



# Navigating gender and culture: NGO consultations

Melbourne, 26 October 2011  
Sydney, 27 October 2011

*When women benefit, the whole community benefits.*



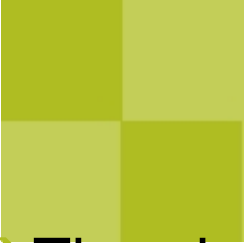
# Workshop Objectives:

- To (share experiences) in order to identify and document specific issues and obstacles that development practitioners experience in relation to navigating the gender and culture interface
- To explore what development practitioners need to assist them in navigating the gender and culture interface?
- To begin sharing strategies and experiences of success in navigating the gender and culture interface



# Today's program

<b>9:30 Workshop Start</b>
<b>Session 1: Introductions &amp; Overview</b>
<b>Session 2. Storytelling</b>
<b>11:00 Tea break</b>
<b>Session 3. Group analysis of issues</b>
<b>Session 4. Feedback and discussion</b>
<b>Session 5. Sharing of resources</b>
<b>Session 6. Next steps</b>
<b>Session 7. Evaluation/ feedback</b>
<b>1:30 Workshop close and light lunch</b>



# Closing the gender gap research

- ❑ The aim of the research was to develop a clearer understanding of the ways NGOs are seeking to integrate gender, identify barriers experienced and what NGOs have found effective
- ❑ And make recommendations to address challenges and amplify good practices – to improve development effectiveness, assist agencies to implement new gender provisions in the ACFID Code of Conduct, & comply more fully with AusAID accreditation criteria
- ❑ Involved a survey of 15 NGOs, a representative sample of NGOs accessing ANCP funds from small, large, faith-based, secular, & gender-focused agencies.



## Key findings

- ❑ Level of awareness of gender issues strong
- ❑ Around a quarter of agencies surveyed have gender as a central focus of their work and others had a strong gender focus in particular countries or contexts.
- ❑ But overall, agencies found it difficult to have a strong gender focus across their whole programs.
- ❑ A range of reasons for this including pressures from partner organisations in developing countries, perceived competition among policy issues set by donors, and internal capacity issues.



## Key findings relevant to gender & culture

- ❑ The main area of resistance to change in gender relations came from partners who saw gender as a western-imposed concept, a donor-driven priority or cited culture and tradition as barriers which could not or should not be challenged.
- ❑ The capacity of local NGOs to work in gender-informed ways is often an area for development, with staff part of a culture that ascribes particular gender roles to women and men.
- ❑ Staff haven't been able to deal with cultural issues and gender issues together, and so culture is often used as an excuse not to deal with gender



# Key findings relevant to gender & culture

- If the challenges of engaging with partners on gender were to be worked through effectively, the agency in Australia had to have a stronger gender focus in its structure and approaches
- A particular need for investment in the capacity of Australian NGOs and their partners to address gender norms in a range of social and political contexts where religion and tradition are sometimes used to argue for the maintenance of particular social structures
- But research also pointed to innovative approaches to dealing with these issues in a sensitive, respectful and productive manner
  - where there was respectful dialogue about the extent of women's disadvantage, especially in the context of other domains of marginalisation like disability, change was possible.



The research report  
can be found at:

[http://www.acfid.asn.au/resources/docs\\_resources/docs\\_reports/closing-the-gender-gap/view](http://www.acfid.asn.au/resources/docs_resources/docs_reports/closing-the-gender-gap/view)





# The Role of Religion

- ❑ Religion is an important influence in many countries in which NGOs work, and often a source of resistance to gender equality advances and the realisation of women's rights, as the interpretation of most religious texts across the main religions has a strong male bias
- ❑ The engagement between religion and women's rights can be fraught, and requires sensitivity if advances are to be made.
- ❑ But religion can provide an entry point for discussing gender
  - for example, the Pacific Churches Partnership enables a close examination of gender-based violence as the churches have a basis for engaging with the private space (of the family)



## Emphasis on culture in development

- Emerged around 1982 World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT), Mexico City, and subsequent UN Decade of Culture:
  - Inclusion of ‘intangible heritage’
  - Devised new definition
  - Rejected existence of ‘hierarchy of cultures’



## Culture & gender: issues from the literature

- Critique of Westernisation and modernization approaches to development:
  - implied hierarchy of peoples/ cultures/ countries
  - assumed linear progression: 'backward' to 'advanced' with implied superiority/ inferiority
- Unexamined assumptions of neutrality: 'West and the rest' (Soetan, 2001)
  - Development – including GAD – laden with cultural values (Jolly, 2002).
  - 'Development organizations (and workers) must make the effort to examine cultural, including linguistic, practices that shape their own world view, as rigorously as they do those in Southern societies.' (Dawit and Busia, 1995)



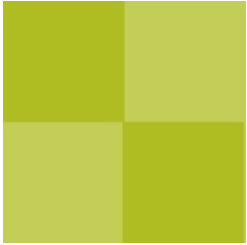
## Culture & gender: issues from the literature

- ❑ Characterising certain beliefs and practices as pertaining to particular ‘cultures’ has impact of reinforcing notions of hierarchies of civilizations – removes power analysis from the equation including analyses of gender inequality and North/South inequality; reinforces post-/colonial notions of ‘white man’s burden’, the ‘civilizing ‘mission’ (Newdick, 2005)
- ❑ Ideas about families ‘become emblematic of an entire culture’ while depending on the subsuming of women’s interests’ (Mukhopadhyay)
- ❑ Gender inequality is structural and systemic and as such is related to other fundamental inequalities such as race/ethnicity, and inequalities between countries.



## Culture & gender: issues from the literature

- ❑ Stereotype of third world woman as passive, subservient, victim; assumptions about what people of particular religions do, believe and value – this is a culture-based assumption (Mukhopadhyay and others)
- ❑ Focusing on negative aspects of culture results in a ‘deficit model’ which can be counterproductive (Airhihenbuwa and Liburd, 2006)
- ❑ Problematic binaries – ‘West and the rest’; developed/ undeveloped; man/ woman; religious/ secular
- ❑ Kandiyoti argues for a moratorium on such binaries in favour of rigorous institutional analysis including attention to fluid networks of influence at all levels (2011)



## Culture & gender: issues from the literature

- ❑ Development and GAD approaches often premised on assumptions about meanings eg the form, meaning and significance of family (Soetan, Fairbairn)
- ❑ Understanding and transforming culture requires analysis of power and the multiple ways that power operates – overt/ hidden/ coercive/ non-coercive (Moncrieffe, 2005, in UNFPA, 2008)



## Culture & gender: issues from the literature

- ❑ Development involves changing... cultural attitudes and institutions (Soetan)
- ❑ Challenging gender inequality may be resisted as ‘cultural tampering’ or ‘imposing “Western” values (UNFPA, others) – such charges may be leveled at insiders (Mukhopadhyay, 1995)
- ❑ Cultures must and do adjust and adapt to external and internal influences and conditions (Soetan, 2001)
- ❑ Culture closely connected with identity (Soetan) – culture is cherished and perceived challenges can elicit defensiveness



## Culture & gender: issues from the literature

- ❑ Local conflict in communities can result eg rights-based approaches, designed to address gender & other inequalities & promote empowerment of marginalised women, can be perceived as undermining traditional power holders - may be resisted by men while being applauded by women.
- ❑ Rather than seeing such conflict as potentially constructive and capable of being managed, Wendoh and Wallace found that many local NGO staff responded defensively or conservatively and assumed that there was no potential or opportunity for gender transformation: ‘...gender was not possible in the office or at home ... the gender coat was put on when they went to communities & taken off when they came back to the office’ (Wendoh and Wallace: 56).





## Culture & gender: issues from the literature

- ❑ Acculturation of men and women within their households and communities, outside their work organisations, affects their behaviours within them (Goetz 1992; George 2007)
- ❑ ‘The people in NGOs are part of the culture too, and their views about men’s and women’s roles and responsibilities are influenced by social expectations as well as by their studies and the policies and processes of the organization’ (Halcrow, Rowland et al. 2010: 32)
- ❑ Conformity to local norms often necessary for women’s and men’s survival (Wendoh and Wallace 2006).




# Culture & gender: issues from the literature

- ❑ Connections between gendered social relationships in the home and community and gendered organisational relationships are not being made. (Goetz)
- ❑ It is difficult to challenge these norms through large-scale programs where centrally-determined frameworks and policies can lead to rigidities and limit adaptation to local cultures.



## Culture & gender: issues from the literature

- Kilby's research on NGOs in India suggested three reasons why gender is weak in local NGO work:
    - The gendered nature of the society in which the NGO is embedded, often with strong patriarchal norms;
    - The lower status accorded gender compared with social categories such as class, caste, ethnicity etc.; and
    - The dual role of government as regulator and donor, and the development policies pursued
-  (Kilby 2010).



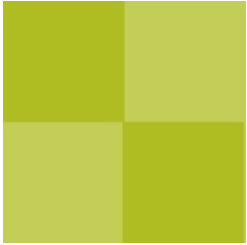
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## Guiding questions for discussion

- In what ways has 'culture' been experienced as an *obstacle* to raising and dealing with issues of gender justice?
- In what ways as an *enabler*?
- What things (tools, resources, skills, knowledge, qualities, support, other) were or would have been helpful to the practitioner in this situation?
- What can we observe about things that seem to trigger the response of 'culture' or tradition as a form of resistance?
- To what extent do people feel that the experiences their group has highlighted are context-specific vs generalisable from one context to another?



## Next Steps...

- ❑ Follow up from ANGO workshops – sharing documentation & resources, other opportunities for input
- ❑ In-country workshops/processes late Jan-Feb 2012 with local women's rights and gender equality advocates in Timor Leste, Solomon Islands, PNG, Cambodia, Thai-Burma border area
- ❑ Distilling learning and designing tools – working group to design resources – one week around IWD 2012 – please signal if you are interested
- ❑ Learning events mid-2012 in Melbourne and Sydney – possibility of an international guest – suggestions?