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Whose Sexuality Counts? Poverty, Participation and Sexual Rights

Henry Armas
November 2007

IDS Institute of Development Studies

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Summary

Sexuality and sexual rights have generally been treated as secondary to 'more important matters' such as poverty. The first part of this paper explores the linkages between sexuality and other areas which *are* considered to be priorities in development, such as health, education, work, migration and political participation. It shows that sexuality is about so much more than sex. Social norms around sexuality have a huge impact on other areas, for example feminine boys and pregnant girls are more likely to drop out of school due to bullying, social pressure and lack of support, and employers and colleagues discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people at work. Rights based approaches must maintain the principle of the integrality and indivisibility of human rights, and recognise the interdependence of sexual rights with rights to health, housing, food and employment. And if poverty is understood to be not just material, but to also be about exclusion, illbeing, and restrictions on capacities and freedom, then the lack of sexual rights in itself constitutes poverty. A call is made for greater attention to sexuality from development agencies.

The second part of the paper shows how participatory approaches can be a valid strategy to include sexual rights and wellbeing in the development agenda. It is important to acknowledge that not every participation experience is transformative, and to address the limitations of participation. Yet participation in some cases does bring about both personal and social transformation, including in relation to sexuality. Sexuality is an issue that enables people to work with politics at a very personal level; the very intimacy of working with issues of citizenship and rights through the lens of sexuality makes space for a transformative process of self-reflection that can lead to social action.

Keywords: sexuality, sexual rights, rights based approaches, poverty, participation, democracy.

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Preface

Sexuality has been side-lined by development. Associated with risk and danger, but hardly ever with pleasure or love, sex has been treated by development agencies as something to be controlled and contained. The AIDS epidemic has broken old taboos and silences, and begun to open up space for the recognition of how central sexual rights are to everyone's wellbeing. But more is needed to take us beyond the confines of narrow problem-focused thinking about sexuality towards approaches in which pleasure and desire play as large a part as danger and death do today.

Sexuality is a vital aspect of development. It affects people's livelihoods and security, their wellbeing, and sometimes their very survival. Sexual rights are a precondition for reproductive rights and for gender equality. Lack of sexual rights affects hetero-sexual majorities as well as sexual minorities – lesbians and gay men, bisexuals, transgendered and intersex people – who are so often denied basic human rights and subjected to violence and exclusion. In some countries, women are denied a choice of partner, subjected to coercive marital sex and restricted in their mobility. Pervasive homophobia places those married men who desire other men, their male partners and their wives at greater risk of HIV and AIDS. Adolescents schooled into abstinence learn little about their bodies or their desires, and may be more vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection as a result. And sex workers are routinely denied basic legal and employment – as well as broader human – rights. The current world climate of rising conservatism, from the Vatican, the USA, and some Muslim states, has only served to exacerbate matters. Rare is the environment which allows people to live out a fulfilling and pleasurable sexuality of their choice and that empowers people with a sense of their right to say 'yes' as well as 'no' and enjoy safe, loving relationships free of coercion and violence.

Issues of sex and sexuality are all too often associated with silence, shame and stigma. Solutions that are framed by a discourse that problematises sex offer limited scope for transforming the way in which development actors work on these issues. It is all too easy to focus on the negatives that we highlight above and to conspire with a silence within them about unruly desires, about pleasuring the senses, and about love. The turn to rights in international development discourse may offer new openings for the articulation of sexuality and development, and new opportunities for realising sexual rights. This series of working papers, funded by Swedish Sida, the UK Department for International Development and Swiss Development Cooperation, enters the debate about sexual rights from the perspective of development. Together, the papers seek to challenge orthodoxies and bring fresh thinking to the challenges of making sexual rights real.

Susie Jolly and Andrea Cornwall

Realizing Sexual Rights Programme, IDS

1 Introduction

Development agencies have traditionally regarded the links between economic growth, poverty and sexuality in very narrow terms, to be addressed through strategies for birth control and HIV prevention. Sexual rights has been regarded as secondary to the important matters of housing, education, employment and so on. Issues of sexuality and sexual pleasure have received barely any attention at all. This paper asks: what do sexuality, sexual rights and sexual pleasure have to do with growth, citizenship, participation and rights?

In the first section, I will explore the linkages between sexuality, rights and poverty and suggest that the relationship between sexual rights with wellbeing and development needs to be given greater attention by development agencies. In the second part, I will show how participatory approaches can be a valid strategy to include sexual rights, wellbeing and pleasure in the development agenda. Yet, as I suggest, to do so faces conceptual and practical difficulties, and raises a number of challenges that need to be overcome. Taking sexuality into account calls for a commitment to a democracy of sexuality, one that can make real the promise of participation, citizenship and rights for all.

2 Sexuality, rights and development

Although sexuality and sexual pleasure are not defined as basic needs, they have echoes in every aspect of life and should be considered in the development agenda. Rights are a clear entry point to talk about sexuality in relation to development; a rights-based approach makes these connections more evident.

Since the 1990s, the rights-based approach has became a crucial element in development discourses, policies and practices, continuing a previous process of work with international human rights, with new actors and strategies. For the United Nations system, a human rights based approach implies that:

> 1. All programmes of development cooperation, policies and technical assistance should further the realization of human rights as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.
>
> 2. Human rights standards contained in, and principles derived from, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments guide all development cooperation and programming in all sectors and in all phases of the programming process.
>
> 3. Development cooperation contributes to the development of the capacities of duty-bearers to meet their obligations and/or of rights-holders to claim their rights.
>
> (United Nations 2003)

Despite the fact that there are many rights-based approaches and practices, some common elements can be identified (Marks 2005: 102):

- Express linkage to rights
- Accountability
- Empowerment
- Participation
- Non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups.

2.1 Sexual rights and rights-based approaches

What do sexual rights have to do with human rights and the rights-based approach?

- Sexual rights have a clear relationship with **human rights.** Principles of integrality and indivisibility require us to see sexual rights as interdependent with rights to health, housing, food or employment.
- Sexual rights enable people to demand **accountability** from power holders regarding the most personal and intimate dimensions of their lives.
- Sexual rights not only **empower** people regarding their own decisions about their sexual lives, but also generate self-esteem, a new perception of citizen ship, control over their own lives in other spaces like, health, education, employment, etc.
- Sexual rights increase **inclusion, representation** and the degree of **democratic engagement** people can have with the decisions that affect their lives.
- Sexual rights make visible **discriminated and vulnerable groups** that remain unnoticed by development agencies and governments in general programmes and actions.
- Sexual rights are not only related with sexual and reproductive health projects, but are an important element to take into account in a wider strategy to tackle **poverty.**

Sexual rights have a variety of definitions. The Platform for Action from the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women affirms:

> Paragraph 96. The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences.

Sweden has used this paragraph as the applicable definition of women's sexual rights (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden 2006: 7). Furthermore, Sweden considers that sexual rights include already recognised human rights, for example the right to private life (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16) and

personal safety (UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, Article 5b). It is a fundamental principle of human rights that one individuals rights must not encroach on those of another. In sexual relations or matters concerning sexuality and reproduction, personal and physical integrity must be respected. In light of this, the Swedish Government defines sexual rights as meaning that all people, irrespective of sex, age, ethnicity, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation, have a right to their own body and sexuality. There is also the general human rights principle of non-discrimination on sexual or other grounds, such as sexual orientation or gender identity.

In *Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: A Position Paper* (DFID 2004) there is no specific definition for sexual rights. Despite mention that sexual and reproductive health is an essential element of good health and human development, and important as an issue in itself (DFID 2004: 3), this institutional document is basically focused on reproductive issues and HIV/AIDS. In the section 'What do we mean by sexual and reproductive health and rights?' definitions of reproductive health, reproductive health care and reproductive rights are provided, but no definitions of sexual rights. However, when the document appeals to the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development) approach of reproductive health care, DFID (2004: 4) states that they are:

> The constellation of methods, techniques and services that contribute to reproductive and sexual health and wellbeing by preventing and solving reproductive health problems. It also includes sexual health, the purpose of which is the enhancement of life and personal relations and not merely counselling and care related to reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases.

According to the working definition for sexual rights provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), they embrace human rights that are already recognised in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus statements. They include the right of all persons, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, to (WHO 2006):

- The highest attainable standard of sexual health, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services;
- Seek, receive and impart information related to sexuality;
- Sexuality education;
- Respect for bodily integrity;
- Choose their partner;
- Decide to be sexually active or not;
- Consensual sexual relations;
- Consensual marriage;
- Decide whether or not, and when, to have children; and
- Pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life.

2.2 The integrality of rights

The World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), stated that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat different human rights with the same emphasis. Principles of integrality, indivisibility and interdependence lead us to approach sexual rights inter-related with rights to education, health, work, political participation, mobility, and its effects in migration, food, housing, etc. Despite consensus on integrality, policy-makers are often unaware of the numerous real and practical linkages between sexual rights and other rights. These include:

2.2.1 Health

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is an overt attempt to eliminate women's sexual pleasure. But there are also other non-corporeal mutilations of women's desire: shame, guilt feelings and fixed assigned roles. These symbolic mutilations can be shared by many other people, whether they are female or male, sexual dissidents [1] or not. They have a direct effect on people's mental health and wellbeing. Heteronormativity affects the health of many men and women and therefore, affects their inclusion in economic life. HIV/AIDS is a good example of this: the violence and exclusion experienced by many people due to heteronormativity discourages them from having safer sex. Men who have sex with men but don't define themselves as 'gay' or 'homosexual' may be more at risk from HIV/AIDS than any other group as a result of the stigma and exclusion associated with openness about their sexuality. Those in same-sex relationships may experience a host of exclusionary practices, from limitations in access to health insurance to discrimination from medical providers. Exclusion in the workplace and social and family environments experienced by those who fail to conform to norms of hetero-sexuality can create risks for physical abuse and psychological aggression. For those LGBT people who have to hide their sexual orientation, depression and stress are a further cause of ill-health.

2.2.2 Education

There is not enough research regarding the effects of sexual rights violations on education. Yet even the few studies that have been done start to show a pattern. A 2002 study in Bangladesh showed that feminine boys were more likely to be bullied in school, drop out and end up in poverty (Naz Foundation International 2002). Teenage mothers have to abandon school due to social pressure or formal sanctions. Heterosexual sexuality that transgresses established social norms equally has effects on education: as, for example, in the difficulties experienced by teenage mothers in continuing schooling, and the risks faced by sexually active young women who are denied access to contraceptive advice and provision. If governments do not incorporate sexuality education as an important element in their national curricula, people (and specially teenagers and young people) would have

1 The phrase 'sexual dissident' was taken from Andil Gosine (2005).

less opportunities to take decisions (regarding parenthood, sexual initiation, HIV prevention, etc.) with proper information. Sexuality education creates opportunities to give people the capacity to decide over their own lives and bodies. Lack of it impoverishes people.

2.2.3 Work

Heteronormativity affects labour rights, and limits opportunities for employment. LGBT people may experience problems not only of access to employment, but also of job security. This is especially the case in certain fields, such as education or the armed forces. Transgender people experience greater barriers still to employment. In Latin America, the very limited range of professional opportunities available to transgender people means sex work is almost the only available option. Therefore, there is a negative cycle between lack of opportunities in education and employment. This results in weaker capacities and poverty.

2.2.4 Migration

Migration and its economic effects have a direct relationship with sexual rights. Those who are discriminated against on the grounds of their sexuality may need to travel to other countries to seek employment. In around 70 countries in the world, homosexuality is a crime. According to Samelius and Wagberg (2005: 22), Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Mauritania have the legal possibility to issue death sentences for consenting homosexual acts. An organisation working openly with advocacy for LGBT rights will be at great risk as its members risk imprisonment for promoting illegal activities. Conviction may entail imprisonment up to ten years, forced hard labour, heavy fines or corporal punishment.

The lack of possibilities that LGBT people may experience in their original countries to love, have a family or develop an identity or a sex life is another reason for migration. Cases of family reunification are subordinated to the particular definition of family that certain states adopt. This has economic consequences: there are more barriers for LGBT migrants, and more possibilities to be confined to an illegal status and social exclusion. LGBT may also migrate within their own countries, to cities or places where they can be more anonymous, away from family scrutiny. They may also be thrown out by their families and urged to move away. Women may migrate to escape sexual violence and abuse, sometimes related to a conflict situation. Single women, widows and divorcees migrate to escape social stigma. Young women sometimes migrate to escape restrictions on their freedom, pressure to marry, or to remain chaste until marriage (Jolly [with Reeves] 2005).

2.2.5 Political participation

Discrimination and prejudice affect also the right to political participation. For example, Lourdes Flores, one of the most popular candidates for President in Peru, was the first woman with a real possibility of winning Peru's most recent elections in 2006. She was attacked by other candidates because she is not a mother and is not married; this, it was inferred, meant that she did not have the maternal

sensibility nor the character to administrate a country. It is interesting to notice that being a *woman* was not considered to be the issue. But not being a *mother* and being single at more than 45 years old was judged problematic. Women (and especially those who want to participate in politics), are exposed to social pressure in issues related to their sexualities, such as if they have children or not, or if they are married. The outcome is decisions to vote based on prejudice rather than on the candidate's proposals.

2.3 Perspectives on poverty

For many donors, the rights-based approach is the strategy and the goal is poverty reduction. But who are the poor? If we understand poverty as exclusion, we can find a link with sexual rights and limits to freedom and wellbeing. As Amartya Sen (1999) points out, poverty depends on capabilities and capabilities depend on freedom. Sexual rights violations imply a loss of freedom, and therefore, poverty. The visible loss of capabilities in people are related to education, employment, migration, health, and many other domains of people's lives. This affects the lives of countless people: from a transgender who cannot be attended in a public hospital to a woman whose child cannot study in certain schools because she is a single mother, from a heterosexual man who experiences social pressure to lose his virginity with a sex worker without condoms, to a man who cannot find a job because he appears in the press as a gay activist.

When we think of sexual rights, we have to think of many other domains of freedom that are affected and that are directly related to poverty. If we include sexual rights as part of the strategy to tackle poverty, we would have a core element in our holistic analysis that will enable us to relate intimate and personal arenas with social dimensions of politics and economy. Micro and macro level of power are closely related. If we think of freedom in relation to the most intimate dimension of people's lives, we can be sure that this process will be reflected in action to address the other dimensions of people's wellbeing that sexuality impinges upon.

Therefore, we can conclude that sexual rights violations create poverty. If we use WHO's working definition for sexual rights, it can be said that people are poor when:

- They cannot reach the highest attainable standard of sexual health, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services;
- They cannot seek, receive and impart information related to sexuality;
- They cannot receive sexuality education;
- Respect is lacking for people's bodily integrity;
- People cannot choose their partner;
- People cannot decide to be sexually active or not;
- People are not free to have or not have sexual relations;
- People are not free to get or not get married;

- People are not free to have or not have children when they want;
- People cannot pursue a safe, satisfying and pleasurable sexual life.

If we use this framework, we can analyse certain policies, like abstinence programmes oriented to tackle HIV/AIDS, for example. They would not only be ineffective, but also, they would limit people's options. As a consequence, they create more poverty, less options and less control over one's own life.

Sexual rights violations create hunger (discrimination leads to fewer salaries, underpaid and risky jobs), insecurity (physical aggression against LGBT people, genital mutilations in women), lack of power (police abuse of sex workers), limitations in access to health (discrimination in hospitals on the basis of sexual orientation, or marital status in access to health insurance) and limitations in access to education (bullying in schools, discrimination, limited access to sexuality education). It is not only lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people who are affected, but also their families. So are heterosexual women and men who diverge from dominant norms or conform to oppressive norms about their sexual lives. Not to have freedom in that intimate dimension of our lives affects all of us as society, even at a macro-political level. We all lose.

3 Participation as a strategy for sexual rights

Participation has different manifestations in different agencies, governments and NGOs. For some institutions, participation is a core element of a rights-based approach. An example of this is the framework that DFID uses, considering participation, inclusion and obligation as components of a rights-based approach (DFID 2000).

3.1 Promises of participation for sexual rights

If participation is the meaningful involvement of marginalised groups in defining their own realities and developing strategies to improve their situation, then:

- sexual rights need to be included in development strategies to tackle poverty
- sexual rights strategies need to be developed according to the visions of those who are most excluded on the basis of their sexuality and who suffer violations of their sexual rights
- participating in defining realities and developing strategies should be a transformative and empowering experience for people whose sexual rights have been violated, and, as such, will have a domino effect in many other domains of people's lives.

This implies the elements outlined below.

3.1.1. Participation as an entry right

Human rights principles of integrality and indivisibility have as a consequence that we cannot think about civil and political rights as separate to economic, social and cultural rights. The violation of certain rights affects others. Participation is an entry right, which absence makes impossible to realise other rights. Eyben argues:

> Deciding which rights are most important, and require priority funding in relation to the states resources, becomes a political debate in which all citizens have a right to participate. From this perspective the right to participation can be seen as the entry point to realising all other rights. The right to participate is the right to claim other rights. Understanding participation as a right, rather than an instrument for greater aid effectiveness, has been one of the biggest shifts in agency thinking in recent years. (2003:2)

Thinking about participation as a right and not just as a methodology helps to reframe participation in political terms.

What is the consequence of this approach for sexual rights? If we want to realise sexual rights we need to reinforce participation that could allow to include sexual rights in the public agenda as a valid element. Therefore, participation is an entry right for sexual rights.

3.1.2 Participation and inclusion

Participation is a strategy to fight against the exclusion of the weakest groups in society in decision-making. Sexuality has intimate liaisons with exclusion, bound up with the effects of heteronormativity and patriarchy. Normative sexual identities or behaviours for women and men affect many other aspects of peoples lives: access to education, employment, health, parenthood, credit and so on. Feminine boys, masculine girls and those with non-conforming sexualities may be excluded as a result.

Chambers asks:

> Whose knowledge counts?
>
> Whose values?
>
> Whose criteria and preferences?
>
> Whose appraisal, analysis and planning?
>
> Whose action?
>
> Whose monitoring and evaluation?
>
> Whose learning?
>
> Whose empowerment?
>
> Whose reality counts?
>
> (2000: 101)

Similarly we could ask in development discourses: Whose sexuality counts? Men's, women's, transgenders' or intersex? Heterosexual sexuality or also gay, lesbian, and bisexual? Whose pleasure? Whose desire? Whose notion of decency? Whose notion of promiscuity? Whose shame? Whose fears? Whose identities? Whose sin? Whose transgression? Whose liberation? Whose freedom?

Participation is not the panacea for inclusion, but it is part of what inclusion might mean in practice.

3.1.3 A focus on the personal dimension of politics

Participation is political. Politics have different dimensions: institutional and inter-institutional, but also personal. It is absolutely important to consider the personal dimension, because it is the most intimate space of politics, participation, rights and citizenship. To work at the personal level is a unique opportunity for self-reflection and awareness; it is the basis on which wider action and reflection can be supported. Sexuality, the most intimate space for rights and citizenship, when it is linked with rights discourse, is about respect for others, self-respect, dialogue, duties, responsibilities and awareness.

The organisation I work with, GRUPAL in Peru, doesn't do sexuality training but we do democracy and participation workshops which include reflection on sexuality: Are you democratic with your sexual partner? Do you listen to your own desire? Are you respected when you say 'no'? Do you dialogue about pleasure? What are the power dynamics of sex and sexual orientation and how do these interact with those of gender, race, and education? This can be quite a good entry point for getting people to think about democracy. We have 16 and 17 year olds who have lived through 10 years of dictatorship and think politics is a dirty space they don't want to participate in. Talking about the personal dimension of politics, with sex as a part of it, gets them interested.

3.2 Challenges of participation for sexual rights

Participation is not a magic solution for the problems of exclusion. Even participatory strategies may present difficulties for sexual rights.

3.2.1 Participation may represent high costs for excluded people

Participation implies costs. For example, the cost of transportation for the meeting venues, the time dedicated to coordinations and deliberations (instead of spending time with family, working or studying) or the costs of political action (campaigns, marches, communication, etc.). This may mean that in participatory policy processes, strong and organised groups are more likely to succeed in pushing their agendas.

What happens with weaker groups? Sexual rights violations imply exclusions at many levels, and those who are excluded face the impoverishing effects of discrimination. How can a sexual rights women's organisation or a LGBT group demand agendas, organise a march, lead a debate or spread out a rights violation case

properly if it is dealing with basic issues of survival? Groups formed around sexual rights are usually small and weaker than others in civil society, in a development landscape dominated by less controversial (and more fundable) issues. This element, which is present in a very natural way in a participatory space, is a problem that needs to be faced. The role of aid and cooperation in strengthening organisational capacities and sustainability of these groups is fundamental to achieve more legitimate and representative participatory spaces.

3.2.2 The costs of visibility

A lesbian activist could succeed with her advocacy campaign appearing in public , participating in public debate. But she will have to accept the costs: discrimination at work, in her family, social spaces, etc. This activist could agree to assume all these personal costs in the name of a collective purpose. But when we call for more participation of sexual dissidents, maybe we are not taking into account the costs that this public activity could represent.

Gays are more likely to participate than MSM. What are the consequences of this in HIV-AIDS participatory policies? Can we demand MSM to be gay and come out in order to claim rights? Who will pay for the personal costs of that exposition (which is not the same for every person)? What happens if intimacy and secrecy (and not a public identity) is an element of the desire object? MSM and other sexual minorities (who don't want to be seen in public) are the most vulnerable groups just because they cannot push agendas or claim rights. Aren't these groups the most excluded? Aren't they the poor? We couldn't say that these persons are bad citizens because they don't participate.

There is an evident tension between the need for sexual dissidents' visibilisation in order to push agendas and their right to privacy. On the other hand, representative democracy could assure anonymity of those who want to be heard. Otherwise, in a participatory space, someone will talk in the name of them, or nobody will talk at all. Therefore, could representative democracy be a better option than participation in these cases? What happens with direct democracy alternatives?

3.2.3 Power relationships and representation in different groups

Groups that advocate for sexual rights are not equal. There is a multiplicity of agendas and relationships. Among them, and inside them, there could be diverse forms of exclusion (racism, male chauvinism, patriarchy, etc.). All these elements will be present in deliberative spaces.

Who will talk in the name of whom in deliberative spaces? LGBT activists will talk in the name of MSM? And inside the LGBT movement, which people will be heard? Formally educated, articulated and informed people are likely to be seen as the decent face of the these movements. White, middle-class and northern images are likely to be seen as the prototypes of sexual identities. In this context, representation appears as a problem.

If we base people's participation in their identities (as gay, lesbian, etc), when representation of different groups is demanded, what happens with the people that base their sexuality not in identities but in fluid desire? What happens with heterosexual men who don't follow traditional social norms and who don't have a specific sexual and political identity? Is it possible to talk about representation without identities? Is there any advantage when people just talk about sexual rights and not about specific sexual identities?

3.2.4 Participation as a mechanism to legitimate moral control

Participatory spaces can be used as much as instruments of moral control as tools for transformation. If the strongest groups of civil society are conservative organisations with more funding, resources, time, networks, influence and ability to articulate a coherent discourse without criticism, it is possible (as it was mentioned before) that these groups could dominate participatory spaces. Therefore, decisions taken in these spaces would reflect conservative ideas, legitimated as participatory decisions or the voice of the people.

Bracamonte and Alvarez (2005) report a case that occurred in Chiclayo, a city in the north of Peru, where activists from LGBT organisations reported that some Neighbourhood Watch groups that depend on the Neighbourhood Councils, exercise violence against transgenders in their localities. In a context in which Neighbourhood Watch groups are a response to the absence of the State in its responsibility to guarantee citizen security, these groups (together with the national and municipal police) could mean violence against lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and particularly against transgenders that are sex workers.

This problem appears in many other domains of civil society. According to Restrepo (2001: 172), in the name of citizen participation and community participation in justice, there are more popular hangings of criminals in Peru and Mexico. In the name of participation in citizen security, self-defence committees and armed civil associations – which not only dispute weapons monopoly but also involve a growing number of the population in war activities – are encouraged in Colombia. The difference between direct democracy and participation is that the latter has deliberation as a core element. Information, criticism and different points of view are the elements that enable deliberation and public opinion. Without them, the risk of turning participatory spaces in mechanisms of moral control or even human rights violation appears.

4 Final reflections

There is an undeniable link between sexuality and development. Sexual rights violations are not just an issue of concern to minorities. They have an economic impact, not only for the people directly affected, but also for their families, friends and social and labour networks. Their impact on impoverishment is a real consequence that we have to reflect about. Social networks are the main bulwark against poverty in developing countries. Prejudice and discrimination weakens these networks and therefore, creates poverty.

Despite these connections, not a single Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper has included sexual rights as part of a coherent strategy against poverty related to human rights. In addition to this, the UN Millennium Development Goals do not specifically mention sexual and reproductive health and rights. Which NGO working on poverty or in human rights (not specifically in sexuality issues) would depict a transgender or a sex worker on the cover of its annual report? Why are so many development agencies so uncomfortable working with certain ways of poverty, linked with sexuality? What are the consequences of this discomfort?

Sexual rights are about much so more than sex. That is why it is important to develop not only theoretical but also political and working linkages with other international, national and local actors that are not working in sexual rights, but are involved in housing, health, education, migration and so on. But there are many challenges that need to be addressed. The first is the lack of systematic evidence that relates sexual rights to other rights and shows how a lack of sexual rights has a direct economic impact, and the relationship between poverty and lack of freedom. Without this evidence, it will be impossible to formulate, let alone monitor and evaluate, programmes and policies. The second challenge is to incorporate a sexual rights discourse in the existing human rights monitoring instruments, and in international reports. Traditionally, sexuality has been presented in these documents only in relation to reproduction. However, non- reproductive sexuality has an important impact on poverty and development. Discussion of HIV/AIDS opens possibilities to talk about sexuality, but sexuality must be recognised as more than about sexually transmitted disease, and included more comprehensively in the development enterprise.

Participation is an important element in the strategy of including sexual rights in the development agenda. It is important to acknowledge that not every participation experience is transformative, and to address the limitations of participation. Yet participation can help sustainability, and in some cases does bring about both personal and social transformation, including in relation to sexuality. Sexuality is an issue that enables people to work with politics at a very personal level; the very intimacy of working with issues of citizenship and rights through the lens of sexuality makes space for a transformative process of self-reflection that can lead to social action.

To conclude, sexual rights are an important battlefield in our fight against poverty. Our work for inclusion and for the realisation of the rights of excluded people cannot be complete if we don't consider sexual rights as a necessary element that affects many other domains of development work. Taking sexuality into consideration means to have respect for the people that we work with and to treat them as citizens.

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