

Sexuality and the Development Industry



Acknowledgements

This report was written by Andrea Lynch and edited by Susie Jolly and Andrea Cornwall. It draws on discussions and presentations at the Sexuality and the Development Industry workshop, which took place in April 2008 at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, UK. The workshop was co-sponsored by the Sexuality and Development Programme and the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Programme Consortium. Both are funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID).

Cover photo A couple cuddle at home in Dhaka, Bangladesh. She is a *hijra* who has undergone a sex change operation. He is her husband who stays at home to take care of household chores while she goes out to earn a living with other *hijras*. A *hijra* is a physically male or intersex person who feels herself to be a member of a 'third sex' or a woman. Bengali society combines tolerance and stigmatising of the *hijra's* ascribed dual role of flirtatious comic and spiritual being.

Photo credit GMB Akash/Panos Pictures.

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Introduction

A lesbian activist from China shows photos from a training event she organised: a three-way wedding ceremony between herself, a gay man and a lesbian woman, held at a gay restaurant in Beijing and officiated by a drag queen. During the ceremony, the 60-odd guests (from an HIV/AIDS training, gay activists, AIDS activists, researchers on sexuality and marriage, and friends from other NGOs) asked the wedding party questions about marriage, gender, homosexuality, sadomasochism and AIDS prevention, among other topics. At the training's close, participants lined up to sign the marriage registry.

A Nicaraguan consultant and researcher recounts his experience of developing a sexual and reproductive rights strategy for a local NGO, only to be told by his employer that the document contained 'too much sex'.

Three advocates for the rights of sex workers trade stories about ill-fated income-generation projects for sex workers: one that involved buying a cow for a transgender sex worker who had to take on extra clients in order to house, feed and eventually impregnate the cow; and another that involved a silk production scheme in Ethiopia that would have taken 12 years to reach 20 female sex workers, in a region with over 2,000 sex workers. The third told the story of a development team who visited a collective of female sex workers in Calcutta to offer them training in income-generation skills, where the women suggested that the team focus their efforts on women who had no incomes first.

A Nigerian sexual rights activist explains how she used discussions of multiple orgasms as a means to spark debate on sex, pleasure, relationships, intimacy, polygamy and female genital mutilation (FGM) with married couples in the Northern Nigerian state of Minna, where *Sharia* law has been in place since 2000.

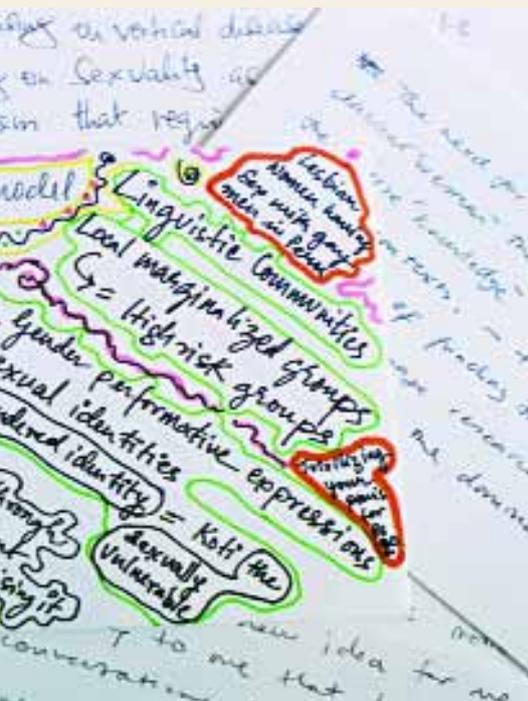
Workshop notes by participants





In April 2008, 70-plus activists, academics, donors and development practitioners from more than 25 countries gathered at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in Brighton to explore the complex linkages between sexuality and the development industry. The episodes above are just a few snapshots of the meeting: for three days, people traded stories, strategies and struggles, raised questions, challenged assumptions, made plans and built alliances. Participants came from a range of professional, activist and academic backgrounds, with varying degrees of identification with the topics on the table. Amidst this diversity, those who attended were united by a desire to look critically at how the development industry addresses sexuality, and to identify entry points for bringing development policies and practices – including efforts to address HIV and AIDS – into closer alignment with the complexity of people’s desires, struggles and identities.

This report aims to capture the spirit and the energy of the workshop, and to share some of the central themes and the contradictions that arose during three invigorating days of discussion and debate.





Who organised the workshop?

The Sexuality and the Development Industry Workshop was convened jointly by the IDS Sexuality and Development Programme and the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Programme Consortium. Both are funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID).

The Sexuality and Development Programme (www.ids.ac.uk/go/sexualityanddevelopment) is a three-year initiative that seeks to examine development industry engagement with sexuality, emphasising the need to move away from negative perspectives on sexuality that focus only on disease, violence or control, towards more positive, rights-based, empowering and pleasure-filled approaches. The programme has four partners, in India, China, South Africa and Brazil, who are pursuing action research on diverse sexuality issues.

Pathways of Women's Empowerment (www.pathwaysofempowerment.org) is a global research and communications programme that links activists, academics and practitioners and focuses on understanding the diverse ways in which women in different parts of the world challenge and transform the constraints that deny them equality and justice. Working in Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia and West Africa, and with global policy actors, Pathways seeks to make connections – between people, ideas, policy processes and lived realities – that can contribute to changing power relations. This workshop was supported as part of the Pathways programme's study of the impact of global policy institutions on sexualities.

Participants write their hopes for the workshop on Post-it notes





The participants

You brought together people from all walks and talks. We usually just go to academic settings, discussions or seminars on sexuality. But the people in this workshop are from all over, with different perspectives, so there's much more interaction than in an academic setting.

– **Cecilia Sardenberg, NEIM, Federal University of Bahia, Brazil**

The workshop brought together more than 70 participants from a range of activist groups, NGOs, universities, government bodies and donor organisations worldwide:

Dorothy Aken'Ova, International Centre for Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights (INCREASE), Nigeria

Christina Alexander, Open Society Institute, Sexual Health and Rights Project, USA

Iman Al-Ghafari, Tishreen University, Syria

Bekti Andara, IDS, UK

Camilo Antillón, Forum Syd, Nicaragua

Henry Armas, Institute of Social Studies, Peru/Netherlands

Lucille Atkin, Hesperian, UK

Nandinee Bandyopadhyay, Path/Durbar, India

Kate Bedford, University of Kent, UK

Nafisa Bedri, Ahfad University for Women, Sudan

Zeneida Bernabe-Garcia, IDS, UK

Deevia Bhana, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Paul Boyce, Institute of Education, UK

Andrea Cornwall, IDS, UK

Esther Corona, World Association for Sexual Health, Mexico

Sonia Corrêa, Sexuality Policy Watch/ABIA AIDS, Brazil

Petra Costa, London School of Economics, UK

Felicity Daly, Interact Worldwide, UK

Chris Dolan, Makerere University, Uganda





Heather Doyle, Open Society Institute, USA
Rosamund Ebdon, Department for International Development (DFID), UK
Jerker Edström, IDS, UK
Silvia Lucia Ferreira, NEIM, Federal University of Bahia, Brazil
Emily Esplen, IDS, UK
Andil Gosine, York University, Canada/Trinidad
Matt Greenall, independent consultant, UK
Jing Gu, IDS, UK
Wendy Harcourt, *Society for International Development Journal*, Italy
Kate Hawkins, IDS, UK
Anupam Hazra, SAATHII, India
Xiaopei He, Pink Space Sexuality Resource Centre, China
Mona Ibrahim, American University of Cairo, Egypt
Pinar Ilkkaracan, Women for Women's Human Rights – New Ways, Turkey
Helena Ishaku, INCREASE, Nigeria
Priya John, IDS, UK
Susie Jolly, IDS, UK
Matt Jones, IDS, UK
Caroline Oloch Kambona, Young Men as Equal Partners Project, Kenya
Akshay Khanna, University of Edinburgh, UK/India
Tanya Kisserli, International HIV/AIDS Alliance, UK
Wendy Knerr, The Pleasure Project, UK
Tessa Lewin, IDS, UK
Jill Lewis, Living for Tomorrow, UK
Amy Lind, University of Cincinnati, USA
Esther Lopez, University of Sussex, UK
Elaine Mercer, IDS, UK
Stella Nyanzi, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK
Gráinne O'Connell, University of Sussex, UK
Nelson Juma Otwoma, African Medical and Research Foundation, Kenya
Cheryl Overs, Network of Sex Work Projects/Monash University, UK/Australia
Charmaine Pereira, Initiative for Women's Studies in Nigeria, Nigeria
Mathilda Piehl, RFSL, Sweden

Selected expectations

- Find people who are breaking taboos around talking about the real sex people have or want to have.
- Talking about sex outside the confines of public health.
- An unconventional exploration of the relationships between sexuality and masculinities.
- Creative ways of discussing the pleasure aspects of sexuality in a conservative society.
- A clearer understanding of the relationship between sexuality and sex work.
- To open fresh possibilities between global South contexts and queer activism.
- A better understanding of the implications of sexuality and its diversity for development policy and practice. What should we be doing differently and how?



- Learn more about the intersection between race, sexuality and gender.
- A better understanding of funding trends.
- Plan some future actions/ programmes to challenge/change frameworks about sexualities.
- Breaking the silence on bisexuality as feminists.
- Find ways to talk about queer sexualities (particularly LGBT sexualities) in a way that does not make it seem like they are ‘Western’ identities, but that such experiences are indigenous and local and need validation too.
- To have fun and feel good about myself and sexuality.
- Discuss the value of ‘good’/ pleasurable and ‘dirty’/taboo sex (doing it or just fantasising about it).
- New positions.

Nadja Pinheiro, NEIM, Federal University of Bahia, Brazil

Samia Rahim, BRAC University, Bangladesh

Tess Raposas, freelance journalist, Philippines

Mubasher Saeed, Rahnuma – Family Planning Association of Pakistan, Pakistan

Meena Saraswathi Seshu, SANGRAM/VAMP, India

Cecilia Sardenberg, NEIM, Federal University of Bahia, Brazil

Jaya Sharma, Nirantar, India

Yngve Sjolund, *CD4 Magazine*/South African Sexual Health Association (SASHA), South Africa

Anjana Suvarnananda, Anjaree Lesbian Group, Thailand

Alice Welbourn, International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (ICW), UK

Carolyn Williams, Gender Institute, London School of Economics, UK

Zonny Woods, Ford Foundation, USA

Participants arrived with varying goals and expectations. People were looking to be challenged, inspired and energised, to make new contacts and explore new forums for their work, to learn from others’ experiences, to deepen their research and to find new ways of talking and thinking about sexuality and development. For many, the workshop represented a rare space where they could discuss sex and sexuality critically and openly – particularly in the context of development – and where they could meet others from around the world engaged in similar struggles to link their commitment to sexual rights with their professional and academic identities.



How did the participants relate to the development industry and what kind of sex were they having?

One of the workshop's first activities revealed the diversity of how the participants saw themselves with respect to the development industry. Asked to position themselves on a continuum between the end points of 'yes' and 'no' in response to whether they considered themselves part of the industry, participants formed a line which stretched from one end of the room to the other, with many standing between the two poles. When asked to explain their choice of positioning, some said that they saw themselves as implicated in the development industry because they had received funding from development agencies, been involved in UN and other global processes related to development, or been engaged in community development work, but that they did not identify with what they perceived to be mainstream development norms and discourses. Others saw their decision to self-identify as part of the development industry as a political act. Stella Nyanzi, born in Uganda but currently based at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, placed herself squarely on the 'yes' side of the room. She explained:

As a black African woman from a poor country, I have made a proactive decision to say that I am part of development. According to the development industry, women like me are all heterosexual, living in villages, married, pregnant, with children, and so on. So I think it's important for someone like me to say I'm part of development, in order to challenge those assumptions.

Next, participants lined up in response to a series of questions generated by the group: Have you ever paid for sex, or been paid for



Slides from Sonia Correa's Keynote presentation: 'Sexuality and the Development Industry: Where have we come from? Where to go from here?'



In development practices

The persistent effects of demography, epidemiology, biomedicine, public health:



- The centrality of heterosexual intercourse, obsession with fertility.
- The venereal panic that resurged in the 1980's with HIV and AIDS, making once again visible a 19th cohort of "figures of sex" and the "sex-death" link

On the other hand:



- Ideas contesting sex essentialism and heteronormativity have captured hearts and minds and inspire myriads of struggles underway.
- Constructivism frames have gained academic legitimacy, even at the heart of the disciplines from which sex essentialism is deployed: molecular biology (Gould, Eiredge, Hubbard, Fausto-Sterling)
- Battles are evolving to reinterpret religious conceptions and norms (Hunt, Jung, Iman to mention few).

sex? Have you ever had sex for reproductive purposes? Have you ever become pregnant or made someone pregnant by accident? Are you or have you ever been in more than one relationship at the same time? Participants spoke frankly about their personal experiences of sex, sexuality, intimacy and struggle. People felt this was an important way to start. If they were going to talk about other people's sexualities, they needed to be able to talk about their own. And discussions about the policies and politics of sexuality needed to be rooted in the complexity of their own realities.

Major themes

The workshop was rich in insights, stories, revelations and contradictions. Four interconnected themes ran through the workshop:

- Norms and heteronormativity
- Sexuality and the political economy of the development and HIV and AIDS industries
- Labelling, categories, identity and (in)visibility
- Putting pleasure back in the picture.

Theme I: Norms and heteronormativity

Those who are marginalised from dominant norms around sexuality – such as lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender and intersex people, sex workers, single women, women who have sex outside of marriage and non-macho men – may face not only pressure to conform, but stigma, discrimination and violence if they do not. Those who are integrated into dominant norms of sexuality may also pay a price – for



example if they undergo genital mutilation or early marriage, or engage in unequal and unsatisfying heterosexual relationships. These connections remain unrecognised in many policies and programmes. As a result, the effectiveness of interventions is hampered, and people continue to be denied their sexual rights, in particular poor people who often have fewer means to claim such rights in the first place.

– **Susie Jolly, IDS Sexuality and Development Programme proposal, 2007**

Norms and normativity in general, and heteronormativity in particular, were central themes in the workshop. Much of the research and analysis that participants shared aimed to locate and question the norms and ideologies – rarely explicit – that shape development policies, programmes, funding and discourses. As activists, many of the people who participated in the workshop seek to challenge norms in their own lives and with the individuals and communities with whom they work. Participants also emphasised that the goal is not just to take norms apart: they are also trying to construct ‘good’ norms about equality, freedom, diversity, human rights and sexual rights. However, concern was expressed about how their work to reconstruct norms could end up creating new problems. For example, some raised questions about how their work to challenge traditional gender norms by promoting women’s empowerment can create a new binary between the ‘empowered’ and the ‘disempowered’, when in reality individuals have complex, dynamic relationships with the norms that shape their lives.

Many battered women go back to their husbands. Why? We react with shock and horror, but there is no discussion of the role of women’s sexual needs in this equation.

– **Jaya Sharma, Nirantar, India**

Jaya Sharma, whose work with the Delhi-based organisation Nirantar seeks to build the capacity of women’s organisations to address

A workshop game by the Indian NGO Nirantar to illustrate the effects of gender and sexuality norms on women’s bodies. Participants discuss these norms, write them on pieces of cloth, and tie them onto the part of the body affected





sexuality, begins her workshops by asking participants to name a norm that they have challenged, and a norm that they have subscribed to – not necessarily related to sexuality. She observed that many of the feminists she works with find it easy to come up with norms they have challenged, but are reluctant to identify norms they embrace. Nirantar’s workshops also revealed that women were more likely to challenge norms that resulted in negative violations of their rights, and less likely to challenge those that led to a denial of their positive desires. For example, they were adamant about their willingness to abandon abusive marriages, but less willing to affirm their right to enter into love marriages across caste and religious differences, for fear of upsetting their families. Jaya’s work also revealed examples of how people simultaneously question and accept norms. She told the story of a widow who was willing to break with gender norms by riding a bicycle, but who covered her head when cycling to her in-laws’ home for fear of offending them. Later on in the discussion, the widow admitted that part of the reason she liked to ride the bicycle was that it aroused her sexually.



What is heteronormativity?

Heteronormativity is the idea that only heterosexual relations are normal, and that only particular kinds of heterosexual relations are normal (e.g. within marriage, between people of the same class and ethnic group, with the male partner being dominant, etc). Exactly which relations are considered normal will vary according to time and place, but the presence of such norms and their effects in controlling and excluding people is almost universal.

The workshop sought to expose and challenge both the implicit and the overt heteronormativity that permeates development discourses and interventions. What makes heteronormativity so insidious is that it is often visible only to those who fail to conform to societal norms about relationships, either because they have same-sex relationships or desires, or because their relationships do not fit with what society



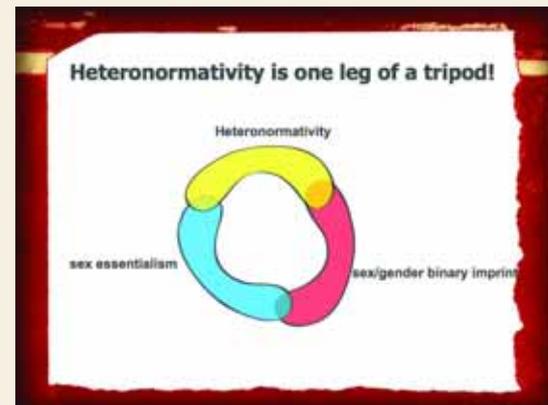
expects a heterosexual woman or man to be or to do. Some examples of heteronormativity in development practice include:

- Interventions that start from the assumption that poor people living in rural areas are universally heterosexual.
- Gender and development programmes that represent women as universally victimised and men as universally predatory and irresponsible.
- Macroeconomic policies that seek to promote equitable heterosexual marriage as a universal poverty reduction strategy, as if everyone is or should be married.
- HIV and AIDS prevention strategies that target men who sleep with men, sex workers and other ‘high-risk groups’ as a means to ‘protect’ the health of the ‘general’ (heterosexual) population, while denying the complex identities of and relationships between the ‘marginalised’ and the ‘normal.’

Brazilian theorist and activist Sonia Corrêa (Sexuality Policy Watch/ ABIA AIDS) offered a theoretical framework for discussing heteronormativity, providing an overview of the religious, scientific, political and cultural arguments deployed throughout history and across borders to naturalise and enforce heterosexuality. Sonia identified heteronormativity as one leg of a tripod that also includes sex essentialism (the idea that sexuality is an essential or biological drive or instinct) and binary gender thinking (the idea that all human beings fit into the categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’, outside of which no ‘legitimate’ gender identities exist).

She stressed the interdependent nature of these concepts, which seek to establish the naturalness of heterosexual desires and behaviours as a biological imperative. This heteronormative model denies the reality of human identities, relationships and behaviours, and obscures evidence of same-sex sexuality and fluid expressions of gender across time and place.

Slide from Sonia Correa’s Keynote presentation: ‘Sexuality and the Development Industry: Where have we come from? Where to go from here?’





It's a well-established notion in religious discourses, science and society, that human beings are gendered, male and female, period. And this is the norm, the rule, and it is so in the religious discourse because God made us that way, and, after the Fall, we reproduced other binary individuals. Everything that falls outside of that is not normal. Homosexuality is not normal. Sex without reproduction is not normal. In religious or cultural terms, it's argued in terms of the preservation of culture: we exist to procreate and to populate the world for God. In science, it's argued in terms of the selfish gene: we exist to perpetuate the species. There's a strand of theory that says that sexual reproduction is the most effective way to preserve our genes and perpetuate the species, but biologists can contest that, since it's not necessarily the case. In fact, asexual reproducers may be more efficient in terms of reproducing genes – which means that a man and a woman having sex is not, in reality, a very efficient way of reproducing. It's an ideological construct. That's heteronormativity.

– **Sonia Corrêa, Sexuality Policy Watch/ABIA AIDS, Brazil**

In the discussion that followed participants came up with ways of explaining and interpreting these concepts in relation to communities where they work, stressing the need to translate critical theory on gender and sexuality – much of which was developed in the West – into straightforward examples and explanations that resonate in specific cultural contexts. This was seen as a particularly urgent task in places where Western norms and ideologies have been imposed with little attention to indigenous terms, traditions and understandings of gender and sexuality. Many participants highlighted the irony of nationalists using laws introduced by colonial powers (e.g. laws that criminalise sodomy and abortion) to assert their independence from 'Western' mores – a strategy commonly employed by fundamentalist movements and governments in post-colonial states.

Throughout discussions of the need for new language, participants resisted the urge to simply 'translate' from Western or English-language paradigms. Instead, they emphasised the need to reclaim indigenous terms and traditions, and to develop and disseminate theories that came from their own contexts. This does not necessarily imply a wholesale rejection of theories developed in the West but rather a reflection on the heterogeneity of Western theory and its applications, not to mention on the usefulness of the 'West' versus 'non-West' binary in a post-colonial, globalised world.

Heteronormativity in action

Throughout the workshop, participants drew attention to the multiple manifestations and impacts of heteronormative thinking, even within movements and organisations that seek to challenge other norms.

Carolyn Williams (Gender Institute, London School of Economics, UK) shared her research on lesbian, bisexual and gay staff members working in development agencies. She pointed out that although many such agencies have human resources policies that outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, lesbian, gay,



Questioning Western theory

I was educated in Western universities with Western thought, but as I started working on sexuality, I found that it said little about my realities. Freud and Foucault said little about my culture, my history and my society. So we went back to our own sources: what are the theories, who are the people from my culture who are talking about this, now and in the past? We found so much: the book *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies* was written by people from countries like ours. For some reason, I felt compelled to cite Foucault in the introduction – in fact, it took me three weeks to write the introduction without citing Foucault, but saying the same thing. Now it has become an important political strategy, because today there is an atmosphere in Muslim countries such that if you are talking about sexuality and you give only Northern or Western references, no one will listen, people shut down.

– **Pinar Ilkkaracan, Women for Women’s Human Rights – New Ways, Turkey**

But it’s simplistic to say that Foucault is Western, especially if we see a continuum between colonialism and development: it’s the same process in a new bottle. The post-colonial state is relevant now. Foucault can’t explain sexuality in India, but he’s useful with respect to understanding the nature of the state.

– **Akshay Khanna, University of Edinburgh, UK/India**

It’s also important to remember that Western critical theory that tries to unpack, destabilise and deconstruct the core elements of Western thinking is useful everywhere, because the West is present everywhere: critical theory can be used to dismantle Western theory elsewhere. It’s not just deploying Western thinking, it’s trying to cope with the extreme limitations and constraints of Western societies, ways of living, statehood and science.

– **Sonia Corrêa, Sexuality Policy Watch/ABIA AIDS, Brazil**

But let’s keep in mind the need to reflect on the history of development and how it stifles things that are already there. My work in the Caribbean engages with a development model that forces heteronormativity that’s not really there. Pinar put it beautifully: we must rely on our ability to contest [Western thought] and find our own knowledge. It’s there, it’s just being stifled.

– **Andil Gosine, York University, Canada/Trinidad**



Heteronormativity in our workshop

Excerpts from a flipchart on which participants were invited to raise issues that had not yet been discussed included:

- Why is this meeting so straight?
- Yes it is. Maybe at least half of the people here are not straight, but the focus of the discussion this morning was more on hetero frameworks.
- Yes! Power to the others!
- Make more space at the next meeting for transgender and intersex people, masculine women and people living with disabilities!

bisexual and transgender (LGBT) employees – lesbians in particular – often felt uncomfortable coming out to their co-workers. The participants in her research explained that although their colleagues were not necessarily homophobic, the culture of development organisations was often deeply heteronormative. Further, a commitment to sexual diversity in human resources policies did not necessarily translate into a parallel commitment in the organisations' external policies and programmes. As a solution, Carolyn suggested establishing a sexuality network that would invite people of all sexualities – including those who identify as heterosexual – to reflect on sexuality in the workplace.

Several participants highlighted that although women's rights organisations and movements were often willing to critique certain norms, other norms remained untouched. As Amy Lind (University of Cincinnati, USA) pointed out, there is a long feminist tradition of critiquing marriage as an oppressive social institution for women, but there is less feminist analysis on heterosexuality as a social institution. Amy's research revealed how heteronormativity within the development industry invisibilises people with non-normative gender identities, sexual identities and family structures. Heteronormative policies and programmes also tend to focus disproportionate attention on the bodies of heterosexual mothers (in relation to reproduction) and gay men (in relation to HIV and AIDS).

Kate Bedford (University of Kent, UK) shared research she conducted on Argentina's 2001–06 Family Strengthening and Social Capital Promotion Project (PROFAM), which was implemented with support from the World Bank in the wake of the Argentine economic crisis. Her research highlighted how macroeconomic policies are increasingly turning to heterosexual partnership promotion as a 'solution' to poverty: making families, rather than individuals, the beneficiaries of social programmes. This heightens the risk that individuals' rights to erotic autonomy are being undermined. In some cases, such programmes support the elimination of public childcare services



and/or community kitchens, opting instead to support initiatives such as family gardens, training for young people, support for women's income-generating work, and workshops to encourage husbands to share the burden of domestic labour. These initiatives often enjoy the support of feminist groups, alongside that of Church-funded organisations. While workshop participants agreed that equitable marriages should not be promoted as the sole 'solution' to poverty, some highlighted the value of programmes that focus attention on the inequitable gender division of labour within heterosexual households, since a widespread shortage of public childcare services often winds up placing a disproportionate burden of care on women's shoulders.

Nafisa Bedri (Ahfad University for Women, Sudan) also shared research demonstrating how marriage normativity, combined with a conservative government stance on sex and sexuality, can render young people, sex workers and men who have sex with men disproportionately vulnerable to HIV and AIDS, unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions. Her analysis of national HIV prevention policies in Sudan demonstrated that condoms, testing services and sexual health information are routinely denied to these groups, based on the norm that only married couples should be having sex.

Challenging normativity in work with married couples

Many development organisations working with married couples, including some women's rights groups, continue to operate from the assumption that the communities and individuals they work with are uniformly heterosexual, and that universal marriage means universal heterosexuality. As a result, their sexuality – and reproduction-related interventions tend to focus on married women. This trend not only overlooks the sexual and reproductive health and rights of unmarried women, it also denies the reality that married women may be unable to openly express gender identities and sexual desires that fall outside the dominant norms of femininity and heterosexuality. Further, much gender and development work reinforces the notion that women are

Heteronationalism

In her analysis of PROFAM, Kate Bedford (University of Kent, UK) explained how family strengthening was promoted as a form of fortifying 'Argentinian-ness' in a time of economic crisis. In his research on how same-sex desires, behaviours and identities in the Caribbean have been impacted by the HIV and AIDS industry's creation of the epidemiological category of MSM (men who have sex with men), Andil Gosine (York University, Canada/Trinidad) took this idea further. Andil put forward the concept of 'heteronationalism': state efforts to enforce heterosexuality as a gendered, racialised strategy for ensuring national purity through heterosexual reproduction. He went on to analyse how the Trinidadian organisation MSM: No Political Agenda worked to maintain heteronationalism: the organisation was established with the clear goal of 'saving' the broader heterosexual nation from HIV infection by MSM, it made an explicit effort to differentiate MSM from gay men, and it adopted a neutral, apolitical approach to same-sex sexuality. Such an approach may divorce same-sex behaviours from any notion of sexual identity, sexual rights or political voice, and sidestep issues of exclusion, discrimination and violence.



uniformly vulnerable and victimised, whereas men are uniformly predatory and irresponsible. Such attitudes invisibilise men's vulnerabilities, deny women's power and fail to engage heterosexual men as agents of change.

The invisibility of male victims of sexual violence is very much part of heteronormativity. I would like us to confront that head on.
– **Chris Dolan, Makerere University, Uganda**

Some organisations working with married couples and married women are making positive efforts to address heteronormativity and marriage normativity in their programmes and advocacy, and to include unmarried people and young people in their work. In Turkey, Women for Women's Human Rights – New Ways (WWHR), whose Women's Human Rights Education Programme has reached more than 5,000 women across the country, has a long tradition of building alliances with LGBT organisations and movements. In its human rights training, WWHR challenges the assumption that unmarried women have no sexuality or sexual lives, by encouraging dialogue on sexuality between married and unmarried women. In Nigeria, the International Centre for Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights (INCREASE) offers individual counselling and support to married people to encourage happier, less violent marriages, with more possibilities for sexual pleasure for women as well as for men – which in itself challenges marriage norms. At the same time, while it aims to foster greater equality and pleasure in marital relationships, INCREASE emphasises that its goal is not to strengthen the marriage system. Indeed, through the counselling and training some people start to explore their own desires and find these can only be fulfilled outside the marriage. INCREASE also organises a lesbian support group, which can support women who decide to leave their marriages to realise their desires for other women.



Marriage, training or *ménage-à-trois*? Challenging marriage normativity in China

In China marriage is the norm. Many people get married: gay men and straight women, straight men and gay women, gay men and gay women. Some marry for reasons of convenience, some as a result of the social pressure to get married, and some by choice and for pleasure. But gay men who marry women are often accused by the gay community for not being gay enough, or by health authorities for transmitting HIV and endangering society. And lesbian women often underestimate their HIV risk within heterosexual marriages, since lesbians are considered to be a low-risk group for HIV.

In an effort to increase space for homosexual, non-monogamous and other non-conforming relationships, activist Xiaopei He, founder and director of the Pink Space Sexuality Resource Centre in Beijing, decided to organise a fake wedding. She proposed marriage to a long-time male friend who is a gay activist, and also to a lesbian woman whom she had just met. Both accepted her proposals. More than 60 guests attended the wedding, including lesbian and gay activists, AIDS trainers and activists, researchers on sexuality and marriage, and members of women's groups. People had many questions to put to the brides, the groom, their parents, the Master of Ceremonies, and each other, and a lively discussion ensued on the topics of marriage, sadomasochism, gender, homosexuality and AIDS prevention in the context of multiple relationships.





Challenging our own normativity

Maybe we're not all heteronormative, but there's a lot of normativity in LGBT and sexual rights work. We need to be critical of ourselves and our essentialism, even when talking about resistance. We're all part of that industry too.

– Carolyn Williams, Gender Institute, London School of Economics, UK

In sharing their research and activism, Carolyn Williams (UK) and Xiaopei He (Pink Space Sexuality Resource Centre, China) pointed out that LGBT movements and organisations can themselves be very normative, failing to include those who choose to express their sexuality in ways that lie outside monogamous homosexuality. As our discussions deepened, several participants also highlighted the connection between pleasure and subverting norms, raising a number of provocative questions and emphasising the need to maintain a critical perspective on even the most 'non-normative' norms:

- Let us not set up a new norm that sex is good and we should all have it. What about asexuals and people who are not getting it? What about people who get sexual pleasure elsewhere, or those who are celibate by choice?
- How to avoid making 'pleasure' another orthodoxy ... will sex ALWAYS have to be really 'good' and 'great'? How do we define 'good' and 'great'?
- If something is not forbidden any more, can it still be pleasurable?



Theme II: Sexuality and the political economy of the development and HIV and AIDS industries

There are key questions about and problems with the ways in which development imagines sexuality, and we must stay attuned to the economic imperatives of that construction. Development is not just good humanitarians helping each other; it operates with its own economic agenda. The World Bank is a bank. Donors are wrapped into this economic machinery.

– **Andil Gosine, York University, Canada/Trinidad**

In India, the HIV/AIDS industry has opened up possibilities for better-paid employment in resource-poor settings. We can make a living out of activism, new government jobs open up, forms of embodiment emerge as forms of expertise, and marginalised people can have jobs.

– **Akshay Khanna, University of Edinburgh, UK/India**

One of the main goals of the workshop was to explore how the development industry imagines and deals with sexuality, and to examine the impact of development policies and programmes on people's sexualities worldwide. The development industry is complex, of course: it is made up of a wide range of individuals and organisations with diverse perspectives on sexuality and sexual rights.

Despite this heterogeneity, over the past few decades the majority of development policies, programmes and funding have addressed sexuality only via limited channels: family planning, initiatives to address sexual violence, and HIV prevention. As a result of these areas of focus, sexuality has been handled primarily in terms of regulation and risk management. This trend denies the positive, affirmative aspects of sexuality, and sidelines homoerotic desire, intimacy and pleasure. It frames sex between men exclusively in terms of its HIV transmission risk, it ignores sex between women altogether, and it



Zonny Woods, Ford Foundation, presenting on 'Where's the money for sexual rights? Funding trends and financial realities'

glosses over complex linkages between poverty, sexuality and gender. Sexuality often winds up being reduced to little more than a series of problems that the development industry seeks to solve – HIV and AIDS chief among them – rather than being seen as an intimate and often pleasurable part of people's lives and identities.

The development industry is trying to help people deal with the damage caused by sexuality.

– **Chris Dolan, Makerere University, Uganda**

A major dimension of our discussions was the political economy of the development and HIV and AIDS industries. A number of participants shared research and reflections on the relationships between funding, ideology, organising and identity.

Where is the money for sexual rights?

Zonny Woods (Ford Foundation, USA) provided a brief overview of the funding currently available for work on sexual rights worldwide, drawing on research conducted by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID, www.awid.org) and Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues (lgbtfunders.org). She emphasised that groups focused on women's rights and LGBT issues tended to be relatively young, operating with small staffs and budgets. In addition, discriminatory laws and policies often prevent LGBT groups from registering as legal organisations in their countries, a situation that makes it more difficult for them to access funds. In a funding climate in which donor organisations are seeking to make larger and larger grants, many such groups lack the capacity to secure and successfully manage substantial sums of money, and few donors are willing to devote the necessary resources to the capacity-building activities that would allow them to establish themselves as institutions capable of competing for large grants. Among funding for sexual and reproductive health and rights globally, reproductive health remains a central priority. This reflects the long-standing concern with family planning that continues to sideline other dimensions of sexual and reproductive health and rights.



New aid modalities

Several participants discussed how certain funding modalities shape organisations' willingness to take on certain issues, and curtail their ability to work on sexuality and sexual rights from a positive perspective. As Camilo Antillón (Forum Syd, Nicaragua) pointed out, donor and government efforts to harmonise funding can result in basket funds that favour certain issues and approaches over others. This strategy collapses multiple sources of funding into a single pool that is explicitly or implicitly driven by a particular ideology. Camilo's exhaustive analysis of the framework document and funding proposals from Nicaragua's Sexual and Reproductive Rights Fund (FED) uncovered almost no mention of pleasure, desire or sex. Instead, the documents repeatedly emphasised reproductive health and rights and problem-based approaches to sexuality and sexual orientation. Nafisa Bedri (Ahfad University for Women, Sudan) raised similar concerns about the 'three ones' approach adopted by the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which allows governments to exert control over which civil society organisations receive HIV prevention funds. In Sudan, the government maintains a hostile stance toward gender equality and sexual rights, and, as a result, only married people can access HIV prevention information and services, including condoms. This increases the vulnerability of the rest of the sexually active population, and hampers civil society organisations' ability to use the spaces created by HIV and AIDS funding to push for the rights of women and sexual minorities.

HIV and AIDS funding

Throughout our discussions, the HIV and AIDS industry received particular attention, since large amounts of funding for development are currently channelled through prevention, care and treatment programmes for HIV and AIDS. It is hugely positive that resources have been made available. However, in some cases, this has resulted in the creation of a *de facto* parallel public health system, at times better funded and equipped than the existing one. This set-up can wind up



excluding those who do not find themselves on the HIV and AIDS industry's agenda from a critical source of health information and services. Further, the categories and labels generated by the industry carry an enormous discursive power: they shape national discussions of sexual behaviour, health and rights; influence how people express their sexual and gender identities; and can lead to skewed perceptions of risk.

A number of participants emphasised the need to conduct further research into how funding for HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment under the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has undermined sexual rights worldwide. In particular, they cited the damaging impact of the Bush administration's investment in 'abstinence-only' prevention programmes, US government-funded 'rescue and justice' missions for female sex workers, and the so-called 'prostitution provision', which requires all organisations receiving US funds to adopt a policy that explicitly condemns prostitution, even if they work with collectives of sex workers who do not wish to be 'saved'. One of President Obama's first initiatives was to overturn the 'Global Gag Rule' which mandated that US funds could not go to organisations that advocated, counselled or offered safe abortion. More change in policy in this area is hopefully on the way.

Sex work and funding trends

Several participants highlighted inconsistencies in the HIV and AIDS industry's approach to sex work. As some pointed out, the Gates Foundation has dedicated \$200 million to HIV prevention efforts targeting sex workers in India, while simultaneously dedicating \$5 million to 'rescue and justice' missions aimed at 'saving' Indian women from sex work. Matt Greenall (independent consultant, UK) shared his research on the lack of an evidence base for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) 2007 Guidance Note on HIV and Sex Work. His research highlighted the need for further studies that demonstrate the (in)effectiveness of HIV prevention strategies driven by ideological, rather than scientific, imperatives. Two sets of stories addressed these issues (see pp24–6).



Politicising the economics of sex: How the development industry imagines sex work

Meena Saraswathi Seshu and Nandinee Bandyopadhyay have been working with female sex workers in West Bengal for over a decade. Meena works with SANGRAM and VAMP (the collective of sex workers who run SANGRAM's programmes), and Nandinee works with Durbar, a collective of 65,000 sex workers from across West Bengal. Both collectives were established with the help of funds that were intended to 'protect' the 'general population' from HIV infection: female sex workers were targeted because they were considered to be infecting the 'bridge' population of married men, who in turn infected the 'good' women they were married to. Despite this restrictive framework, the organising and advocacy made possible by HIV and AIDS funding has enabled Indian sex workers to have a political voice in the development industry for the first time. Below are excerpts from a conversation between Meena, Nandinee and a 'Talk show host Winfrey' style talk show host.

Meena: When SANGRAM started working with sex workers, we didn't call them sex workers or commercial sex workers, we called them women in multiple sexual partnerships exchanging sexual services for money. We worked with them because they were women. We didn't know anything about sex work, so we asked the women to teach us about the business. Slowly, a collective of sex workers formed – VAMP.

Nandinee: In 1995, HIV was an entry point for political mobilisation. A group of sex workers in Kolkata were saying that sex work was work like any other work, it was tiring and exploitative like most work, and the best way to organise

was to focus on protecting rights. Mining can be dangerous, but you don't ban mining, you make it safer – the same is true for sex work. Sex workers found a way to weave HIV into that reasoning. They saw sex work as a contractual relationship between worker and client that was consensual, not forced. First of all, you need to be willing to get into it. Then, you are bound contractually to give safe services. As a worker, you must protect yourself from occupational hazards (such as diseases), and as an honourable worker, you must provide safe services. HIV became a way to prove that this was legitimate, clean work. These were largely non-literate women from poor families, they were not engaging with the development industry before HIV came onto the scene.

Meena: In 2003, when the US government launched PEPFAR [its five-year, \$15 billion global HIV/AIDS initiative], SANGRAM and VAMP were already getting funds from USAID. A new provision in PEPFAR said that anybody working with sex workers needed to have an explicit anti-prostitution policy. So we invited the USAID representative to our office, explained that we couldn't adopt such a policy, and returned the money. It was all very cordial.

Talk show host: Why would you reject money from the US government?

Meena: We're SANGRAM, but we're also the sex workers' collective VAMP, which runs the programme, so such a policy would be absurd for us. The women we work with want to continue being in prostitution and making money that way. VAMP has a slogan: 'Save us from the saviours!'



The problem is that the man who we met with from USAID then went back to Washington and contacted John Miller, who is in the US government's anti-trafficking programme, and Miller issued a statement in Washington saying that SANGRAM's US money was withdrawn because SANGRAM was a trafficker. That is absurd. It was a cordial meeting. But we started to worry: will they imprison us? Trafficking is a criminal offence in India. This has legal implications. Finally, the US embassy in Delhi issued a statement saying that our funds had been terminated not because we were traffickers, but because of mutual reasons.

Talk show host: But are you suggesting that trafficking into prostitution doesn't exist?

Meena: No. It does. But it's important to make the distinction, because they have been confused with each other for so long: migration does not equal prostitution does not equal trafficking. There is definitely trafficking into prostitution, but outsiders coming in and expecting that they will resolve the issue is ridiculous in the extreme. I've always believed that sex workers themselves are the key to addressing the issue. They know who's coming and buying, and who's planning to sell soon. So, if we want effective strategies, we need to sit down with women themselves, because trafficking is part of violence and abuse within prostitution. We need to empower women to resist violence and abuse.

Nandinee: Trafficking has no place in workers' rights – in sex workers' rights, or any other group of workers' rights. Like any other occupation, sex work should have qualifications: at a minimum, age and consent. In terms of age, if you start too young, you're finished too young. It's not tenable. You should only start after you're fully developed.

Talk show host: And your programme has evidence of a reduction in child prostitution?

Nandinee: Yes. The median age of sex workers has gone up in areas where we work. Especially in smaller areas where sex workers have more of a say, they have set up self-regulatory boards of sex workers and allies. When they hear of cases of somebody brought in non-consensually or too young, they step in and negotiate with the police, so that the trafficked person isn't picked up by the police and forced to give evidence against the trafficker, which can result in the trafficked person being imprisoned or deported. In terms of trafficking overall, the only way to stop it is if it becomes too much of a hassle to traffic people.

Talk show host: Well, that may be true, but I once went on a tour of a red light district in Kolkata, and I asked all of the women I saw if they wanted to be prostitutes, and they all said no, they didn't want to be, and they didn't want their daughters to be. There were also women breaking bricks by the side of the road, but I didn't have the time to ask them if that's what they wanted to be doing. Don't you think my research shows that no women want to be prostitutes? How do you respond to that?

Nandinee: Look, as in any profession, there are some women who want to opt out, usually older women whose earnings are going down, and whose jobs are becoming riskier because they don't have as much choice in clients. For one NGO, we even drew up a list of women in their forties and fifties who wanted to be 'rescued', but the Ministry rejected them because they were too old! Apparently, they weren't worth rescuing – the Ministry wanted young 'vulnerable' girls instead.



The Taming of the Shrewd *Melei Chhele*¹

Akshay Khanna, co-founder of the Delhi-based queer activist collective Prism, and currently based at the University of Edinburgh, had a different story to tell about the decision by one sex worker organisation to seek anti-trafficking funds. Akshay was invited by the leader of a *kothi*² group to speak on sexuality and human rights at an event it was organising in suburban Calcutta. When he arrived, he was astonished to see a banner that read ‘Stop trafficking!’ hanging above the stage. What was the banner doing there? India’s anti-trafficking movement opposes sex workers’ rights, and groups such as the one that organised the event generally put forward robust critiques of the anti-trafficking lobby. He confronted the leader: What did trafficking have to do with this *kothi* group?

The leader explained that the banner had been hung because the group had received a grant from an anti-trafficking organisation known to have raided, distressed and displaced sex workers in Delhi’s red light area. The grant was providing funding for research on the *londanach*, an erotic dance traditionally performed by effeminate adolescent boys at weddings in Northern India. The adolescent boys, or *londas*, who perform the dance, generally earn more at the dances than they do during the whole of the rest of the year, making the *londanach* a critical means of income generation. During the ceremony, as dancers shift from ‘respectable’ dance to raunchy Bollywood-style numbers, the performance becomes increasingly sexual. A hierarchical and at times violent relationship can develop between employers and *londas*. Sometimes a landlord finds a *londa* attractive, and the *londa* is individually contracted by the landlord, which usually entails a net loss of income, since the *londa* is prevented from dancing at weddings for the remainder of the season. Thus, the tradition of the *londanach* not only challenges the paradigm of India as heterosexual and pure against the

polluting West, it also serves as a source of artistic pride, income and entertainment, and a prism through which dynamics of caste, power, religion and gender are filtered.

Why were the *londas* and others framing the *londanach* as trafficking? Why translate this complex experience into a simple model of exploitation? And why convert sexuality’s complicated role in the political economy into a straightforward case of sexual slavery? Wasn’t the *kothi* group looking for better working conditions rather than the abolition of sex work and erotic dancing? The leader of the group had a simple answer to all of Akshay’s questions: Where else would they get the money from? This was not a case of false consciousness, internalised homophobia, political naiveté or anything else. This group simply wasn’t part of the Bengali MSM network through which funding for MSM groups is channelled. It was legally registered as an organisation and had applied for membership in the network, but in the meantime, the only source of funding it had was anti-trafficking money.

Thus, the *kothi* group’s adoption of the anti-trafficking idiom arose out of the economic need for survival: the political economy. But the decision to accept an anti-trafficking frame failed to acknowledge the political economy of the *londanach*, even though it arose out of the same livelihood concerns. The transformation of the complex dynamics of the *londanach* into the global idiom of trafficking was neither a simple translation nor a reduction, but a collaborative misrecognition that arose from social, political and economic conditions. It was only through taking on this global idiom that the *londa*’s experiences gained entry into the world of development. We need to appreciate not just how the *londanach* reflects the complexity of Indian sexuality, but also the socioeconomic conditions in which *londanach* becomes trafficking.



Theme III: Labelling, categories, identity and (in)visibility

Brutal and false as they are, broad categories may have some use ... at least they give donors something to spend money on. The challenge is to make sure programmes are self-critical and sensitive enough to see beyond the categories.

– **Matt Greenall, independent consultant, UK**

There's a difference between the labels people choose for themselves, and the labels they have been given: this is key to claiming rights. We have to work with this tension – we can play an important role in creating and popularising new language.

– **Andrea Cornwall, IDS, UK**

Throughout the workshop, labels, categories, visibility and identity were frequent touchstones during discussions of how the development and HIV and AIDS industries approach sexuality. Within these industries, identity-based categories are often treated as practical tools for channelling funds, designing and implementing interventions, and measuring the effectiveness of policies and programmes. But as the workshop discussions revealed, labels and categories enable and constrain the expression of people's sexuality and sexual identities in complex ways.

As many participants pointed out, increased funding for HIV prevention has opened critical new spaces. These spaces may have been originally based on an epidemiologically driven desire to 'contain' the epidemic by targeting 'high-risk' groups, but they have been used by collectives of female sex workers in India, LGBT activists in China and Nigeria, and transgender and *travesti* organisations in Brazil – among others – as opportunities for broader political organising and rights claiming.

1 The Bengali idiom *melei chhele* or 'girlish boy'.

2 *Kothi* refers to a gendered and sexual identity in South Asia, of feminine men attracted to masculine men.



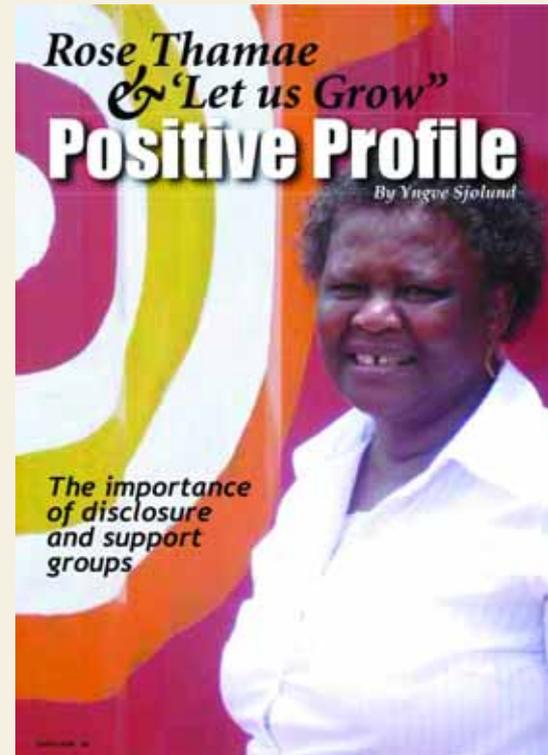
The Gates Foundation sets up huge mapping projects and MSM projects in India, and, in the worst case scenario, labels them all *kothis* – but that process still enables interaction and global exchange. There is a lot of political potential, almost in spite of the HIV and AIDS industry. We can try as queer activists to politicise those networks, in order to allow and enable subversion. We can go from the margins of these structures and subvert them.
– Akshay Khanna, University of Edinburgh, UK

Who is left out?

In a landscape where HIV and AIDS is often the only context in which sexuality is discussed or addressed, groups that are not perceived to be epidemiologically relevant to the pandemic are often excluded from opportunities to access sexual health services and claim rights. Throughout the workshop, we identified a number of ‘invisibilised’ groups whose sexual rights remain absent from discourses on HIV prevention, as well as from a wide range of other development interventions:

HIV/AIDS imagines not just a heteronormative world, but a world where women who sleep with women don’t exist.
– Andil Gosine, York University, Canada/Trinidad

- **Lesbians.** The persistent invisibility of lesbians in almost all development discourses was a source of concern throughout our meeting. A number of participants highlighted lesbians’ invisibility in public policies and discourses related to sexuality, gender, HIV and AIDS, and development. Xiaopei He (Pink Space Sexuality Resource Centre, China) emphasised the degree to which the invisibilisation of lesbians within HIV and AIDS funding, programmes and policies, has led lesbians in China to believe that they are at no risk from HIV, even if they are having unprotected sex with their husbands, some of whom are gay men who may be having unprotected sex with other men.



Images from the South African magazine *CD4* (pages 28, 29, 30–31).



THEMBA (HYVADK and STI Education)

themba

"We are all HIV+ until proven negative. Let's get tested now!"

Let's talk about SEX & HIV!

Using interactive theatre to influence behaviour to prevent the spread of HIV.

by Yngve Sjolund

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Amy Lind (University of Cincinnati, USA) shared her research on how the development and HIV/AIDS industries make certain queer bodies (gay men) 'hyper-visible', while invisibilising other queer bodies (lesbians), which also invisibilises violations of lesbians' human rights. She highlighted a study documenting how middle-class lesbians in Ecuador had been forced to undergo shock therapy as a 'treatment' for their sexuality – abuses that did not receive attention either as violence against women or violations of lesbians' sexual rights.

In development and HIV/AIDS, there seems to be an interplay between invisibility and hyper-visibility. The question is, is there a realm of visibility that's appropriate, and if so, how do we secure it?
– Kate Bedford, University of Kent, UK

- **HIV-positive people.** Alice Welbourn (International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS, UK), emphasised the importance of affirming the sexual lives, rights and desires of HIV-positive people, in programmes and policies explicitly addressing HIV and AIDS, as well as in programmes and policies dealing with development and sexual rights more broadly. Yngve Sjolund (*CD4 Magazine*/South African Sexual Health Association, South Africa) shared copies of *CD4 Magazine*, a periodical that seeks to reduce HIV-related stigma and boost the self-esteem and dignity of HIV-positive people in South Africa. The magazine takes a positive approach to informing people about prevention, care and treatment for HIV and AIDS, featuring stories that focus on the sexual and romantic lives of HIV-positive people. Nelson Juma Otwoma (African Medical and Research Foundation, Kenya) stressed the need to work on HIV prevention in an inclusive manner, and recognise that HIV-positive people continue to desire and have sex. Although HIV prevalence has recently decreased from 15 per cent to 6 per cent in Kenya, huge disparities persist between provinces, with some districts reporting prevalence levels of up to 30 per cent. Nelson explained, 'My work is to promote strategies to prevent the spread of HIV and to help people who want to prevent HIV to adopt behaviours that will help them



remain negative. But when you're working in a high-prevalence area, if you have ten people in a room, three or four of them are likely to have HIV. You can't start the conversation by saying, "We're here to talk about prevention, so please, if you already have HIV, go out". You have to work with people all together.'

- **Older women.** Cecilia Sardenberg (NEIM, Federal University of Bahia, Brazil) offered reflections on sexuality and aging in Brazil, asking what it meant to become a middle-aged woman in a country where 'the culture of eternal youth thrives vigorously.'
- **Young or unmarried women.** In societies in which everyone is expected to get married, and where sex is not supposed to occur outside of marriage, the sexuality and sexual desires of young people – and young, unmarried women in particular – are often denied or pathologised.
- **Children.** Few of our discussions dealt directly with child sexuality, although several participants signalled the need to address this dimension of sexuality, and to acknowledge that children are sexual beings.
- **Men on the receiving end of sexual violence and men who are exploited within the sex industry.** Several participants highlighted how development narratives on men and sex invisibilise men's vulnerability to sexual violence, trafficking and sexual rights violations, due to heteronormative development stereotypes that cast men as perpetrators of violence and women as their victims. This can lead to men fearing the stigma of reporting abuse, or even experiencing situations in which they are laughed at and treated as if they are making it all up, because heteronormativity is so pervasive that this kind of violence is barely imaginable. Male sex workers may receive some funding and visibility within the HIV and AIDS industry, but they are generally excluded from wider discourses and programmes that address sex work, as these tend to focus on women.

HIV-POSITIVE A

"I am a human with sexual needs which need to be met without a condom to any"

People tend to think that contracting HIV can spell the end of their sex lives, but HIV-positive Africans of all ages are now being urged to reclaim their sexuality and live healthy, normal lives.

"I got this [HIV] through sex, so [I thought] my sexuality was gone and I felt I needed to stop dressing attractively and wait to die," Florence Anam, 28, an information officer at the Kenya Network of Women with AIDS, told IRIN/PlusNews.

Anam said when she first revealed she was HIV positive, many men avoided her, believing she was out to infect them; she herself had no interest in sex for several months after she was diagnosed. However, she has since discovered she can continue having and enjoying sex, despite being HIV-positive.

"My take on this is that you can have your sexuality ... you don't have to lose it because you have HIV, you just have to be responsible," she said, adding that sex "has to be good or I'm not having it".

At a recent workshop by the Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre (ARSRC), at its Sexuality Institute in Kenya's coastal city of Mombasa, participants heard that there was a need to rethink sexuality in the context of disease, particularly chronic infections such as HIV.

"HIV as a condition is highly moralised; people face stigma because they are perceived by society to have been sexually immoral," said Richmond Tiemoko, director of ARSRC.

"Women are particularly affected by this type of stigma because they are expected to be the keepers of society's morality, so contracting HIV is seen as a great failure on their part." He said it was important that people living with HIV recognised and claimed their right to sexuality and sexual intercourse.

The Sexuality Institute provides a forum for African health professionals to discuss ways of promoting more positive attitudes towards sexuality in the region.

"We believe that to reduce HIV and promote well-being, we need to adopt a positive discourse on sex and sexuality," said Tiemoko. "Discussing issues of sexual violence, stigma, self-esteem and HIV enables people to have a better understanding of their links with sexuality and to make them less taboo."

Comment from South African Sexual Health

Sexuality is a normal part of being human, irrespective of the sex approval or disapproval has the tendency to influence how we feel. Positive status require a responsible approach towards our sexual abstinence from sexual desires and needs. Each of us has the right to live with the challenges in a manner that ensures safe practice.

AND STILL SEXY

...n being with
...and feelings,
...fulfilment
...pologies
...one”.

The workshop was attended by researchers, government workers and staff from local non-governmental organisations with a reproductive health or AIDS focus. They were encouraged to incorporate messages about healthy sexuality into their programmes for people living with HIV.

“When first diagnosed, I considered sex dirty and blamed it for my fate,” Asunta Wagura, executive director of the Kenya Network of Women with AIDS, said in a recent interview with the *Sexuality in Africa* magazine, an ARSRC publication. “I suppressed this need for a long time, until I could suppress it no more and openly declared, ‘I am a human being with sexual needs and feelings, which need fulfilment without apologies to anyone.’”

Wagura, who has publicly declared her HIV status, caused controversy when she decided to have a child in 2006. Her son was born healthy and has so far tested HIV-negative.

“I was criticised all round ... the view is that people living with HIV/AIDS should not think along those lines, because having a baby involves sexual intercourse,” she said.

Speaking at the workshop, Dr Sylvia Tamale, dean of law at Uganda’s Makerere University, said there was a ‘disconnect’ between sex in a health or medical context, and sex in a pleasure context.

“There is a need to ‘unlearn’ and refine some of the lessons that society teaches us, and open people’s minds,” she said, adding that sexuality counselling could go a long way towards changing perceptions.

The ARSRC holds rotating workshops annually in Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. The Mombasa workshop was hosted in conjunction with their partner organisation in Kenya, the Population Council, an international non-governmental reproductive health organisation.

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MOMBASA KENYA, 16 November 2007 (PulseNews)
Source: AF AIDS eForum 2007. <http://afidsforum.org/healthindex.org>
<http://www.pulsenews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=37037>

Health Association (SASHA)

...ual challenges we are confronted with. Society’s stigmatization,
...el about ourselves. Although different challenges, such as a HIV-
...I practices, it does not have to mean that we have to suppress or
...to be a complete sexual being feeling positive about ourselves. It
...be part of who we are, but more importantly it is how we choose
...es for ourselves and for our partners or potential partners.

- **Women who have experienced female genital mutilation (FGM).** Dorothy Aken’Ova (International Centre for Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights, Nigeria) highlighted the importance of including women who have experienced FGM in discussions of sexual pleasure, since they too have a right to pleasure. As Nafisa Bedri (Ahfad University for Women, Sudan) pointed out, ‘Through our work on FGM we discovered that men were absolutely ignorant about female genitalia and sexuality. In Sudan, the indigenous preparations for women who are getting married only educate women about men, not about themselves, and men are not educated at all’.

What is visibility? In the clinic? In the UNAIDS risk group list? To each other? In academic articles to prove how ‘hip’ and transgressive the author is? In the newspaper? In expensive workshops?

– Excerpt from a flipchart

Thinking inside the box

Of course, as many participants noted, visibility can be a dubious goal in light of the development industry’s problem-based approaches to sex and sexuality and the HIV and AIDS industry’s epidemiological and often ideological approaches to ‘containing’ the pandemic. Even the positive new spaces created by the HIV and AIDS industry can become boxes that wind up circumscribing the fluid, contextual nature of people’s sexual, gender and social identities. As many participants pointed out, development and HIV and AIDS programmes rarely analyse people’s identities (particularly poor people’s) as multiple and overlapping – encompassing race, class, caste, gender, sexuality, culture and religion, among other dimensions.

In reality, lesbians are often mothers, sex workers are often wives, men can also be exploited within the sex industry, and people’s sexual and gender identities can be either fixed or fluid. As a result, the categories and labels that the development industry uses to set priorities and



create order can wind up generating false distinctions, denying the multiple points of contact between people and the resulting vulnerabilities, and reifying the imaginary notion of a 'general population' that can be kept 'safe' from harm and disease.

One of the things that we need to do about lesbians and female sex workers is to stress that they are also women. We need to look at how data is collected so that these allegedly un-overlapping categories come together. Women and AIDS doesn't include sex workers somehow: is it just 'good' women and AIDS? It's another dimension of why we need to break down the epidemiological categories in the HIV industry on so many of these ideas that are important in people's individual lives. They determine why a lesbian, who is an important part of a community, can't participate in a particular effort: because a decision made by someone in an office in a donor country winds up restricting her mobility.

– Cheryl Overs, Network of Sex Work Projects/Monash University, UK/Australia



Theme IV: Putting pleasure back in the picture

My starting point was multiple orgasms.

– **Dorothy Aken’Ova, International Centre for Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights (INCREASE), Nigeria**

The development industry has traditionally shied away from pursuing approaches to sexuality and sexual rights outside the context of disease and family planning, but that does not mean that all development actors are afraid to talk about sex for sex’s sake. A number of workshop participants have made tremendous headway in promoting positive, rights-based approaches to sexuality and sexual diversity in the communities where they work. Many have achieved this in spite of discriminatory laws, development and HIV and AIDS discourses that take an exclusively problem-based approach to sex and sexuality, and governments and fundamentalist movements that are hostile to sexual rights.

There is an idea in the development and HIV/AIDS industries that African women do not seek pleasure or do not even have sex, although they have many babies.

– **Wendy Knerr, The Pleasure Project, UK**

Dorothy Aken’Ova, who founded the International Centre for Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights (INCREASE) in Northern Nigeria in 2000, has always included the right to pleasure in INCREASE’s community education programmes, which target young people, sexual minorities and married couples. In sharing her experience of developing the programme, she talked about the negative reaction it received at the outset:

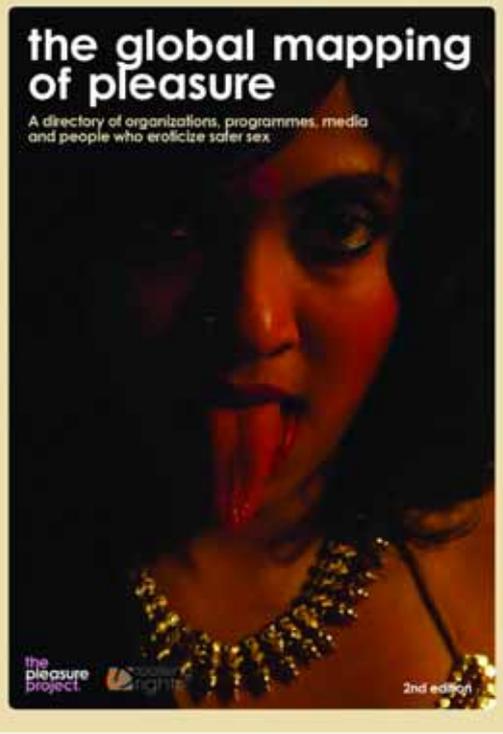


There were people around who believed that we couldn't talk about sexual pleasure. They asked us, 'How can you justify working on pleasure when we have such a high rate of maternal mortality in Nigeria? You're wasting your time, you should focus on saving the women who are dying'. But I was convinced that we could do this very delicate work that was described as taboo, that was sometimes criminalised. I was convinced that if we could discuss women's sexual pleasure, we could discuss anything.

Dorothy's instinct proved right, and today INCREASE uses discussions of pleasure, anatomy, multiple orgasms, fantasies, seduction and communication as a means to affirm people's desires, identities and relationships. Such discussions have also proved effective as an entry point to address violence against women, FGM, polygamy and a host of sexual rights violations that can be difficult to address effectively using traditional development approaches.

At Women for Women's Human Rights – New Ways (WWHR) in Turkey, Pinar Ilkkaracan pursued a similarly affirmative approach to sexual pleasure through the organisation's Women's Human Rights Education Programme, a 12-part community-level training programme for women that includes two modules on sexuality and sexual rights. Over the years, her determination to address women's sexuality openly, honestly and affirmatively has paid off in unexpected ways. She shared one example:

We have been working with women on the idea of sexual pleasure as a human right since 1994. During the penal code reform process in 2004, one of the provisions we were demanding through our campaign was the criminalisation of marital rape. Legislators objected to this. They said, 'You're elite women from big cities, rural women don't want sexual rights. Anatolian women will disagree with you'. So we told local women's groups from 40 provinces – many of which had organised following our Women's Human Rights Education Programme – that the government had said this. Those women



A publication of The Pleasure Project, which promotes the pleasures of safer sex

mobilised: they came in buses, wearing headscarves, and they demonstrated in front of the General Assembly, demanding their right to sexual pleasure. It was the fruit of ten years of working on sexual pleasure at the community level.

The success of Dorothy and Pinar’s programmes, the enthusiastic responses they have elicited over the years, and the ways in which they have opened the door for deeper, wider work on sexuality, advocacy and human rights, challenge a number of development orthodoxies. They reject the notion that sexual pleasure and sexual rights are ‘luxuries’ that poor people (especially poor women) – who are supposedly exclusively and uniformly focused on survival – have no interest in discussing and no time to address. And they offer a promising alternative to the tradition of placing sexuality at the bottom of a presumed hierarchy of poor people’s priorities – a tradition that not only belies the sexual rights, identities and desires of poor people, but also fails to recognise the complex linkages between poverty, sexuality and gender.

Anupam Hazra (SAATHII, India) argued that safer sex promotion campaigns should take a pro-pleasure, non-medicalised approach while talking about sex and sexual health. Such a strategy might make it easier to reach men who may be vulnerable to HIV but do not fully identify with the ‘high-risk’ MSM category or the heteronormative model of masculinity. In 2004 Anne Philpott and Wendy Knerr of the Pleasure Project (UK) set out to build an evidence base for taking pleasure-based approaches to safer sex in development programming, via *The Global Mapping of Pleasure*. This resource compiles programmes, products, campaigns, projects and materials that directly promote, or indirectly encourage, safer sex practices. All of the resources shift the focus from diseases or negative outcomes from sex, and treat sex in a positive or empowering way. In 2008, the Pleasure Project released a second edition of *The Global Mapping of Pleasure*, available online at www.thepleasureproject.org/.



Problematizing pleasure

As our discussions of pleasure deepened, participants also emphasised the need to unpack the concept, since, in practice, pleasure has many meanings to many people. When it comes to sex and sexuality, pleasure is closely tied with individual expression, identity and subversion, and several participants were uncomfortable with the idea of the development industry taking too strong a hand in defining pleasure. They pointed out that ‘healthy life’ narratives might diverge from what some people desire, and highlighted the need to link pleasure with desire, an urge that societies often seek to contain and domesticate. If pleasure becomes a norm, is it still pleasurable?



A poster from The Pleasure Project which promotes the pleasures of safer sex



Participants reflect on ways forward

Ways forward

I have a lot of faith in the individual creativity of the perverts. The encroachment is never complete.

– **Andil Gosine, York University, Canada/Trinidad**

On the last day of the workshop, participants divided up into four working groups, each focused on brainstorming strategies for addressing a particular topic addressed during the workshop:

- Group 1: Sex work
- Group 2: Sexuality and poverty
- Group 3: Heteronormativity, sex and power
- Group 4: Pleasure.

Group 1: Sex work

Participants in this group identified three main areas of focus for further research on sex work:

- Research on the political economy of sex work: gathering information about how sex workers come to sex work and how income generated by sex work contributes to development and economies.
- Further deconstruction of the current discourses on sex work: examining the evidence base for rights-based versus moralistic (e.g. Bush administration) discourses on sex work.
- Analysis of legal frameworks: investigating different legal and juridical constitutions for sex work, including how they play out in sex workers' lives.



The group plans to put together a small steering group to raise funds and move forward on this research agenda, with partners in India, Australia and the USA. Its short-term goal is to produce a book by compiling research papers. The long-term goal is to develop a significant, mainstream volume on sex work and development that will become required reading on development studies courses worldwide. Since the workshop IDS, Monash University, SANGRAM/VAMP, Path/Durbar and the Global Network of Sex Work Projects have been working together to establish a new initiative for research with and by sex workers: the Paulo Longo Research Initiative (PLRI).

Group 2: Sexuality and poverty

Poverty versus sexuality: it seems the two are mutually exclusive. When gay men have HIV, it's about sex. When women have HIV, it's about poverty.
– Cheryl Overs, Network of Sex Work Projects/Monash University, UK/Australia

Participants in this group identified gaps in the research available on sexuality, poverty and gender, stressing the need to gain deeper insight into how norms around gender and sexuality can marginalise, define and oppress, as well as create opportunities. For example, marriage may be heteronormative, but for some people it also brings social acceptance and economic security. Sex work can be a response to patriarchal norms that commodify women's sexuality and teach men that their urges are uncontrollable, but it can also be a livelihood opportunity.

Amy Lind (University of Cincinnati, USA) emphasised the need to reframe poverty, suggesting economic justice as 'a way to talk about poverty that doesn't pathologise poverty or people who are poor'. Nafisa Bedri (Ahfad University for Women, Sudan) emphasised that

Workshop interactions





the linkages between poverty and sexuality were not always obvious. She argued:

Everybody assumes that you engage in a same-sex relationship in a conservative society like mine [Sudan] only because you are poor: that there is no element of choice, no element of sexual orientation. In fact, there are many issues at stake, including security, livelihoods and social acceptability. A young boy studying in university who can't afford his fees is perhaps being funded by an older man who he's having sex with – a powerful man with a big public image and a wife – and the young boy has a girlfriend or a wife as well. Also, we have seen women who are engaging in multiple sexual relationships in order to overcome their poverty: they have an intimate partner for security reasons, a sugar daddy for their livelihood, and a husband for social acceptability.

Overall, participants agreed that more research was needed to explore the connections between sexual diversity, poverty and women; the connections between men and same-sex sexuality in the context of poverty but *outside* the context of HIV; and the linkages between poverty and same-sex desiring women and their realities, especially with respect to silence and social exclusion.

Group 3: Heteronormativity, sex and power

Participants identified priorities for action:

- Challenge the sexual norms that women are all weak and are all victims, and that all people are heterosexual.
- Address men's vulnerability and heterogeneity, and document instances of male vulnerability. In a year's time, organise another conference on this theme to raise awareness of the issue.



- Invest in efforts to visibilise lesbians and other sexually marginalised women, using the 2006 Yogyakarta principles on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity.³
- Replace identity categories with *behaviours* and *desires* that are not part of a fixed identity.
- Develop a resource that compiles and circulates the indigenous idioms of gender and sexualness from the various places we come from, as a means to open up new ways of talking and thinking about sexualness.

Group 4: Pleasure

The pleasure group explored the need to problematise the concept of ‘pleasure’ in work on sexuality and sexual rights. Many participants preferred a conceptual frame that linked pleasure with other concepts (such as power or politics). Their discussion highlighted the importance of yearnings and desires, emphasising that sometimes the promise of pleasure was more satisfying than the pleasure itself. They discussed forbidden pleasures, the eroticisation of unequal power relations, the failure of ‘healthy lifestyles’ to take the complexity of desire into account, the pleasure of transgression/subversion and how the internet has in some ways democratised pornography and erotic images (with people posting photos and videos of themselves in action) and created new transnational exchanges of desires. One group member suggested a development intervention to distribute webcams aimed at promoting auto-eroticism!

How can development discourse begin to grapple with wellbeing and happiness? How do you measure pleasure?

– **Carolyn Williams, Gender Institute, London School of Economics, UK**

³ Available at www.yogyakartaprinciples.org/



People have the right to pleasure, desire and sexuality, as well as a right not to experience these if they don't want to. How can we tell if these rights are being realised? We don't need to measure sexual pleasure, which would be quite difficult! Instead we can measure rights, and there has already been a lot of work done on how to do this.
– Henry Armas, Institute of Social Studies, Peru/Netherlands

New insights, new frontiers

Before they left, participants took a moment to reflect on new insights and connections that the workshop had sparked. Below is a sample of their resolutions and reflections:

‘I’ve learnt a lot that I’m expecting to utilise in my work. Learning about the experiences of people addressing issues of sexuality at the grassroots level; this provided rich information because I hope to do some in the country I am from. I became much more aware of how I too am implicated in heteronormative ideas and models: How do we address issues of sexuality in polygamous societies? How do we become conscious of and remove the idea of the nuclear family and the heterosexual couple from our ways of envisioning gender-just societies? Listening to Pinar talk about discussing sexuality in Muslim countries and the tremendous politics that we feel trapped by with all the Islamophobia, aligned with notions that Islam represses women sexually, was very powerful and inspiring. How do we address issues without implicating ourselves in existing power structures and stereotypes? I met great, great, great people here, who were so honest at times about their life experiences, and that will leave me with so much fuel to go forward with my work. Thanks for a great workshop!’

‘First of all: thank you, thank you, thank you. It has been a great experience participating in this *inspiring* and amazing workshop.’



The main idea that comes to my mind is a feeling of how much needs to be done: and that this – the inclusion of sexuality in the development field – is a journey which will be a liberating, empowering process for people who don't enjoy sexual rights and don't have decisions in the kind of sexuality they want to have.'

‘ I am clearer about the link between sexuality, poverty and HIV/AIDS and how heteronormativity influences funding of the above.’

‘ Try to open up spaces for discussion of sexual orientation, especially for lesbians. Such spaces can be big or small, but that will be a starting point.’

‘ Sexuality is not my field of expertise and so attending the workshop was immensely enlightening to me. It made me realise how much I know/do not know about sexuality and how much it is really a major part of my work that I am not aware of.’

‘ Interesting and an eye-opener to me: I take a lot of potential research ideas as well as many insights into the work on sexual health that we are doing, especially with young people and women. Thank you for this chance.’

‘ Wonderful workshop and thanks to the organisers a thousand times. What I have come out with is the aspect of challenging heteronormativity and avoiding the aspect of grouping/parking/putting sexuality issues in a box.’

‘ A brilliant workshop – I leave full of good energy, with loads of new connections with people working on this link between sexuality and development.’



‘It is important to promote a positive approach to sexuality when dealing with sexual rights. However, we must be aware of the risk of reinforcing heteronormativity by using some predefined categories or by only focusing on certain forms of pleasure that are considered ‘good’, ignoring the links between pleasure and power relationships, economic conditions, prohibitions ... One of the things I could do is to promote this positive and comprehensive approach in my organisation and the organisations we have relationships with, through training activities, sharing information and creating networks for collaboration (or using the ones that already exist).’

‘A huge number of ideas to digest and see in the local context for translating into future action: developed links internationally, very useful!’



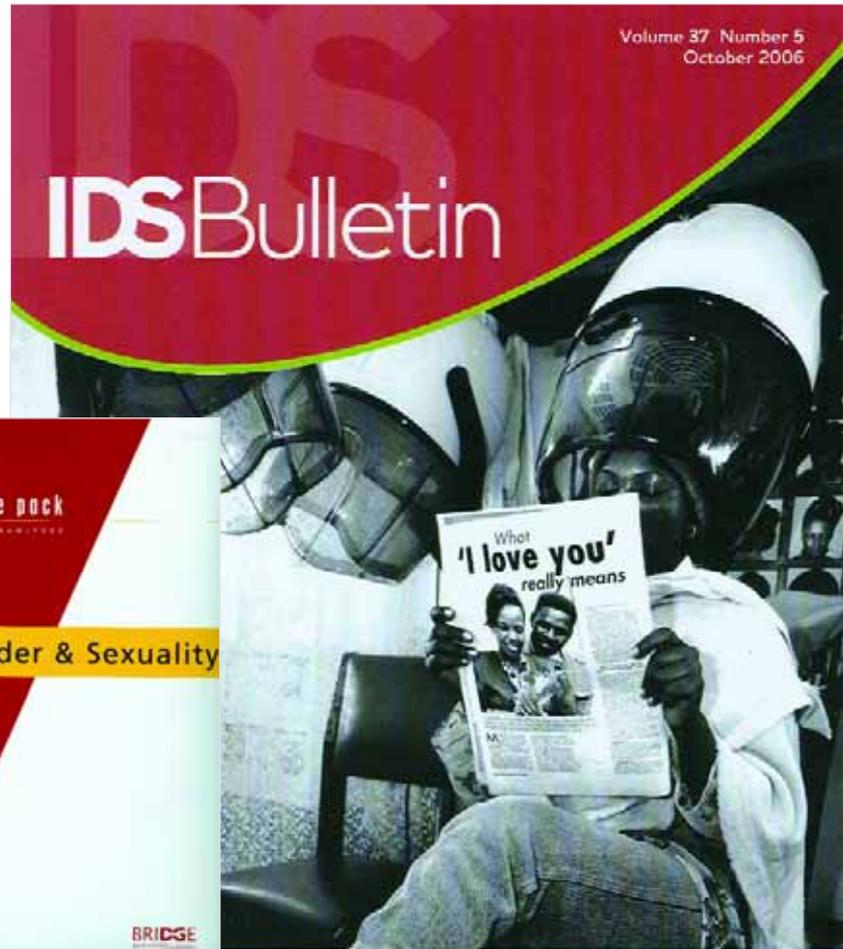
Other outputs from the workshop

IDS website feature and recordings of some key discussions
www.ids.ac.uk/go/about-ids/news-and-commentary/april-2008-news/sexuality-and-the-development-industry-workshop or
www.ids.ac.uk/go/sexualityanddevelopment then click on 'Sexuality & Development Workshop 2008'

Special issue of the journal *Development*, 'Sexuality and Development', Volume 52, No 1, March 2009 www.sidint.org/development

Information on the IDS Sexuality and Development Programme and links to other IDS resources on sexuality:
www.ids.ac.uk/go/sexualityanddevelopment

Pathways to Women's Empowerment Research Programme Consortium: www.pathwaysofempowerment.org



In April 2008, 70-plus activists, academics, donors and development practitioners from more than 25 countries gathered at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in the UK to explore the complex linkages between sexuality and the development industry. For three days, people traded stories, strategies and struggles, raised questions, challenged assumptions, made plans and built alliances. Participants came from a range of professional, activist and academic backgrounds, with varying degrees of identification with the topics on the table. Amidst this diversity, those who attended were united by a desire to look critically at how the development industry addresses sexuality, and to identify entry points for bringing development policies and practices – including efforts to address HIV and AIDS – into closer alignment with the complexity of people’s desires, struggles and identities.

This report aims to capture the spirit and the energy of the workshop, and to share some of the central themes and the contradictions that arose during three invigorating days of discussion and debate.