

# Introduction: Sexuality Matters

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I work a lot on issues of sexuality and sexual rights. And every time I mention that in the context of India, I am told that the community is not ready for it, in a country where poverty is so high why do we need to talk of sexuality; this is a western notion and I am English speaking and that is why I have all these ideas. Frankly everyone has sex, or wants to have sex, or is moaning the lack of it, so shouldn't we be talking about it? (Menon 2006)<sup>1</sup>

We need to enable people to become as comfortable in talking about sexuality as they have become about gender. (Robert Chambers, IDS)<sup>2</sup>

This *IDS Bulletin* addresses a theme that mainstream development has persistently neglected: sexuality. Over the last decade, development policymakers and practitioners have come to endorse a multi-dimensional approach to poverty, one that pays closer attention to the social and cultural dimensions of poverty (Chambers 2005). Growing attention has come to be placed on achieving greater freedom, well-being and human rights for all as an integral part of what 'development' has now come to mean (Sen 1999; DFID 2000; Chambers 2005). It is no longer possible to ignore discrimination, inequality and social exclusion and their developmental consequences (Klugman 2000; SIDA 2005, Samelius and Wagberg 2005). Yet when it comes to the economic, social, political and human rights implications of sex and sexuality, there is a silence at the heart of mainstream development. Consigned to being treated as a health issue, or disregarded altogether as a "luxury", sexuality barely features in development debates.

The AIDS epidemic may have forced open spaces for sexuality to gain greater prominence within the strategies of development agencies. But representations of sex and sexuality in AIDS discourses are not only persistently negative, they are also profoundly normative (Pigg 1999; Gosine 2004). As with population, sexuality continues to be treated

as a problem which needs to be contained rather than as an integral part of human experience, a source of joy and pleasure as well as suffering and pain. This negative approach dovetails with the efforts of the religious right to curtail the enjoyment of bodily autonomy, love and intimacy of those who fail to conform to norms prescribed by religious authorities, society and the state (Long 2005). The intensification of 'sex wars' (Rubin 1989) in recent years and, as Kate Shieff's article reminds us, the profound human rights implications of the rise of conservatism and its repressive intentions in many parts of the world, call for the silences over sexuality in development to be decisively broken.

Sex and sexuality have profound implications for development. This *IDS Bulletin* seeks to show why sexuality matters. Drawing on the inspiring 'Realising Sexual Rights' workshop held 28–30 September 2005 at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), this *IDS Bulletin* features papers from this workshop and beyond. It provides diverse accounts of sexual rights conceptions, mobilisation, and new approaches to implementation. This is a first for IDS – both to host such an event and to produce an *IDS Bulletin* on this theme. The style of contributions to this *IDS Bulletin* reflects their innovative content.

Sexuality is about policy, programming and power relations, but it is also about pleasure and danger, feelings, sensations, emotions, skin, flesh and body fluids (and hopefully orgasms too!). In this collection, we seek to bring together the human side of sexuality with macro-political and analytical issues. Contributions range from explorations of new conceptual approaches to human rights, research into experiences of sexuality in a diversity of contexts and among diverse people, to personal stories of activism and initiatives that seek to transform the ways in which sex and sexuality are conceived of and experienced. This introduction draws together threads that weave across the contents of this *IDS Bulletin*, exploring their interconnections and implications for theory, policy and practice.

## **1 Why sexuality matters (and why should development concern itself with sexuality?)**

### **1.1 Because sexuality matters to people**

Sexuality lies at the core of human life, of what makes us fully human – it is the key to our capacity to contribute positively and fully to the societies we live in ... Issues of sexuality and sexual rights concern everyone's rights to life and to good health. (Carin Jämtin, Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation)<sup>3</sup>

Sexuality is an important part of people's lives, yet the rich diversity of human experience is all too often reduced to 'factual information, dire data and warnings, and what not to do', as Jill Lewis and Gill Gordon point out. They go on to note, 'There's little in all of this to anchor sexual connections in real situations and real bodies' (page 110). Where development agencies do talk about sex, it is as acts and activities that are laden with risk and danger, rather than as intimate connections between people. 'Love', 'desire' and 'pleasure' are not part of the development lexicon. Lewis and Gordon's article radically expands the frame through which sex and sexuality have come to be viewed. They explore the contours of pleasure and desire, the maps that diverse cultures offer for learning about and experiencing desire, and the expansive spectrum of forms of sexual expression and ways of talking about sex.

The monochromatic view of sex in development discourse represents women as powerless victims, men as voracious sexual predators, and children as innocents – and transgender is nowhere to be seen. Children are one group for whom sexuality is not supposed to be an issue. Yet Deevia Bhana's study of seven and eight year-olds in a black township in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, shows that boys and girls of this age 'are neither innocent nor ignorant about HIV/AIDS and sex'. While they are already able to chat comfortably about AIDS, sex and condoms with the researcher, they also know they are not supposed to talk about these things, one of the reasons given being 'we'll get smacked'.

As Sabina Faiz Rashid's study of sexual and reproductive health in a Dhaka slum demonstrates, the realities of sexualised relations of power in poor communities do indeed leave many women vulnerable to sexual and reproductive ill-being. Yet her analysis also highlights the importance of understanding better how women themselves

experience their sexual relationships, and not prejudging their situations. She cites Shehnaz, a 15-year-old girl, second wife to an older man, who revels in her sexual power over her husband and the leverage this affords her (albeit temporarily), declaring: 'It does not matter that I am his second wife, I have much more pull over him and he has more affection for me. She has no strength. He can never ever say no to me!'

This and other dissonant images, in which women's agency becomes evident, are a reminder of the need to go beyond taken-for-granted assumptions about women's powerlessness to understanding how they themselves make sense of their own sexual realities.

In many situations, women are not supposed to admit to wanting sex. Liz Ercevik Amado cites a participant in a human rights training module on sexuality in rural Turkey: 'Women are not supposed to be forward and express some of their feelings openly. Even when I'm having intercourse with my husband, I wonder if he's going to take it wrongly and think I'm too keen. My husband worked abroad. When he came back, I couldn't express my desire openly, so that he wouldn't think I had such desire while he was away'. Isatou Touray, drawing on research in the Gambia, identifies the problem of 'forced retirement from sex' by post-menopausal women when their husbands take a younger wife. One interviewee explains, 'I am denied sex for the past one year because my husband has a new and younger wife who he spends most of the time with ... I am starving and I cannot disclose this to my family'.

What these accounts so powerfully reveal are the effects of social norms governing sexuality, and the dissonance between lived experience and society's expectations. The stories they tell are moving testimonies to the importance of finding new ways to communicate about sex that reframe the boundaries of what is possible, and indeed "acceptable". Shireen Huq tells how, through women sharing their stories with each other in Naripokkho, a country-wide women's organisation in Bangladesh, it became apparent that restrictions on women's mobility related to preserving their honour and chastity have a huge impact 'not only on women's physical well-being but also their sense of self-worth, personal freedom and happiness'. Through the process of 'countless testimonies' the question emerged: 'How

could the rights agenda ... leave out issues of sexual freedom, as it had tended to do?’

Women are supposed to be sexually vulnerable. In contrast, men are not supposed to talk about fears or vulnerability around sexuality. As Alan Grieg observes, ‘When asked about their concerns related to sex, both young and adult men often report being anxious about issues related to sexual performance, such as potency and penis size, at the same time as feeling unable to ask for help in dealing with these issues for fear of not being “manly” enough’ (page 84). The consequences, as Barker (2005) documents, can be deadly. Anupam Hazra looks at the language of sex used by men who have sex with men (MSM) in Kolkata, India. He finds that talk of sex is often violent, masculinity is equated with sexual aggression, and only penetration is counted as sex. Hazra sees this discourse as unhealthy and deriving from social stigma, a legal framework penalising homosexuality left over from colonial times, and patriarchal gender roles, all of which combine to proscribe alternative ways of talking about sex.

As for transgender people, in some contexts they are not supposed to exist at all. In other contexts, transgender communities may be well established and recognised, if stigmatised, such as *hijras* in South Asia (Huq) and *travestis* in Latin America (Campuzano). However, just like everyone else, their expressions of sexuality are subject to normative pressures which can hinder fulfilment in sexual and life experiences, as well as lead to abuse and violation of their human rights. Giuseppe Campuzano shows how in contemporary Peru *travestis* face violence from the public and police, as well as economic exclusion and discrimination by health services. Socially, *travestis* have assimilated the worst of both genders – they are seen as male and thus fair game for violence from the police, but they have also assumed some aspects of the stereotype of the ‘hysterical’ woman such as body transformation, even at the cost of their health, choosing macho and possibly violent partners, and passivity in sex.

Sexuality matters for development because it matters to people. And it matters because the silences, taboos and societal expectations that surround sex reinforce unhelpful gender stereotypes that can be as problematic for heterosexual men and women as they are for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Breaking with these stereotypes,

creating spaces for communication and moving beyond complicity with societal prescriptions and silences requires strategies for change that begin with people’s lived experiences, acknowledging their complexity, and working from there to bring about more equitable, mutually respectful and pleasurable sexual relationships.

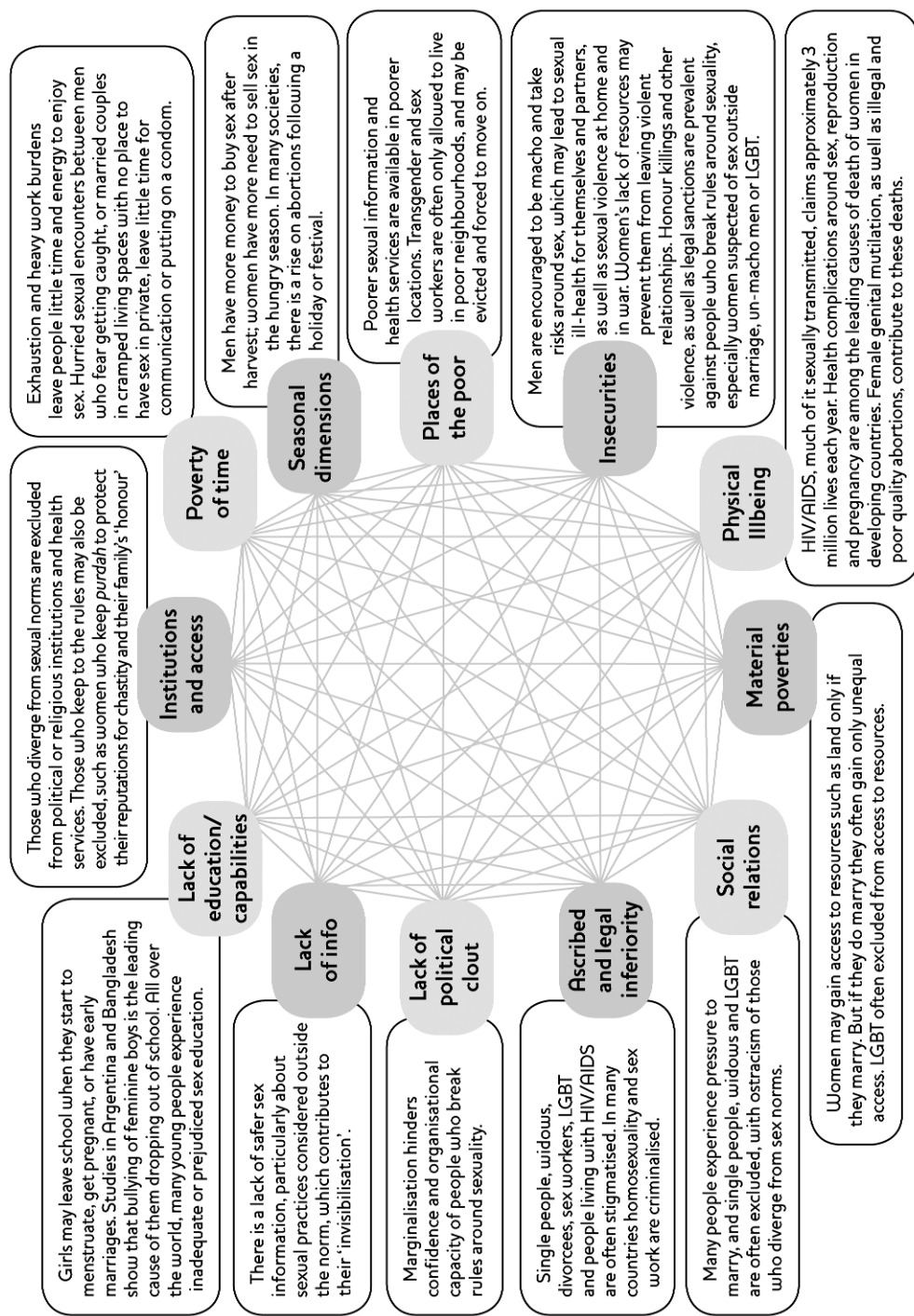
## 1.2 Because sexuality is more than a ‘health issue’

Wanted sex, good sex and right to enjoy sex is not something that is covered in many intervention programmes ... How do we expect young women to understand the importance of consensual sex and negotiating skills, if education is only limited to prevention of pregnancy, STIs [sexually transmitted infections], and sex being a no go area in many societies? (Namibian participant in International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS Young Women’s Dialogue 2004)

Development agencies carve up people’s lives into sectors, separating out the flux of human experience to create manageable planned intervention. Sexuality has largely been treated by development agencies as a health sector issue, and is responded to within the frame of reference of this sector with interventions that seek to lower the risks of pregnancy, birth and sexual relations, and prevent disease. Sex has been treated as a source of risk and vulnerability, rather than in terms that affirm rights (Klugman 2000; Corrêa 2002). Essential as these interventions are, they limit sexuality to the physical act of sex and its consequences (pregnancy, STIs and so on). There is, as we go on to argue, much to be done to expand the frame of reference of ‘sexual health’ to encompass wider dimensions of well-being and to take a more holistic approach to intimate relationships that includes sexual pleasure and mutual respect. At the same time, our answer to the question of why sexuality matters is that it is more than a ‘health issue’.

Sexuality, and social rules around it, have an impact on areas central to conventional development concerns, such as poverty and well-being. As SIDA’s new sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) policy recognises, violations of the rights to sexual and reproductive health both cause and are caused by poverty; these rights underpin the achievement of all the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and are not only a goal in themselves, but also a means

Figure 1 Web of poverty's disadvantages – with examples related to sexuality



to fight poverty (SIDA 2005). Klugman (2000) argues that it is essential to make the links between the lack of sexual rights and poverty, not by seeking greater protection for women – and denying their sexuality in the process – but by putting sexual pleasure into the heart of the rights framework. Sexuality can be an economic resource, for example selling sex or marrying into a household which also functions as an economic unit. Discrimination against those who break rules around sexuality can lead to poverty, ill-being and social exclusion. Rather than a 'luxury' to be entertained as a focus for development only when basic material needs have been met, as some argue, the right to control one's own body – whether to protect its integrity or to enjoy its pleasures – is the most basic of all rights. If we lack the possibility to prevent our bodies from being violated by others, and if we are denied the opportunity to protect ourselves from pregnancy or disease, then how can we take part in or claim any of the other benefits of development?

The intersections between sexuality and poverty can be analysed according to Robert Chambers' framework (Figure 1) (Chambers 2005: 46). As this diagram makes amply clear, sexuality has ramifications in every single dimension of poverty and implications for every aspect of development. And these ramifications and implications extend well beyond those privations experienced by LGBT people and other sexual minorities. They also affect those who conform to existing sexual and social norms – women and men who marry, young people who conform to society's desire to imagine them as non-sexual innocents, widows and post-menopausal women who society constructs as post-sexual and whose sexual desires place their respectability at stake. Sexuality is a development issue because the effects of disregarding its place in human experience affect *everyone*.

### 1.3 Because development affects sexuality

No-one can logically dispute the relationship between sexual pleasure and happiness. Economists cannot deny, by their own definitions, the centrality of sexuality to human wellbeing. The problem is that because they can't measure it, they have chosen to ignore it. (Martin Greeley, economist, IDS)<sup>4</sup>

Another answer as to why development should concern itself with sexuality is that it is already doing so – and often in ways that do more harm than

good. Policies and programming have an impact on people's sexualities in ways that are barely even contemplated, let alone intended. Sometimes these kinds of interventions work to regulate and stigmatise particular expressions of sexuality; sometimes they unwittingly create the possibilities for the reconfiguration of gender and sexual relationships, which may have both negative and positive effects. Altman (2004), for example, analyses the impact of globalisation on sexuality and gender, showing how increased mobility and urbanisation are changing forms and norms of sexual behaviour in ways that can be both liberating and oppressive. Rarely, however, have economic development policies paid close attention to their *sexual* as well as their social implications.

Development agencies have in the past focused largely on one outcome of (hetero)sexual expression: pregnancy and childbirth. Andil Gosine recounts the extent to which the uptake of concern about population growth among policymakers led to measures to regulate women's sexual and reproductive choices, either by coercion (China's one-child policy, forced sterilisation in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, for example) or through attempts to change preferences through education programmes that emphasise the costs of having many children or environmental impacts of 'overpopulation'. Gosine argues in his article that:

Throughout women's sexual desires were either denied or condemned ... Moral panics about HIV/AIDS have constituted MSM as a similar kind of menace, and sex between men as a negative activity engaged by people unable to control sexual desires or ... experience love.

Current US conditionalities on HIV/AIDS funding, which require abstinence promotion, and disassociation from abortion and sex work, are also clear examples of attempts by parts of the international aid industry to regulate sexuality. This agenda is also reflected in right-wing religious organisations' contestations around abortion and other rights to bodily autonomy in the United Nations reviews of 2005 as detailed in Kate Sheill's article.

Attempts to regulate the sexuality of others is, of course, nothing new. Several contributors trace the contemporary effects of the repressive legislation that remains a colonial legacy in many countries. Sonia

Corrêa starts her history of sexuality and development in the seventeenth century. Sumit Baudh analyses the implications of a British colonial law, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, still in place in many commonwealth countries, which criminalises ‘carnal intercourse against the order of nature’. Campuzano describes how Spanish colonial intervention superimposed a rigid gender dichotomy on far more fluid indigenous notions of gender, in which there was ritual and societal recognition of the role of people who transit genders, who came to be known as *travestis*. However, colonial Christian doctrines and subsequently development influences suppressed these identities and communities.

Development agencies are beginning to recognise the importance of addressing issues of sexuality beyond AIDS. The Ford Foundation has blazed a trail that other development agencies would do well to follow, establishing regional sexuality centres in four continents to support working with sexuality in positive and empowering ways.<sup>5</sup> Sweden’s landmark 2005 SRHR policy, a first among bilateral donors, emphasises the centrality of sexual rights and well-being to development. DFID’s 2004 Position Paper on SRHR has little to say on sexual rights,<sup>6</sup> but elaborates a rights-based approach to SRHR that acknowledges women’s rights to a sexuality of their own choosing (DFID 2004).

Current development talk of ‘citizenship’, ‘accountability’ and ‘empowerment’ creates openings for these new directions. Yet, at the same time, today’s aid modalities and geopolitics offer ever-diminishing scope for progressive donor agencies to pursue the kind of funding that can seed and support initiatives that can make a difference. Rising fundamentalisms make the context ever more hostile. Tracing the trajectories of debates about sexual and reproductive rights in the international arena over the last few debates, Corrêa highlights flashpoints and breakthroughs, and identifies these conflicting trends as ‘the paradoxes’ of this decade.

#### 1.4 Because sexual rights are human rights

Sexuality is an undeniable strand of human experience. Then, what keeps it from having its own place, its own articulation in the spectrum of human rights? (Sumit Baudh)

If sexuality matters for development, then rights-based approaches must take account of sexual rights

– not as a ‘luxury’, but as basic rights (Shue 1996) that are essential if we are to claim any other rights. In this case, which rights are we talking about – and for whom? As the links between development and human rights have come to be articulated in recent years, the human rights dimensions of sexuality become ever more evident (Klugman 2000; Hunt 2004; Corrêa and Jolly 2006). Framing the development dimensions of sexuality in themselves human rights issues and as a necessary part of any ‘rights-based’ approach to development underscores their significance for development, Henry Armas argues:

Sexual rights are not less important than rights to education, health or work ... sexual rights are all these rights ... Despite the theoretical consensus on integrality, policymakers have rarely attempted to take on board the numerous real and practical linkages between sexual and other rights.

Armas makes these linkages, outlining the ways that sexuality interacts with education, health, work and other such areas. He cites evidence of female genital mutilation, as well as “symbolic mutilations” of women’s desire including shame and guilt having direct effects on physical and mental health and well-being; feminine boys and pregnant girls being more likely to drop out of school due to bullying, social pressure and lack of support; and employers and colleagues discriminating against LGBT people at work. He goes on to argue that any efforts to democratise development and expand democratic citizenship must engage with questions of sexuality, and must confront head-on the multiple discriminations and disadvantages experienced by those whose sexual rights are disregarded.

## 2 New connections, new possibilities

### 2.1 Realising sexual rights

... We must move beyond solely defensive tactics and develop holistic, coherent strategies so that we can push on to realise the full promise of ... sexual rights. (Kate Sheill)

The question remains as to *how* to turn these rights into reality. Sheill calls for a reconsideration of current advocacy strategies to better convince the United Nations and member governments that sexual rights are indeed human rights. She explains how defensive tactics, developed in response to the conservative revival, can be counterproductive.

Activists claim that they are not calling for any new rights, in that sexual rights are already implied by previous international agreements. However, the conservative lobby has taken this to constitute an admission that rights (such as to abortion) are not endorsed unless explicitly codified in existing agreements. Sheill argues for a move beyond defensive tactics and 'the negative, protectionist model' of human rights which focuses only on protection against violations, on 'the right to be free from rather than free to'. This model will ultimately limit the realisation of sexual rights. Like Sheill, several other contributors explore the limitations of current strategies for realising rights and explore alternative approaches.

Legal activism has proven an important strategy for the women's and LGBT movement globally, who have sought both to repeal discriminatory legislation and to put in place protective frameworks that penalise discrimination on the basis of sex and sexual orientation. In his survey of legal frameworks and legislation in the region where some of the most progressive legislation outside Europe exists, Brazilian federal judge Roger Raupp Rios focuses on the degree of protection that LGBT people are afforded by law across the Latin American region. Setting the achievement of these rights within the context of redemocratisation in the region and in relation to demands for social rights, he signals some of the links between democracy and sexuality highlighted in Armas' article. Yet he also draws attention to gaps in existing legislation – such as protection of those who transit genders – and the very real challenge of turning enabling legal frameworks into changes in the societal attitudes and practices that continue to threaten the lives and well-being of sexual minorities in the region.

Rios' focus is on rights for 'those whose identities as LGBT mark them as "different"' and on challenging heteronormativity through legislation that proscribes discrimination. This, as his article shows, has led to considerable advances in the recognition of people's rights to choose their own sexuality and to enjoy loving relationships of their own choosing. Yet Jaya Sharma argues that such an approach has its limits and may end up reinforcing, rather than challenging, the very forms of discrimination that it sets out to proscribe. Legal frameworks that seek to protect LGBT rights largely do so by designating categories of rights-holders (e.g. 'gay men', 'homosexuals') with

which people need to identify or be identified as in order to claim these rights. Defining rights for 'sexual minorities', she argues, insulates heteronormativity from question. What is needed, Sharma contends, is to 'draw upon rights language strategically, while being firmly rooted in a queer, feminist framework that can offer more effective and liberating discourses and strategies for justice and equity' (page 52).

Baudh seeks to address some of these concerns by reframing sexual rights within existing human rights arguments. Baudh's analysis begins with the interrogation of a residual piece of colonial legislation that has been used in India to enforce compulsory heterosexuality: Section 377 is applied almost exclusively to male same sex sexual activity. Analysing the legal arguments that have been used to challenge sodomy laws in other contexts, Baudh argues that these have made use of rights to privacy, equality and human dignity. Each of these, he shows, has flaws that mean they fail to fundamentally advance sexual rights. The right to privacy simply places sexual conduct outside the purview of the state and does little to lend legitimacy to same sex sexualities. The right to equality rests on seeing sexual orientation as fixed, and viewing any non-normative sexual identities as residual to a particular normative notion of heterosexuality. The right to human dignity lends people who engage in sexual practices such as sodomy the status of minorities, who share a collective identity and deserve to be protected. By either denying the diversity of sexual expression or creating a distinctive, residual category of people whose sexual desires and identities are treated as different, heterosexuality emerges as the unchallenged norm.

What would an approach to sexual rights that took account of the diversity of forms of sexual identity and expression and the flux of sexual desire and experience over the lifecourse of any individual, look like? Baudh derives from the legal arguments that arise in defence of the rights to privacy, equality and human dignity, an argument for the right to sexual autonomy that has potential beyond its use in relation to same sex sexualities to address a spectrum of sexual and reproductive rights. As Petchesky (1998) reminds us, rights talk may mean little to the lives of people who have scant recourse to justice, but this does not mean that people do not have a sense of their sexual and reproductive *entitlements*.

As Shireen Huq shows, the framing of notions of entitlement in the language of rights is a fundamental part of struggles to realise sexual rights. Baudh's articulation of the right to sexual autonomy offers a way of moving beyond categorisation, framing the struggle to reclaim the rights over our own bodies in terms that embrace both bodily integrity and sexual freedom.

Talk of sexual rights for *everyone* raises the question: what, then, are *heterosexual men's* sexual rights? This is a question, as Jill Lewis and Gill Gordon note, that 'women-centred gender-equality' development workers find hard to answer. Men are so pervasively cast as the problem and patriarchal prerogative is so naturalised in gender discourse as a benefit that accrues to all men that there is barely space to raise let alone answer this question. Alan Greig's article does just this. Problematising the homogenising category 'men', Greig argues for the need to bring 'a more complex, and less heterosexist, gender analysis' to bear on the issue; and 'to recognise that some men's sexual rights have long been violated' (page 84). Highlighting the gender basis for the sexual violence that queer and straight men experience, Greig urges us to look beyond simplistic narratives of masculinity and into the complex constraints of heteronormative masculinity. He calls for an approach that asks fundamental questions about autonomy and accountability, and that does not shy away from highlighting the role heterosexual men have to play in 'the social and sexual revolution that will secure sexual rights not simply for themselves, but for all'.

## 2.2 The power of pleasure

What would the world be like if we really did have the right to choose our sexuality and pleasurable sexual relations? (Karen Ronge, Women for Women's Human Rights)<sup>7</sup>

If development and sexuality interact so deeply and extensively, how can we make this relationship more constructive? One answer proposed by several contributors is to shift from the current narrow and negative approaches to sexuality, to more empowering, positive and pleasure-focused framings. This ties in with Kate Sheill's call for a move beyond 'victimisation rhetoric', and beyond the focus only on violations, towards broader positive rights including to 'individual choice, expression and pleasure'.

As described above, people are only supposed to express their sexuality in particular ways. In many contexts women, LGBT people and people living with HIV/AIDS are not supposed to enjoy or express their sexualities. Men may be supposed to enjoy and express their sexuality, but socially sanctioned channels of expression are in fact limited to particular kinds of sex (e.g. aggressive penetration), and only with particular kinds of people (e.g. young women). Social and economic structures, violence, shame and stigma combine to keep such rules in place. Positive approaches, which include the right to ask for or say 'yes' to the pleasures we seek as well as 'no' to that which we do not desire, can be an entry point to challenging these power structures.

Conservatives claim 'culture' as their own: and emphasise its repressive elements. The association of 'tradition' with the denial of women's sexuality needs to be definitively challenged. Traditions as ancient as the *Karma Sutra* exist that recognise the power of pleasure and the importance of good sex for good relationships. Sylvia Tamale's account of the indigenous Bagandan initiation institution *Ssenga* provides a powerful example of this. Tamale explores *Ssenga's* pleasure-focused approach, and shows *Ssenga* initiation can serve as a space for women to subvert patriarchal norms and take control over their own sexuality. She cites a *Ssenga* initiate who, by challenging a male-focused view of sex, opens up discussion on women's erotic pleasure:

Wait a minute; all we've heard this evening is how to please a man? How we must wait on him and our children all the time, what we must do to please him in bed, blah, blah, blah ... Can you tell me what a man can do to please *me*?

As Tamale's article so powerfully shows, rather than writing off 'tradition', there may be much to gain from recuperating its enabling – and indeed subversive – elements.

There are many exciting initiatives that affirm women's rights to pleasure, as well as over their bodies. Amado's account of the Turkish NGO Women for Women's Human Rights' (WWHR) work is an example of this. WWHR runs human rights training programmes, which include sexual rights modules, for women in largely Muslim rural areas. Like a number of other contributors to this *IDS Bulletin*, Amado identifies control of women's



sexuality as one of the major mechanisms for women's suppression. UWHR's training programme seeks to enable participants to make the links between the political, social and cultural context and the constraints they face, instead of seeing these as reasonable measures to protect their 'honour'. The training also aims to help participants to know their own bodies better, and gain more power over what they do with them. One trainee remarked 'until I participated in this training, I didn't know girls or women can feel sexual pleasure'. Another declared 'I have the right to make love. I have the right to experience pleasure ...'

Although pleasure, or the desire for it, is one important reason people have sex, it is often ignored by safer sex programmes which focus only on risk and fear. Wendy Knerr and Anne Philpott introduce training material, piloted in Cambodia, which uses pleasure to motivate safer sex. Their argument is one that makes sound common sense: making safer sex sexier makes it more likely that people will practice it. Condoms become, within this approach, 'erotic accessories' rather than tools for disease prevention. Alice Welbourn recounts experiences from workshops run as part of ActionAid's 'Stepping Stones' programme that create space for participants to explore their understandings of love and experiences of intimate relationships. Her account demonstrates how powerful it can be to break the silence that so often surrounds sex and sexuality. By refocusing discussions on sexual pleasure to take into account all the factors that can work against having an enjoyable sexual relationship – including a lack of mutual respect and care – such workshops can promote an approach to HIV prevention that goes beyond teaching people the mechanics of safer sex.

In the Gambia, for instance, men have learnt of the importance of female orgasm and the G-spot and now recognise that the "wham, bang thank you ma'am" approach to sex leaves women emotionally and sexually unsatisfied.

Welbourn writes of how powerful these kinds of workshops can be for HIV-positive women, whose sexual desires and rights to pleasure are often totally ignored.

For those of us who maybe had no opportunity to learn about the far-reaching importance of

good sex in our lives before our diagnosis, such workshops can also give us the opportunity and skills to reclaim our own bodies from the clutches of an HIV diagnosis, to learn about what gives us pleasure, to develop a closer, more loving, mutually respectful and satisfying relationship with those with whom we choose to have sex, in the knowledge that they are likely to realise through these workshops that respect for us means that *their* lives become more meaningful also.

Gosine advocates for development to go beyond the racialising discourse of MSM, which reduces relationships between non-white men to purely physical interactions. He calls for an approach that recognises love, intimacy and affection as part of the sexual relationships men have with other men. Such an approach not only confronts the tendency to reproduce societal prejudice against same sex relationships that is implicit in treating MSM as vectors of disease, it also draws attention to the affective dimensions of men's intimate relationships with each other. Hazra likewise sees introducing 'elements of sensuousness' into safer sex education for MSM as essential to its effectiveness, as well as being potentially very validating for these men in their struggle to establish a place for themselves in the face of stigma and discrimination.

### 2.3 Forging alliances, building a movement

We were together, strategising, mobilising, facing journalists ... demonstrating in front of different government offices ... meeting UN officials ... and in between sitting around having tea, listening to the many untold stories of personal struggles, sharing jokes. We had become *attiyo* [related]. (Shireen Huq on the joint campaign of sex workers and women's organisations in Bangladesh, 1999)

Another part of the answer as to how development and sexuality can interact more constructively, is to take on sexuality as a cross-cutting issue, recognising its relation to the multiple dimensions of life and well-being. Sexual rights need to be established as an integral part of human rights for all, not only linked to particular limited identities. Several innovative activist initiatives are featured in this *IDS Bulletin* which make new connections and build solidarity around common issues of sexuality, between groups previously at odds.

Jelena Djordjevic describes the first showing of the *Vagina Monologues* in Serbia. Celebrity performers

drew in an audience far broader than those usually interested in the women's movement, including young people and men. They came to see the stars, but were moved – some to tears – by the show. At the end of the performance, the activist Rada Boric invited all those who knew a woman or girl who had suffered violence in her life to stand, and almost the whole audience was on their feet. Then members of KOLO were invited to take the stage. This Bosnian women's organisation supports Bosnian women who had been raped by Serbian soldiers during the war in former Yugoslavia. They received all profits from this showing of the *Vagina Monologues*. Powerful connections were made as a result of the common struggle against sexual violence.

Campuzano talks of what *travestis* can learn from feminism and the need to build alliances with the – traditionally hostile – women's movement in Latin America. Huq's moving account of how the Bangladeshi women's movement came face to face with the realities of sex workers' lives, including transgender sex workers, and the alliances and new understandings that emerged from this encounter shows the power of confronting prejudice and identifying around a set of shared political goals. Greig's article offers insights into how heterosexual men might come to identify with the critique of embedded power relations that lend them patriarchal

prerogative. This demonstrates the potential power for bridge-building across established faultlines. What these diverse stories all show is the importance of moving beyond limiting conceptions of the other and engaging across difference in a new politics that confronts the injustices maintained by existing social and sexual orders.

### 3 Sexuality matters

We used to talk about development with a human face. We should be talking about development with a body. (Arit Oku-Egbas, Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre, Nigeria)<sup>8</sup>

Why is sexuality a development concern? Because sexuality matters to people, and is an important part of most people's lives. Because development policies and practices are already having a significant – and often negative – impact on sexuality. And because sexuality and the societal norms that seek to contain and control it have, in turn, a significant impact on poverty and well-being. Development needs to recognise the importance of sexuality, and move beyond the current limited and negative approaches, to embrace the significance of sexuality for development in more positive and constructive ways. This *IDS Bulletin* offers a wealth of joyful and inspirational examples of how this might be done.

### Notes

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- 1 Pramada Menon, 2006, 'The Top Ten List on How to Change', *Development* Thematic Section 49: 42–5; see doi:10.1057/palgrave.development.1100226.
- 2 Comment made at the IDS 'Realising Sexual Rights' workshop opening lecture by Sonia Corrêa, 28 September 2005.
- 3 Speech made at the 'Expert Group for Development Issues' seminar on Sexuality, Development, Human Rights: Making the Connections, Stockholm, 6 April 2006.
- 4 Comment made at the IDS 'Realising Sexual Rights' workshop opening lecture by Sonia Corrêa, 28 September 2005.
- 5 For Africa, see [www.arsrc.org](http://www.arsrc.org); for Latin America, see [www.clam.org.br](http://www.clam.org.br); for South and South-East Asia, see [www.asiasrc.org](http://www.asiasrc.org); for the USA, see [www.nsrc.sfsu.edu](http://www.nsrc.sfsu.edu)
- 6 There is only one mention of the term, in relation to the 2004 UN Commission on Human Rights.

7 Comment made at the 'Realising Sexual Rights' workshop, September 2005.

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