues for women’s leadership, for public speaking, and it is a form of social security both spiritually and temporally. And as some people in our research cynically said, when you die they give you a good burial.’<sup>18</sup> Takyiwaa Manuh, Pathways West Africa Hub Convenor**

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# 2

Across very different contexts, women's ability to exercise voice and strategic forms of control over their lives is linked to being able to generate regular and independent sources of income.

The economic empowerment of women has become a major development priority. Giving women more opportunities to earn an income has been shown to make a significant contribution to the achievement of development outcomes.<sup>21</sup> Yet amidst the push to get more women into work and stimulate women's income-earning capacities, less attention has been focused on what would make working more empowering for women.

Pathways research has revealed clear links between women's economic empowerment and other dimensions of empowerment in their everyday lives.<sup>22</sup>

But it has also shown that these effects do not automatically flow from women's entry into paid work: much depends on other factors, including the opportunities that going out to work offer women to broaden their horizons, to expand their understanding of their options

and develop the knowledge, confidence and capacities to exercise agency.<sup>23</sup>

Action research on conditional cash transfers (CCTs) has revealed the significance of interventions that make women aware of their rights and entitlements, and that treat women as citizens rather than as beneficiaries. Research on women's work in the informal sector has shown the significance of collective action in offering pathways to citizenship for working women. Evidence from

this research offers crucial insights into the repertoire of strategies that women in informal work can bring to bear on their strategies for change.<sup>24</sup>

Taken together, Pathways research on women, work and income points to the benefits of infusing conventional strategies for economic empowerment – microfinance, employment creation and skills training – and the new instruments of social policy, such as CCTs, with a citizenship approach.<sup>25</sup>



## Work survey in Bangladesh

The work theme group in Bangladesh carried out a survey of 5,000 women in different locations in the country. The economic impetus for positive change in women's lives included access to work outside the home, especially formal and semi-formal work. Unfortunately this accounted for only 5 per cent of the sample. Ownership of assets, particularly housing and education (in particular post-primary), were among the other factors that mattered. In addition, routine watching of television, support to the

family and membership of an NGO all proved important pathways of change in women's lives. Conformity with religious norms had mixed impacts. It gave women some standing within the community and the sense that they could deal with difficult circumstances. But it also curtailed their mobility in the public domain with regard to health services, economic activity, markets and visits to their own families. It reinforced son preference and it had little impact on women's sense of having control over their own lives.<sup>28</sup>



## Viewing alternative realities in Afghanistan

Pathways research in Afghanistan explored how Afghan women experienced efforts to enable them to gain greater economic independence and establish their own businesses. Led by Naila Kabeer, the research revealed important lessons for how empowerment is assessed. Kabeer notes that attempts to quantify women's empowerment often fall short precisely because they measure predictable outcomes – and what empowers women may be entirely unpredictable. In the context of Afghanistan, what has made a difference has been exposure to alternative realities through migration experiences, access to television and the opportunities that micro-credit programmes have opened up for women to interact with other women like themselves. For some of these women, the ability to earn was important in trying to renegotiate the male breadwinner model of the household. For many others, however, the significance of the loans was in enabling them to set up businesses like bakeries or hairdressing salons that bring people to them, expanding their social networks and with this their horizons.<sup>29</sup>



Key point 2

**‘Yes, I’ve heard of equal rights. It means that the husband and wife have equal rights in any kind of work and in making any kind of decision. I know this from my education, from books and from watching TV.’<sup>26</sup> Fatrhat, home-based worker, Bangladesh**

**‘You can tell as soon as you see a working woman. If she works and earns an income of her own, then there is a different sense about them. They have mental strength.’<sup>27</sup> Shahara, subsistence production worker, Bangladesh**

# 3

Relationships lie at the heart of women's empowerment – women's families, partners, friends and colleagues, and women's organisations, networks and coalitions can be crucial in supporting and enabling women's pathways of empowerment.

Development agencies tend to represent women's empowerment in terms of improvements in individual women's lives or the bigger picture of society-wide

economic change. There is a lot of talk about women's agency.<sup>30</sup> But there is little recognition of the role that others play in shaping women's actions and choices.<sup>31</sup> Relationships with

family, friends, colleagues and partners are significant in mediating women's choices. These relationships are not factored in sufficiently to the ways development agencies think about women's empowerment.<sup>32</sup>

Women's organisations play a crucial role in supporting processes of women's empowerment.<sup>33</sup> They provide spaces for women to gain capacities, confidence and awareness, and to build supportive relationships with other women.<sup>34</sup> Informal networks and associations, including work-related or religious associations, can play an equally important role in women's empowerment providing women with opportunities to come together with other women and reflect

on their shared situations.<sup>35</sup> Relationships fostered in these spaces are often responsible for bringing about the kind of changes associated with empowerment – growth in self-confidence, acquisition of new capabilities and consciousness, and capacity to act collectively to demand rights and recognition.<sup>36</sup>

For women seeking to bring about change in the arenas of policy and politics, relationships are vital to women's effectiveness.<sup>37</sup> Pathways research demonstrates the significance of supportive domestic relationships and the importance of constituency and alliance-building for women's political careers.<sup>38</sup> Research in global policy spaces attests to how vital networks and alliances are to women's capacity to influence.<sup>39</sup>

## Building women's relationships in rural Bangladesh

What is the significance of social relationships in women's lives? What does it have to do with empowerment?

Researchers Naila Kabeer and Lopita Huq looked at Saptagram, a landless women's organisation in rural Bangladesh.

Saptagram's core strategy for positive social change is to transform women's consciousness and capabilities. Key to this is building relationships based on solidarity and mutual support between women with shared experiences of class and gender oppression. The research showed that women benefited materially from their involvement with Saptagram, learning about the environment, family planning and child health. But more important is the social space in which chosen identities and relationships flourish. Their friendship, affection and loyalty for each other resulted in an unconditional form of support. They can draw on the power of these social relationships to confront relationships of power within their community. They have used their solidarity to demand a fairer distribution of government services, and to raise awareness about violence by men against women.<sup>41</sup>





### Feminists in global policy spaces

Rosalind Eyben's work on 'femocrats' in national and global policy arenas draws attention to how powerful feminist bureaucrats can be in shaping policy agendas. Of key significance, she finds, are the relationships that femocrats build with each other within institutions and with other broader networks of feminists. She points out that although many dismiss bureaucrats as mere technocrats, their positions, and how they choose to negotiate them, can be highly supportive of feminist agendas. She looks beneath the surface of discourses of empowerment and studies the subtle tactics that feminists within the aid world use to strategically challenge dominant and potentially unhelpful discourses about women's empowerment.<sup>42</sup>



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**'Women are not as foolish as they used to be. By going for processions, by getting together, becoming united, by becoming members, we have learnt. When we were by ourselves, there was no unity. Now everyone is together. There are 20 members here: can anyone's husband come here to beat her?'**<sup>40</sup>  
Jamuna, Saptagram member, Bangladesh

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# 4

Sexuality is a vital but neglected dimension of women's empowerment. Positive approaches to sexuality can be an important driver of change in women's lives.

Social expectations of women's sexuality affect their working lives and their interactions in public, as well as in their most intimate lives.<sup>43</sup> In many countries, marriage is virtually compulsory for women; what is regarded as

acceptable or permissible for women shapes their career choices, political aspirations and electability, and the choices that they feel able to make about their own bodies.<sup>44</sup>

Ways of understanding sexuality are affected by

globalisation, moral conservatism and fundamentalisms.<sup>45</sup> This is particularly apparent in times of disruptive change, and can prompt a retreat to 'tradition' or 'culture'. Pathways researchers discovered the importance that narratives of sexuality play in women's experiences of empowerment and disempowerment.<sup>46</sup> This research explored not only how the way women's sexuality is represented is changing but also how it can be changed. The findings challenge assumptions about what can best support women. They show how legal and policy reforms can inadvertently reinforce the very gender norms that create the

problems laws and policies are trying to solve.<sup>47</sup> And sometimes strategies are needed that take a more 'under-the-radar' approach to changing attitudes.<sup>48</sup>

Positive approaches to sexuality play a vital role in promoting women's empowerment.<sup>49</sup> Changing narratives of sexuality, Pathways researchers suggest, is a crucial but much-neglected development strategy that promises wider benefits to women's livelihoods and wellbeing.<sup>50</sup> Our findings point to the value of engaging positively with the creation of alternative images of women's sexualities in film, storytelling and photography, as well as in development policy narratives.<sup>51</sup>

## Young women's sexualities in Palestine

Pathways researcher Penny Johnson's research in Palestine explored how the political and security crisis created a context in which moral panics about unmarried women and 'irregular' marriages led to tighter social control of young women. Her research focused on two areas of the West Bank and revealed marked differences between the two in terms of young women's visions for the future. In Dheisheh, a strong supportive civil society and not having to cross an Israeli checkpoint played a decisive role in facilitating the girls' opportunities. But in Sair where a checkpoint had to be crossed, girls' mobility and thus opportunities were severely restricted. These restrictions extended to accessing information about their bodies. The girls clearly articulated a desire to understand their bodies better, but faced barriers to such understanding. In discussing NGO training for Palestinian youth on democracy, the young women complained, 'really we are bored from always hearing the same subject, communications workshops, democracy. Learning about our bodies would be better.'<sup>54</sup>

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**'People thought we were wasting time talking about sex and pleasure, when maternal mortality is so high ... but I was convinced that if this delicate taboo thing – sexual pleasure – could be negotiated by women, then almost anything can be negotiated ... and that idea gave me multiple orgasms!'<sup>52</sup>**  
**Dorothy Aken'Ova, INCREASE, Nigeria**

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## Key point 4

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‘Talking about pleasure means more than just reeling off facts about pleasure zones and sexual acts. It calls for addressing deep-seated cultural norms, taken-for-granted ideas about how the body works, and assumptions about what it means to be a “real man” or a “real woman.”’<sup>53</sup>  
Jill Lewis, international gender/HIV prevention consultant and  
Gill Gordon, HIV/AIDS Alliance

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### The power of pleasure

Women’s sexuality is of concern to development agencies only as a source of danger, harm, risk and vulnerability. Yet, as Pathways work shows, focusing on the positive aspects of female sexuality is a key strategy in challenging limiting social norms that restrict women’s wellbeing and opportunities at work, in politics and in the public domain. Being able to have control over and to enjoy our own bodies without fear of abuse

or disease is fundamental to our wellbeing. Positive approaches to sexuality open up space for women to learn about their bodies, and recognise their rights to a pleasurable sexuality of their own choosing. Together with the DFID-funded IDS Sexuality and Development Programme, Pathways convened a workshop on sexuality, pleasure and women’s empowerment that brought together practitioners and activists to share innovative approaches and exchange experiences.<sup>55</sup>

# 5

Understanding women's empowerment calls for rigorous and imaginative combinations of research methodologies and methods. Participatory research can make a powerful contribution to both understanding and action.

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**'The consensus that empowerment is context specific and processual has provided the possibility of gaining new insights into women's lives in different contexts. Realising this demands methodological innovations, but also the navigation of challenges.'**<sup>64</sup> Dzodzi Tsikata and Akosua Darkwah, University of Ghana.

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## Surveying women's empowerment

Researchers from Bangladesh, Brazil, Egypt, Ghana and Pakistan met to discuss common questions that could be used in surveys on paid work and empowerment. It rapidly became evident that asking the same question in different settings would generate answers with very different implications. For Ghanaian women, for example, going out to work is something that is expected of a woman, whilst in Bangladesh women's entry into the labour market is one of the most pronounced social changes of the last few decades. This underscored the need for a combined methods approach to measuring empowerment that can be sensitive to cultural context. Pathways survey researchers combined questionnaires with life histories, focus groups and interviews to gain deeper understanding of the impact of changes in women's lives.

Researching women's empowerment is challenging. Pathways researchers found that the concept of 'empowerment' is understood in diverse ways in different cultural and organisational contexts.<sup>56</sup> This creates well-recognised difficulties for assessing when, how and whether empowerment is taking place.<sup>57</sup> Pathways sought innovative combinations of quantitative, qualitative and participatory methodologies – including the use of new communications technologies<sup>58</sup> – to explore the process of empowerment as well as its

outcomes.<sup>59</sup> Combining life histories, surveys, ethnographic methods, participatory workshops, interviews and analysis of existing statistical data permitted us to gain closer understanding of the process and experience of empowerment, as well as of its outcomes. Our work affirmed that involving women directly in the research process – women living in poverty,<sup>60</sup> women in social movements<sup>61</sup> and women's organisations,<sup>62</sup> and 'femocrats' in development agencies<sup>63</sup> strengthens not only the quality of evidence, but also stimulates the impetus for action.

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**'Courses, workshops, trips out of state ... I can summarise the impact of the Pathways project on my life with the following phrase: it is "empowering" me.'**  
Daniela Almeida, student intern, Changing Times, Changing Lives project, Brazil

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### Digital storytelling in Bangladesh

Life histories offer powerful windows into women's lives. Digital media technology opens up new possibilities for capturing and sharing life histories through the creation of digital stories. The South Asian team ran three workshops in which researchers, students, rights activists, and local politicians in Dhaka and the Chittagong Hill Tracts made their own digital stories. These were short films (about 3 minutes long), with a first person audio narrative, illustrated with a slide show of photographs or sketches. The process of women creating their own digital story

follows in the tradition of the work of Paulo Freire and others, who see the development of critical consciousness as a necessary precursor to action for social change. In articulating their stories, the women developed technical and creative skills and confidence. The collaborative nature of the workshops, and the sharing of each other's stories, helped the women develop a sense of solidarity with each other. The content of the stories offers researchers very rich material, and they can potentially be used as illustrative or advocacy tools on particular policy issues.<sup>66</sup>

**'I define women's empowerment as a bundle of things – an array of policies, practices and attitudes that allow women to actualise themselves, to realise their potential.'**<sup>68</sup> Takyiwaa Manuh, Pathways West Africa Hub Convenor



**'I cannot express how much I liked watching my own story on the screen ... Every time I watch my digital story, I will feel empowered and confident all over again.'**<sup>67</sup> Participant, second Digital Storytelling workshop, Bangladesh

### Changing Times, Changing Lives in Brazil

Cecilia Sardenberg embarked on researching changes across three generations of women in Plataforma, a working class suburb of Salvador, Brazil, by recruiting a group of co-researchers from amongst her students. Half were working-class young women whose internships with the research project helped them stay in college. The others were middle-class students who had previously had little exposure to life in the low-income neighbourhoods of the city. Using feminist consciousness-raising techniques, the team shared their own stories. The young

women interviewed their own family members and used what they learnt to construct a survey instrument to explore women's perspectives on the impact of broader changes in Brazilian society and culture on their everyday lives. Their collective analysis changed their perspectives of themselves as women, and of the women around them, and resulted in an opportunity for these young women to travel to southern Brazil to present their work at one of Latin America's most prestigious feminist conferences. The project showed that research on empowerment can in itself be empowering.<sup>65</sup>

# 6

Efforts to promote women's empowerment need to do more than give individual women economic or political opportunities. They need to tackle deeper-rooted structural constraints that perpetuate inequalities.

By addressing the structural constraints that lead to women being treated in ways that undermine their dignity, deny them respect and perpetuate their disempowerment, efforts to empower women stand a far better chance of achieving success.<sup>69</sup> To be effective in addressing women's disempowerment, Pathways

research suggests, means treating women as whole people rather than only as income-generators, reproducers or representatives. This means putting the dignity and respect that women experience as lacking in the way society treats them at the heart of efforts to enhance their empowerment. For example, domestic workers in Brazil said that one of the

most disempowering aspects of their job was to be invisible to their employer, a pair of hands rather than a person.<sup>70</sup>

Our work suggests that addressing the multiple structural constraints to women's empowerment calls for approaches that re-value the longer, slower processes through which women gain a sense of their own self-worth, come

together to recognise those aspects of their lives that are unfair and oppressive, and engage actively in changing everyday unfairness that might otherwise be taken for granted.<sup>71</sup> Pathways researchers also emphasise the need to recognise the role that men can play in those processes of change.<sup>72</sup>

## Appropriating 'gender' and 'empowerment'

Charmaine Pereira analyses the uptake of terms such as 'gender' and 'empowerment' by the Obasanjo government's National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS). Pereira argues that, in the context of a global recourse to narratives of poverty reduction, the state's instrumental use of feminist discourse legitimates a neoliberal development agenda. Fundamental questions of power are erased in the process. These include the constraints within which women are expected to perform their gender as well as the power of those close to government to buy up lucrative public properties, investments and infrastructure in the name of 'economic empowerment'. Pereira points out that, if the structural inequities that produce poverty and disadvantage are to be addressed, there is a need to reclaim a feminist vision of empowerment in the pursuit of social and economic justice.<sup>76</sup>

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**'Making markets work for women is not enough for economic justice. Focusing exclusively on increasing women's labour market participation and entrepreneurship will not produce a balanced distribution between men and women in both productive and reproductive work. Policymakers need to address the right to decent work and equal wages and recognise and value all women's work.'**<sup>73</sup>

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Rosalind Eyben, Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies

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### Crossroads of empowerment

Domestic worker activists in Brazil have brought about changes in the law and fostered innovative programmes that seek to change the options open to young black women at the crossroads that take them into domestic work. Terezinha Gonçalves researched processes of empowerment for women in FENETRAD (National Federation of Domestic Workers) in Brazil.

Despite an expansion of the labour market to include more women in the last 50 years, the fact that 60 per cent

of domestic workers are black and female shows that this has done little to improve their reality. Upper and middle-class women employ domestic workers so they can pursue careers and escape the ‘trap’ of reproductive work. Yet often because they do not value domestic work as an occupation, they do not respect the law in terms of payment and hours. At this crossroads, where gender, race and social class intersect, domestic workers face a struggle to overcome the multitude of obstacles and find pathways of empowerment.<sup>77</sup>

## Key point 6

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‘Alleviating poverty and enabling women to make some income can better lives, but the enabling environment that confirms the right to work, to property, to safety, to voice, to sexuality and to freedom is not created by sewing machines or microcredit alone.’<sup>75</sup>  
Hania Sholkamy, Pathways Middle East Hub Convenor

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‘Women don’t only want access to resources, but also control over them. Women don’t want to work in *any* employment opportunity, but in protected and decent work. This is the situation where women become empowered, and also the reason why this kind of empowerment cannot happen under colonial occupation and patriarchal domination. It is difficult to attain a degree of empowerment if the occupation does not end, and if stability and security does not prevail.’<sup>74</sup>  
Eileen Kuttab, Assistant Professor in Sociology, Institute of Women’s Studies, Birzeit University

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# 7

Policies and laws that affirm women's rights and open up pathways for women's empowerment are critically important. But they are not in themselves sufficient to change women's lives.

Pathways research shows how important legal and policy change has been to achieving women's empowerment. Our work also suggests, however, that legal and policy reforms are only a first step in the process of achieving women's empowerment.<sup>78</sup> Efforts to ensure the effective implementation of policies and laws are vital, including supporting women to seek access to justice and take

up opportunities for political engagement.<sup>79</sup>

Quotas can be a pathway into power, but can also leave women without voice or influence once they reach office.<sup>80</sup> When women enter politics through quota systems they are more able to be effective advocates for women where they have a constituency who can support them, and hold them to account. Providing

opportunities for individual women alone offer women fewer pathways of empowerment; interventions should seek to change the structures of constraint that women face.<sup>81</sup>

Studies of microfinance and conditional cash transfer programmes show that economic empowerment initiatives hold more potential for women's empowerment when they take a citizenship approach – providing benefits as entitlements, and accompanying payments or loans with activities that strengthen women's knowledge and exercise of their rights.<sup>82</sup>

Our research also found that

instruments producing positive outcomes in one context do not necessarily have the same effects in others. Alternative measures may be needed. For example, older women in Ghana experienced education as a key pathway out of poverty. For education to play a similar role for younger women today, additional measures are needed to strengthen their access to employment in a changing labour market.<sup>83</sup> However, in comparison, our survey in Bangladesh found that education, particularly secondary education, was a very powerful force for positive change.<sup>84</sup>

## Quotas: A pathway of political empowerment?

The use of quota systems to increase women's political representation and to further women's political empowerment is increasing worldwide and continued support for this intervention is essential. But many more factors beyond the introduction of quotas influence how power is mediated. Quotas are not an adequate indicator. Research in Latin America by Ana Alice Alcântara Costa found that once in office women representatives are often faced with patriarchal political structures that limit their political activity. There is also no guarantee that women representatives will act in favour of women's rights. This highlights the need for a strong feminist movement with grassroots support. Quotas also run the risk of being ignored unless they are backed by sanctions against parties for their non-implementation.<sup>88</sup>

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**'Quota systems *alone* are not sufficient to create the conditions for women to empower themselves politically ... But when quotas are complemented with public policies to promote equality that can create deeper transformations in the patriarchal structure in society, with the perspective of expanding democracy, then they can serve as a channel for change.'**<sup>85</sup> Ana Alice Alcântara Costa, Research Fellow, Nucleus of Interdisciplinary Studies at the Federal University of Bahia

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‘Reform strategies need to go beyond lobbying the government.

What is lacking in the current reform efforts are building support among different sectors of the society (religious scholars, Islamic NGOs, legislators, families and communities) through dialogue and awareness raising, and partaking in the process of imparting to new generations of children and young people enlightened religious knowledge and sensibilities that are appreciative of justice, equality and acceptance and respect for others.’<sup>86</sup> Mulki Al-Sharmani, Assistant Professor, Social Research Center, American University in Cairo

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‘The thing I like about Pathways is the impact it can have on people’s lives; it is not just doing studies for academics but changing people’s lives. I think Pathways has improved people’s lives a lot. This is the beauty of it. The Maria da Penha observatory, for example, is actually making the Maria da Penha law on domestic violence happen. People are really using it. You have a law, but it is only an advisory law. We need the observatory to make the law work – to track in which cities the law is really being applied and how it’s being applied.’<sup>87</sup> Lea Santana, Masters student, Federal University of Bahia (formerly Latin America Hub Communications Officer)

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### Family law reforms in Egypt

In the last decade, new family laws have been passed in Egypt that include legal provision for women to release themselves from marriage, *khul*. Although these have had important ramifications for women, research by Mulki Al-Sharmani and her team found that the transformative role these reforms could play in strengthening women’s rights is being limited. Implementation of the reforms has been uneven, with many different actors

bringing their own agendas to the table. Their research shows that in order for new family laws to be truly effective, greater understanding needs to be fostered amongst the public. To counter the kind of stigma and opposition associated with *khul*, broader societal debate is needed on marriage and on women’s and men’s rights, roles and responsibilities within it. This research formed the basis for a documentary, *Khul*, produced as part of Pathways Real World scheme.<sup>89</sup>

### Building peace through women's organising in Sierra Leone

Women's organisations played a vital role in efforts to end Sierra Leone's brutal civil war and build the basis for peace. The brutalities and atrocities that women and children, especially girls, were subjected to during Sierra Leone's 11-year civil war resulted in a groundswell of activism by women's NGOs and activists demanding the protection and promotion of women's rights as part of peace negotiations, post-conflict reconstruction and peace consolidation processes. Sierra Leone's reconstruction and peace consolidation policies and programmes are pursued within the post-conflict peace-building framework and resolutions such as Resolution 1325. Pathways researcher Hussainatu Abdullah and her colleagues in Sierra Leone found that while this framework has a transformational edge, it does not go far enough to ensure women's empowerment. Its application in post-conflict Sierra Leone is disjointed and full of loopholes that can be used to roll back whatever gains women have achieved. Sustainable change remains elusive. What is needed is more consistent application of existing commitments, along with support to women's organisations to monitor and hold to account those charged with implementing women's empowerment within the post-conflict peace-building framework.<sup>98</sup>

Organising plays an important role in enabling women to formulate and voice their demands for gender justice to their communities, societies and states. It is especially important for women who experience multiple structural oppressions, whether because of race, class or other social inequalities.<sup>90</sup> Working women coming together to demand better conditions, recognition and rights can gain strength from each other and join their voices to insist on being heard.<sup>91</sup> Women's movements bring women from all walks of life together to fight for a common cause.<sup>92</sup> By combining efforts in support of a particular issue women can gain greater visibility and legitimacy in holding governments to account on enacting their promises in a meaningful way.<sup>93</sup> It is much harder for women to achieve lasting change when they are not organised.

Our work also shows that through collective mobilisation women can gain a sense of their own self-worth, and come

together to recognise those aspects of their lives that are unfair and oppressive. Research on women's collective action to improve conditions in informal sector employment shows that mobilisation around immediate practical concerns over livelihood issues can open up pathways to citizenship, as mobilisations broaden to encompass longer-term concerns.

Women's organising is key to making policies and laws make a difference to women's lives. Organising women can raise awareness of enabling programmes and legislation, so that women can make demands for change and hold authorities to account for delivering on existing laws and policies.<sup>94</sup> It is especially important for women who experience other forms of discrimination, including because they are poor, work in marginalised or stigmatised professions, or due to their race or caste. It is much harder to achieve lasting change through legal or policy reform without active engagement by those for whom the changes are intended.<sup>95</sup>

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**‘If you don’t see a light in the darkness, you must light a fire.’<sup>97</sup> Creuza Oliveira, domestic worker rights activist, Brazil**

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## Key point 8

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**‘Strategies for empowering women need to take into account the role played by such organisations [national women’s NGOs] as mediators and channels of women’s voice and demands, and engage with and support them more actively as champions of change.’<sup>96</sup> Sohela Nazneen, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka and Maheen Sultan, Pathways South Asia Hub Convenor**

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### **Constituency building by women’s organisations**

In a state characterised by gender and class hierarchies, women’s organisations in Bangladesh have to use a range of strategies to highlight their agendas. Research by Sohela Nazneen and Maheen Sultan analysed how three national level organisations negotiated with political parties, state bureaucracy and civil society to become an effective voice for women’s interests in Bangladesh.

They found that how women’s organisations frame issues influences their ability to build solidarity. The latter is important

for alliance building which puts them in a stronger position to avoid any potential backlash from conservative quarters in society or the state. Women’s organisations use tactics to demonstrate to the government the cost of not implementing its commitments so that it does not renege. The media has proved to be a useful ally on certain issues such as women’s political participation and acid violence by holding the government up to public scrutiny. Influencing government is seen as essential to ensuring sustainable rights for women. Engagement with the state is strategic as the organisations may not always be around but government machineries will remain.<sup>99</sup>

# 9

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to women's empowerment. Global institutions would benefit from listening more to local women and doing more to support existing local agendas for women's empowerment.

Pathways research demonstrates how global women's empowerment agendas take shape on the ground in different forms and with varied effects depending on the social and political context into which they are introduced.<sup>100</sup> The term 'empowerment' itself has come to

acquire unhelpful associations as a result of the promotion of a stock set of interventions and programmes by global development institutions that often fail to take any account of what might be needed to create an enabling environment for such interventions to have

empowering effects.<sup>101</sup> A much-voiced critique of global development actors is their failure to be sufficiently aware of what is already happening on the ground, and to lend support to those initiatives – a situation exacerbated by the limitations of current models of aid delivery and impact assessment.<sup>102</sup>

Global institutions should look at how best to support existing local initiatives rather than superimposing one-size-fits-all solutions and decontextualised 'best practice' models on entirely different contexts. This is not to say that there is not a place for sharing

what works with other countries. When policymakers take the time to adapt good ideas that come from elsewhere and ground them in the particularities of that context, there is a much better chance of success. An example of this is the design of the Egyptian conditional cash transfer programme, which incorporated elements and lessons from experience in various Latin American countries – fostered by a Pathways-supported exchange and the ethnographic action research that informed lesson-learning from implementation of a pilot scheme.<sup>103</sup>

## Empowerment in Palestine

Palestinian researcher Eileen Kuttab shows how when women's empowerment is simply taken up mechanically as an agenda associated with foreign donor agencies, it can obscure and dilute the concerns faced locally by women. In the Palestinian context, Kuttab and her colleague Islah Jad demonstrate how the rush of funding for women has led to the 'NGOisation' of women's organisations, and to a disregard for the actual conditions of Palestinian women's lives under occupation. Kuttab's research reveals the extent to which the mushrooming of microcredit institutions seeking women's economic empowerment has not resulted in any meaningful change in women's lives. She contrasts donor and lender empowerment interventions with the community-based organising that grew out of the resistance to the Israeli occupation and shows that the vitality of these forms of local development offers a far more promising entry point for change than the importation of off-the-shelf interventions by foreign agencies.<sup>107</sup>

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**'Women's empowerment is often treated by international agencies as something that can be designed as a policy blueprint, rolled out and scaled up. What actually happens when policy is conceived, negotiated and shaped may be altogether different.'**<sup>104</sup>  
Hania Sholkamy, Pathways Middle East Hub Convenor

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‘Empowerment should be first about listening and seeing what people on the ground want, not entering crisis-stricken or disadvantaged spaces with predetermined “rescue” agendas.’<sup>105</sup>

Rosalind Petchesky, Professor of Political Science, City University of New York

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## Key point 9



### Donor relationships with women’s rights organisations

When does external financial support to women’s rights organisations (WROs) have a positive impact on women’s empowerment? Pathways researchers studied this question in Bangladesh, Ghana and at the global level through critical reflection with donor staff and representatives of WROs.

The researchers found that donor resources play a critical role in women’s rights work yielding tangible results in terms of legal reform, policy advocacy and delivery of services to women. However, both the donor staff and the WRO representatives highlighted (a) short-term, project-related rather than core funding, and (b) the increasing emphasis on inter-organisational competition for scarce funds, as being detrimental to the sustainability of WRO activities. Negotiating

complicated funding application formats, and the increasing need to rely on unfamiliar intermediary organisations to apply for funding is a further hindrance to accessing resources.

Once funding is obtained, the lack of a direct relationship between the donors and the WROs around how the money is spent has proved problematic. Direct citizen-to-citizen communication would increase solidarity, understanding and mutual accountability.

The current dichotomy between rights and efficiency in donor speak has also proved challenging to WROs in how they position themselves. These discourses imply that rights are not efficient and that efficiency does not deliver rights. The research also highlighted the increasing demand on WROs to provide evidence and measurable results to demonstrate that women develop improved leverage through institutional support.<sup>106</sup>

### Talking empowerment in plain Arabic

'Empowerment' has been described in the Middle East as a 'Western import'. Against the perpetuation of this myth, and recognising the limitations that English-language concepts may hold when used in different language contexts, Hania Sholkamy and colleagues in Egypt, Palestine and Sudan organised a series of events to explore the meaning of 'empowerment' when translated into Arabic. They used these events as a way of engaging a diversity of people who are influential in public and policy debate about women and women's empowerment. In Sudan, for example, the workshop drew together journalists, academics, politicians and people working for NGOs, bringing them into dialogue with each other on these questions, often for the first time. It opened a space for critical interrogation of what the concept of 'empowerment' actually means in this setting.

The workshops enabled those people that felt alienated from the concept of empowerment to appropriate this language and ultimately contribute to the global narrative on women's empowerment. It also offered individuals an opportunity to find new ways of talking empowerment in plain Arabic without feeling that they are serving someone else's project or someone else's political agenda.<sup>117</sup>

If policies that challenge deep-rooted inequities – such as the disproportionate numbers of men in politics or unequal pay and a lack of opportunities for women – are to stand a chance of being taken up, they need to be accompanied by proactive strategies that foster debate. Public opinion is critical to providing an environment that will be receptive to policy reforms. When citizens are encouraged to engage with policy change and contribute their views and experiences,<sup>108</sup> they are more likely to be interested in holding state and non-state actors to account for delivering what they promise.

Creating broad-based public support for laws and policies that seek to alter the status quo in favour of women's empowerment can be difficult.<sup>109</sup> Popular culture and the media play a vital role in shaping public opinion, and offer spaces for debate and deliberation on the issues that matter.<sup>110</sup> To capture public

sympathy women may be represented as long-suffering victims or brave heroines. These representations are unhelpful and can be disempowering.<sup>111</sup> Being cast as a victim can leave women with little sense of their own agency, and places them in a position of being passive recipients of other people's help. Being represented as a heroine who can lift economies, keep her household afloat and be the motor of poverty alleviation places a huge burden on women – and fails to acknowledge the very real constraints that every woman experiences.<sup>112</sup>

Challenging stereotypes of women, including those perpetuated by development agencies themselves, should be a priority for those who want to support women's empowerment. Our work also points to the need to break with stereotypes of men<sup>113</sup> – and recognise the supportive roles that men can play and are playing in women's empowerment and gender equality.<sup>114</sup>



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**‘Is legal reform enough to address the problems that women suffer from in Egypt? I don’t think so. I think we need to do more. We really need to address public opinion and how it is constructed; our social norms and how people think about marriage; men and women’s roles and their relations within marriage. We need to have a dialogue, a societal dialogue.’<sup>115</sup> Mulki Al-Sharmani, Assistant Professor, Social Research Center, American University in Cairo**

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**‘Often in policy discourses, popular culture is completely discounted [as though] it doesn’t exist ... and yet it is a genre that so many people relate to. Popular culture is something people engage with on a daily basis and it does shape their perceptions.’<sup>116</sup> Takyiwaa Manuh, Pathways West Africa Hub Convenor**

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### **Songs for change**

Representations of women in popular music can reinforce or challenge stereotypes. Pathways researchers Akosua Adomako and Awo Asiedu analysed the lyrics of Ghanaian musical genres from the 1950s to the present, and found that the messages contained in these songs were often negative, portraying women as sex objects, and as fickle and jealous. Multi-stakeholder engagement opened up spaces for discussion about the way gender and relationships were being

portrayed in popular music. In order to encourage artists to think more about these issues, a song writing competition was held. A panel of judges made up of musicians, music producers, gender researchers, music scholars and young music consumers chose the winning songs, based on the strength of the lyrics, musical quality and innovation. Ongoing engagement with these groups will encourage shifts in the way women are portrayed in the music and entertainment industries in future.<sup>118</sup>

# 11

Recognising and supporting those within the state who are responsible for the implementation of women's empowerment interventions is crucial; front-line workers can be vital agents of change.

## Implementing a feminist conditional cash transfer programme in Egypt

Pathways researchers in Egypt, led by Hania Sholkamy, worked closely with officials at the Ministry of Social Solidarity to design and implement a conditional cash transfer (CCT) pilot programme based on feminist principles. The Egyptian CCT programme works with female heads of household in a Cairo low-income neighbourhood, Ain el-Sira. Researchers were closely involved in the training of 200 social workers to implement and monitor the programme. Social workers monitor the loan conditionalities, visiting the women once a month, talking directly to the women as family representatives, and providing them with much-needed support in terms of access to resources. This has included, over the duration of the programme, cash for small businesses, cash to support ill or handicapped family members, and support in combating family member drug addiction. The centrality of the social workers within the scheme, and the training and support they have received as a result of this has significantly improved their engagement with their job, as well as their ability to do it well. It has also helped foster their understanding of feminist politics, and the structural issues that particularly affect women.<sup>124</sup>

State policies and programmes offer a major source of support for women living in poverty, and women who experience abuse, violence and discrimination. While development agencies place much emphasis on achieving supportive policies, far less attention is focused on those people who deliver programmes at the grassroots. Yet Pathways research on women workers within the state – social workers administering cash transfers in Egypt, and lady health workers in Pakistan and Bangladesh – found that these jobs are often empowering for the women

that do them, and in turn they allow these women to support the empowerment of the women for whom the policies and programmes are intended.<sup>119</sup>

Front-line workers play an important role in transforming those who would otherwise simply be seen as beneficiaries of state policies into citizens, and in creating the enabling conditions for their empowerment.<sup>120</sup> Their own attitudes towards those they work with are also crucial in ensuring that health and social services do not become a site for the reinforcement of limiting beliefs and expectations about women.<sup>121</sup>

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**‘Many men and women have changed their thinking after seeing me work. They also want their daughters to become lady health workers. Whenever I go to women’s houses, they ask me to have their daughters hired if there are any vacancies for lady health workers.’<sup>122</sup> Nasreen, lady health worker, Pakistan**

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### Lady health workers in Pakistan

The Lady Health Workers programme is a major public sector initiative to provide reproductive healthcare to women in Pakistan. It employs almost 100,000 women as community health workers who address women's reproductive healthcare needs. They provide information, basic services and access to further care. Thanks to the programme, women are more visible and mobile within the community. They receive training, are knowledgeable and gain respect, and also have their own income. This challenges gender imbalances in the home and the community. Government-run advertisements on television in support of the programme were critical in helping women to gain credibility. The research shows that processes that support empowerment are strengthened when social policy is shaped alongside current social change.<sup>125</sup>



Key point 11

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**‘One of the interesting things we’ve done from a women’s empowerment point of view is to work with and train the bureaucrats – the people who serve the poor, who are usually very poor themselves and no one invests in their training – to convince them that social protection for women is strategic.’<sup>123</sup>**  
**Hania Sholkamy, Pathways Middle East Hub Convenor**

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# 12

Changing attitudes and values is as important to bringing about women's empowerment as changing women's material circumstances and political opportunities.

Pathways research shows that empowerment is not something won or bestowed, but a process of negotiation that requires courage and persistence, and support when times get tough.<sup>126</sup> The courage to step away from the expectations that limit us and negotiate pathways of empowerment is something that comes not only from having assets or opportunities, but from seeing ourselves and our options in a different light. Supporting women's pathways of empowerment must also involve efforts to share these images of the possible, and to spark women's imaginations, so

that they can see themselves differently – and from that, begin to act to change their lives.

Changing attitudes and values that limit women's horizons is vital for women's empowerment. The way we view the world, and understand what is 'normal', or 'acceptable' or even just 'possible' is shaped not only by our direct interactions with people, but by the images and words that surround us from television, radio and newspapers.<sup>127</sup> Pathways research revealed how powerful women's self-image and societal perceptions of women can be in limiting their

possibilities.<sup>128</sup> It also shows the power that could come from breaking away from stereotypes, broadening and diversifying images of women and men, and creating new narratives that showed women pursuing alternative possibilities. Sharing stories of women doing jobs that are usually associated with men, for example, helps demonstrate that it is both possible, and desirable, to lift the barriers blocking women from particular professions. Role models that inspire, challenge and strengthen others are invaluable.<sup>129</sup>

Where imaginative use has been made of vehicles like soap

operas and online forums, opportunities have been made to challenge prejudices by creating the possibilities for greater understanding. This in turn can change people's perceptions and perspectives. Despite these changes being difficult to measure, development agencies should not give up on their promise. Working with the producers of the images that we consume – journalists, musicians, photographers, filmmakers, broadcasters and artists – is essential if we are serious about gender justice.

## Storytelling in Egypt

Ana el Hekkaya (I am the Story) are a group of feminist storytellers, based in Cairo, who believe in the power of storytelling in shaping people's understanding of reality and in challenging existing gender norms. Their stories aim to represent positive,

empowered images of Egyptian women, and grew partly out of their distress at how women were portrayed in traditional literature, such as the *Arabian Nights*. Their work provides a modern, feminist, take on a popular traditional art form. With support from Pathways, they have worked with young writers and

performers from Sudan, Egypt and Palestine both helping them creatively, and trying to make them more aware of the gender subtexts in their writing. Ana el Hekkaya do regular performances and are producing an animated film based on some of the stories produced by young writers.<sup>132</sup>

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‘What the Afghan research demonstrates is that even in the most repressive of circumstances, exposure to new ideas and alternative realities, even if it is simply through watching TV, can have the power to change lives.’<sup>130</sup>

Naila Kabeer, SOAS, University of London; Ayesha Khan, Collective for Social Science Research, and Naysan Adlparvar, Institute of Development Studies

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‘We see on television a nuclear family where the man is the breadwinner or sometimes the husband and wife together maintaining the family, but we want to see serials where it is the wife who is the sole breadwinner. In scenes that show men driving around in their cars and motorbikes, they have their wives next to them; we’d now like to see women in the driver’s seat.’<sup>131</sup>  
Student at Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh

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### Women watching television in Bangladesh

Pathways Bangladesh researchers Aanmona Priyadarshini and Samia Rahim have been looking at the way in which women watch television. Television has blurred the boundaries between the public and the private. Its power to influence is significant. Women are not just passive consumers of television; they choose, judge and discard the narratives that they see, and negotiate how these narratives interact with their daily lives.

As such, if the media would break existing stereotypes and add to, or replace, dominant stories and images, it could contribute enormously to women’s empowerment. Seeing role models on television can change women’s sense of what is possible, and provide them with hopes of an alternative reality. Watching television also gives women the leisure that their everyday lives may otherwise deny them, time to think and to dream that can be vital for their empowerment.<sup>133</sup>

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# Pathways projects

## **Conceptualising empowerment**

### **Changing Times, Changing Lives: Women's Empowerment through Generations in Bahia, Brazil**

This study identified and analysed changes in women's lives in Salvador, Bahia over the last three generations, and how these changes relate to processes of women's empowerment.

### **Conceptualising Empowerment: A Look at Public Policy for Women in Brazil**

This project identified and analysed conceptualisations of empowerment in Brazil underlying public policies for women, in particular at the Pro Gender Equality Programme (Programa Pró-Equidade de Gênero) implemented by the Secretariat for Public Policies for Women.

### **Conceptualising Empowerment in Global Spaces and the Shaping of International Policies and Practice about Women**

This project explored the meanings and debates around women's empowerment within and among sets of actors with global reach, and looked at how they are shaping values, ideas and policy actions (or absence of actions) on women's empowerment.

### **Discourses on Women's Empowerment in Sierra Leone**

Pre-war discourses of empowerment which were mainly around issues of development have now changed, in this post-war era, to include issues of gender equality, participation and voice, among others. This project tracked these changes in relation to women's conceptions of empowerment during this period.

### **Expanding the Space for Women's Empowerment in Contemporary Nigeria**

This project examined the discourses of empowerment used by specific actors, particularly in relation to understandings of women's disempowerment, and explored the effects of these discourses on efforts to bring about gender equality.

### **Interrogating Policy Discourses and Practice on Women's Empowerment in Ghana**

This project involved looking at policy texts of organisations (civil society, donor agencies and government) dealing with women's issues to see what kind of empowerment is present in the texts.

### **National Discourses on Women's Empowerment: Enabling or Constraining Women's Choices**

This project compared and contrasted conceptualisations of women's empowerment in Bangladesh, in the development area, in women's organisations and in cultural spheres such as the media and religion.

### **Qalet el Rawiyah (So Said the Storyteller)/Ana el Hekkaya (I am the Story)**

A storytelling project that aimed to enhance the empowerment of Arab women through a rereading and rewriting of traditional representations of their roles.

### **Talking Empowerment in Plain Arabic**

This project held a series of workshops in Arabic to discuss the agendas of women's empowerment and the flows that influence, set, shape, critique and communicate them in plain Arabic rather than English (which tends to be the language of empowerment in Arab countries).

### **3G**

3G Three Generations of Women is an interactive multimedia project that attempts to move beyond the media stereotypes and statistics about women, and look at their real lives.

### **Tracing and Measuring Empowerment and Change in Women's Lives through Revisiting Different NGO Trajectories of Development Discourse and Local Lay Women's Conceptions of Empowerment**

This project analysed the ideological and structural transformation of the concept of 'empowerment of women' as applied within development paradigms and policies in Palestinian NGOs in general, focusing on women's organisations in particular and on locally recognised empowered women.

## **Empowering work**

### **Analysing the Egypt Labour Market Survey**

Researchers used the Egypt Labour Market Panel Survey (ELMPS) of 2006 (and its predecessors) to foster both qualitative and quantitative studies on various aspects of gender and work in Egypt, as well as building research capacity in this area.



## **Gendered Impacts of BRAC and WFW Microfinance Programming on Hazara Women in Kabul, Afghanistan**

This research provided a grassroots analysis of the livelihood strategies of women from low-income households, their ability to take advantage of new economic resources and the extent to which these resources, along with other supportive measures, have translated into shifts in the balance of power within the family and the community.

## **Cash Transfers for Poor Families in Egypt**

Dr Hania Sholkamy (Pathways Middle East Hub Convenor) and her team at the Social Research Center, American University in Cairo collaborated with the Ministry of Social Solidarity to implement Egypt's first conditional cash transfer programme. The pilot was launched in March 2009 in the Cairene slum of Ain el-Sira.

## **Changes and Continuity in Women's Everyday Lives in Ghana**

Through a pilot survey of 400 women in urban, peri-urban and rural areas in the Greater Accra Region, this study explored women's everyday lives in order to better understand their experiences of empowerment and disempowerment.

## **Empowering Domestic Work: The Organising of Domestic Workers in Brazil**

This project traced how some of the most marginalised workers in Brazil came to unionise, press demands for professionalisation to government and achieve a major policy shift. It draws out broader lessons on how marginalised workers can gain rights, security and wellbeing, addressing the intersections of race, class and gender.

## **Lady Health Workers in Pakistan**

This study explored the empowerment-related possibilities experienced by women in a major public sector community health initiative in Pakistan.

## **Women Health Workers in Bangladesh**

This research considered whether and how the work done by women health workers leads to changes at the individual, family and societal levels.

## **Paid Work and Women's Empowerment**

This research project explored how paid work can change women's lives in terms of dealing with the public sphere and institutions, accessing services, commodities, resources, information, reducing isolation, increasing negotiation/bargaining skills, ability to protect themselves, etc.

## **Women's Voice in Policy Spaces Shaping the Global Economy**

This project looks at the challenge of how to maximise the gains and minimise the constraints of globalisation in order that women can access markets as a pathway to their empowerment in different regional and local contexts.

## **Building constituencies for equality and justice Women in the Writing of 1988 Constitution**

This research analysed documents and interviews with congresswomen who participated in the elaboration of the Federal Constitution of 1988.

## **Feminisms and Women's Movements in Brazil: Issues and Challenges**

This research is ongoing and looks into collective action as a pathway to women's empowerment.

## **Brazilian Feminisms in the United Nations Arenas**

This research analysed the strategies of articulation of Brazilian feminists, with a special focus on the global spaces created by the United Nations organisations.

## **Women in Local Power in Bahia – City Council Women**

This project facilitated training seminars with local council women.

## **Building Constituencies for Political Reform: Quotas as an Instrument of Change**

This project looked at the extent to which political quotas for women can be successful in bringing women into political office.

## **Review of Strategic Approaches to Building Constituencies by Women's Organisations**

This project sought to document and analyse strategies and approaches used by selected women's organisations in Bangladesh to mobilise and advocate for women's rights and raise demands to the State and other rights holders.

## **Dialogue with Selected Women District Assembly Members in Ghana**

This research asked how assembly members got into office, and what their experiences in office have been, and what gains they have made for themselves and their communities.

## **Family Courts in Egypt: An Exit from Marriage on a Pathway to Empowerment?**

This research looked at the reforms that have been taking place in Egyptian personal status laws since 2000, and their implications for women's empowerment.

## **Feminist Activists in Global Policy Organisations**

This project identified and worked with feminist activists working within international development organisations that are shaping discourse and policy action – it explored their strategies and strengthened capacity to bring about change.

### **Local Governments between Building the Islamic Nation and Women's Empowerment**

In this research, Islah Jad examined the role of the newly elected (2005–06) local councils in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

### **Measuring the Implementation of UN Resolution 1325**

This research aimed at monitoring and evaluating progress made so far on the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 in Sierra Leone.

### **Mobilising Resources for Women's Organisations**

This project examined the significance and impact of official external financing for women's organising at global, regional and national levels, with case studies from Ghana and Bangladesh.

### **Pathways of Women's Empowerment through Legal Strategies: The Case of Maria da Penha Law**

This project investigated women's struggles and pathways for the implementation and monitoring of public policies addressing violence against women in Brazil.

### **Poor Women's Agency in Gaza: Between 'Doing' and 'Being'**

This research examined the complexity of gendered subjectivity in the Gaza Strip and how it is reshaped in a contradictory manner in the context of livelihood crisis and insecurity caused by the full siege imposed on the Gaza Strip by the Israeli occupation and the international community.

### **Sustainable Security and Peacebuilding as Pathways of Women's Empowerment**

This project examined women's conception of, and role in security and peace building in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

### **Women and Local Governance in Sierra Leone**

This study aimed at illuminating the pathways of women's political empowerment, the relationship between political participation and change and interrogating the effectiveness of the decentralisation commission in empowering women.

### **Women in Local Government in Bangladesh**

This project investigated the introduction and enabling conditions of women into local governance in Bangladesh and its influence on women's empowerment, including strengthening accountability of local governance institutions to women.

### **Women in Local Government in Pakistan**

This project investigated the introduction and enabling conditions of women into local governance in Pakistan and its influence on women's empowerment, including strengthening accountability of local governance institutions to women.

### **Women in the 'Right?': Women in Religious Political Groups in Bangladesh**

This research explored how and why women organise in religious groups and its political implications.

### **Women's Political Participation in Egypt**

This project looked at the various instruments to support women's political participation in Egypt, including the National Council for Women's political empowerment training programme, and asked how effective have these been in challenging power hierarchies and empowering women politically?

## **Changing narratives of sexuality**

### **Changing Representations of Women in Popular Culture**

This project sought to understand the ways in which women are represented in popular Ghanaian music from 1970 to date, and challenge contemporary musicians to think about how their lyrics portray women.

### **Cultural History of Bengali Muslim Women**

This project explored the identity formation of Bengali Muslim women by investigating the cultural and political history of Bangladesh spanning the 20th century.

### **Exploring Positive Approaches to Sexuality**

This project looked at a small number of cases of local, national or regional initiatives on sexual rights and women's empowerment that have succeeded in creating spaces for challenging repressive social norms concerning female sexuality.

### **Feminisms and the Struggle for Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights: The Brazilian Experience**

By exploring the link between the denial of women's reproductive rights and the denial of women's sexual agency under patriarchy, this project examined the conditions under which feminist demands around abortion have been successful by drawing together experiences from across Latin America.

### **Sexuality and Empowerment: The Case of Anita Hogan**

An incident in which nude pictures of a well-known Nigerian actress appeared in a 'serious' newspaper and the subsequent response provides insight into understandings of sexuality and its embeddedness in discourses on morality and freedom. This project explored this and the use of communications technology in the shifting of public/private boundaries and sexual commodification.

### **Social Change through Video Production in the Chittagong Hill Tracts**

This project explored how minority communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts project identity, culture and change in the cultural productions of the

Hill region and the process through which their stories, for long unheard, are now being related by minority people.

### **Unmarried in Palestine: Dynamics and Discourses of Choice, Embodiment, Responsibility, Power and Survival in the Lives of Single Palestinian Women**

Using topical life stories, focus groups, data and discourse analysis, this work explored the experiential diversity and thematic commonalities in the lives of Palestinian unmarried women, in the context of a society experiencing prolonged warlike conditions, political crisis, and social disruption.

### **Women and Media in Bangladesh**

This project explored how Bangladeshi women engage with television and the meanings, choices and subjectivities they derive from it.

### **Women and Religion in Bangladesh**

This research looked at resurgent Islam and its influence on the formation of female identities and sexualities to examine whether the new forms of Islam in fact open up new spaces thereby ‘permitting’ women greater sexual rights than has been popularly perceived, and what might be learnt by the secular women’s movement from women’s organising in these new spaces.

### **Changing Narratives of Empowerment in Pakistan: Trajectories of Desire and the Mediation of Socio-Cultural Spaces**

Pathways South Asia examined the discursive changes that are taking place in areas related to the media, predominantly satellite television and religion, viz the global upsurge of religious fundamentalism and resurgent patriarchies in Pakistan, in the wider context of new technologies, consumerism and globalisation.

## **Communicating empowerment**

### **Real World**

Real World is a film production scheme run by Pathways and Screen South (Regional Screen Agency of the British Film Institute) that supports emerging directors to work with our researchers to produce short films based on Pathways work.

### **Photography Ghana**

Pathways Ghana held both a training workshop and a photographic exhibition that looked at changing images of women in Ghana.

### **Photography Brazil**

Pathways Brazil ran a photovoice project and exhibition with women domestic workers in Bahia.

### **Photography Egypt**

Pathways Egypt held a gender training and photography competition interrogating contemporary images of women in Egypt.

### **Changing Images of Women Photo Exhibition**

Pathways Bangladesh ran a gender sensitising training, and photographic competition, followed by an exhibition looking at changing images of women in Bangladesh.

### **Digital Stories**

Pathways communication officers in each hub were trained in digital storytelling (DST) facilitation. Three DST workshops were held in Bangladesh, two in Dhaka and one in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

### **Stories of Change Video Documentary, Bangladesh**

*Stories of Change* is a video documentary that travels through different regions of Bangladesh and through different generations by following the narratives of five women, ranging from a 16-year-old cricketer to a 60-year-old activist. The film depicts the lives and struggles of these women as part of the efforts to make visible the trajectories of change experienced in the lives of Bangladeshi women.

### **Stories of Change Writing Project, Bangladesh**

This project started with a workshop where stories from Pathways research were rewritten using creative writing tools, and culminated in a book.

HOME FAMILIES ABOUT

THREE GENERATIONS OF WOMEN **3G**

## SAMIHA'S FAMILY, EGYPT

PORTRAITS OBJECTS INTERVIEWS NEIGHBOURHOOD

AN EL SIRA, CAIRO

NEXT FAMILY

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## IHSAN'S FAMILY, EGYPT

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PORTRAITS OBJECTS INTERVIEWS NEIGHBOURHOOD

HANEM FATIHA IHSAN

▶ GROWING UP LEARNING LOVE WORK CHANGE BELONGING HAPPINESS

PLAY ▶

Contestations

dialogues on women's empowerment

ISSUE 4: ISLAM AND FEMINISM IS AN IMP FRIENDLY?

Issue 4: What's happening in Egypt? Report on Women's Rights? SUBSCRIBE Page 10: Interview with Fatma Ahmed Ali Interview by Yasmin

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theSTAR

Education

### Stories from the Hill Tracts

By: Rana Khatun

Education is the key to the development of a nation. It is the only way to ensure that the people of a nation are able to improve their standard of living and to participate in the development of their country. In the Hill Tracts, education is a challenge. The people of the Hill Tracts are a marginalized community and they face many obstacles when it comes to accessing education. The STAR is a platform that provides a space for the people of the Hill Tracts to share their stories and to discuss their challenges. The STAR is a platform that provides a space for the people of the Hill Tracts to share their stories and to discuss their challenges.

Projeto Domésticas

uma história

Maria Isabel – a luta continua!

Projeto Domésticas é um projeto de pesquisa e de intervenção social desenvolvido por uma equipe de mulheres, com o objetivo de promover a conscientização e a organização das trabalhadoras domésticas. O projeto atua em diferentes frentes, incluindo a realização de oficinas, a produção de materiais educativos e a promoção de ações de advocacy. O projeto também atua em diferentes frentes, incluindo a realização de oficinas, a produção de materiais educativos e a promoção de ações de advocacy.

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# IDS Bulletin

## QUOTAS: ADD WOMEN AND STIR?



### Apresentação

O projeto Mulheres... Usadas Reveladas é uma exposição fotográfica coletiva, com imagens produzidas por 12 mulheres, trabalhadoras domésticas. O enfoque é em seus cotidianos, identificados através dos olhares dessas trabalhadoras sobre suas próprias vidas e as percepções do cidadão médio morador, em Salvador, Bahia, Brasil. São histórias, aqui, as relações entre seus ambientes de trabalho e os bairros nos quais residem - entre os contextos familiares nos quais convivem trabalhando como domésticas e as suas próprias famílias. Além disso, as imagens revelam os locais de passagem, inferências entre os seus contextos identificados na trajetória dessas mulheres, que cruzam extremos da cidade, entre os bairros da periferia e os bairros "ricos" de Salvador, inferências através das quais podemos perceber as diversas "passagens transitórias" presentes nos grandes centros urbanos.

A ideia da exposição surgiu a partir do desenvolvimento do projeto Trajetória da Organização das Trabalhadoras Domésticas no Brasil, que atua com o empoderamento de mulheres. Integra o Projeto FLAMPO - Início do Empoderamento de Mulheres, ora sendo desenvolvido pelo Núcleo de Estudos Interdisciplinares sobre a Mulher - NEM/UFPA, como parte do conferência de pesquisas intitulada Pathways of Women's Empowerment.

A partir das atividades do projeto, veio a demanda de que fossem criadas estratégias de auto-reconhecimento e afirmação identitária das trabalhadoras envolvidas, no qual a fotografia apresentou-se como um mecanismo poderoso de vocalização dos contextos percebidos pelas referidas mulheres, por ser uma arte visual capaz de desvelar situações e mostrá-las à sociedade como realidades vividas. Assim, ocorreram, assim, oficinas de sensibilização para a linguagem fotográfica, através das quais as mulheres realizaram ensaios fotográficos com câmeras descartáveis.

Aparceriam, daí, muitos formados... I foram revividos ambientes, rituais, denúncias sociais e subjetividades, convergindo no tema em questão e resultando nas "vistas" que cada uma desenvolveu acerca de seu entorno e situação de vida.

IDS Bulletin

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March 2010

NEGOTIATING EMPOWERMENT



Now praise ye great and graceful women

By 1998, the... [text continues]

... [text continues]

14

حكايات مصرية في اليوم العالمي للمرأة

... [Arabic text continues]



سيرة الحفولة تفصل الطلاق

سالي من الأقاليم إلى رصيف القاهرة

... [Arabic text continues]



**Neusa Palmeira**

Tem um casal de filhos e é avó, aos 44 anos. Trabalha em casa de família, principalmente como cozinheira. Adora estar com sua filha e seu neto. "A fotografia mudou minha vida. Através desse curso eu tive meu primeiro contato com a fotografia. O mais legal foi ter aprendido a prestar mais atenção nas coisas à minha volta para a depois ver o resultado nas imagens que to".

44 years old. She has a couple of children and is already a grandmother. She is a domestic worker in a family home, working mostly as a cook. She loves to be with her daughter and her grandson. "Taking pictures has changed my life. The night this course I had my first contact with photography. The coolest thing was learning to focus more on things around me and then see the result in the images I take".



Real World

... [text continues]

The Show

... [text continues]

A Vida Política | Thoms & Silk

Women's stories from Palestine & Brazil

animal\*monday write this down

How to join the RW

REAL WORLD

# Photo captions

**Captions are in the order they appear in the report.**

**Cover left to right** Salamata, a woman accused of being a witch by her fellow villagers, outside her home in Gambaga, Northern Ghana. Photo: Yaba Badoe

Munni Saha, a Bangladeshi television reporter. Reporting used to be limited to men due to the nature of the work, having to go anywhere at any time and to potentially risky situations. However, many young women are now undertaking this challenging job and rejecting the image of women as being defenceless and vulnerable. Photo: Sheikh Razibul Islam

An Egyptian girl on the streets of Cairo during the recent revolution. Women played an active and crucial role in the 2011 protests, demanding political reform and the ousting of the then president Hosni Mubarak. Photo: Ali Atef

A woman fruit seller in Salvador, Brazil. This photo was taken as part of the photography training given to the NEIM student interns. Photo: Sheila Rodriguez

**Contents, page 1** Women taking an early morning stroll. Women going for a morning walk is a recent phenomenon in Bangladesh as they become health conscious and more comfortable walking by themselves. Previously, women would not have walked in the park without a male guardian, however young. Photo: Sheikh Rajibul Islam

**Pathways, page 7** Participants at a Digital Storytelling Conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Photo: Tessa Lewin

**Introduction, page 8/9** Women in Tamale, Northern Ghana. Photo: Steve Ababio

Women on the streets of Cairo during the January/February 2011 revolution. Photo: Ali Atef

**Introduction, page 10** Hawa, a seamstress working in Tamale, Northern Ghana. Photo: Steve Ababio

**Key Point 1** Shantana works in the garment industry in Bangladesh. Garment workers are paid very little and work 10 or more hours a day to make a living. She says she is happy and not intimidated by her workload, having built a fantasy world for herself where her companions are film stars. Photo: Sheikh Razibul Islam

**Key Point 2** Om Ramadan selling gas canisters in Ain el-Sira, Cairo. This is traditionally considered a male job. Photo: Amanda Kerdahi Matt

**Key Point 3** Family in Ain el-Sira, Cairo, location for the pilot conditional cash transfer programme being supported by researchers at the Pathways Middle East Hub. Photo: Heba Gowayed

**Key Point 4** Kabul, Afghanistan. Women crowd into a beauty salon reopened after the defeat of the Taliban regime. The salon's busiest day is Friday, the Muslim holiday. Photo: Iva Zimova/Panos

**Key Point 5** NEIM's undergraduate student interns. Photo: NEIM

**Key Point 6** Hawa is a seamstress working in Tamale, Northern Ghana. Her tailoring business may include an old-fashioned charcoal-heated iron, but she stays in touch with her contacts via her mobile phone. Photo: Steve Ababio

**Key Point 7** Nursing students. This photo won second place in the 'Changing Images of Women in Ghana' photo competition. Photo: Senyo Ganyo

**Key Point 8** Creuza Oliveira, domestic worker rights activist, campaigning for election in Salvador, Brazil in 2008. Photo: Animal Monday

**Key Point 9** Majda Al-Bahr, taxi driver. Majda is a rare sight on the streets of Jerusalem: she says she is the only Palestinian female taxi driver who works there. A mother of five, she used to be a cleaner and work only indoors. She aspires to become a bus driver, as that would mean more regular working hours. Photo: Paulina Tervo

**Key Point 10** A family watching television together in Bangladesh, 2008. Television provides women with new spaces in which to view the world, expanding their knowledge and helping them escape reality; the contributions this can make to their wellbeing and empowerment have been underestimated by development. Photo: Aanmona Priyadarshini

**Key Point 11** A health worker, Bangladesh. This woman's standing in the community reflects the increasing recognition given to healthcare and family planning. As health workers are required to engage with households of all kinds, they are crossing class and caste barriers that would previously have denied them such direct access and mobility. Photo: BRAC

**Key Point 12** Storytellers from the 2008 Qalet el-Rawiyeh performance at the historic venue of Wikalet el Ghouri, Cairo. Photo: Tessa Lewin

**‘This important global investigation, driven by facts found on the ground, gives us valuable insights into how women’s lives change for the better. The findings hold two essential messages for policymakers. First, to build equality, the deep structural causes of gender inequality and discrimination must be firmly addressed. Women cannot live with dignity and improve their lives – and those of their families and communities – when they are denied equal rights to property and access to justice, income-earning opportunities, and knowledge. Second, collective action provides the foundation for sustained empowerment. For UN Women, these two findings constitute valuable guides for our work.’**

***Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women***

