

TITLE

Conflicting policy narratives: Moving beyond culture in identifying barriers to gender policy in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores barriers to gender policy implementation arising from the narratives framing gender as a policy issue. Through examining the influence of gender policy narratives on practitioners, it challenges those who represent policy failures as the result of unsupportive cultural contexts. The paper draws on Fraser's (1995; 2003; 2005) conceptualisation of recognition and redistribution to highlight tensions between three different gender policy narratives: (1) gender as instrumental for development; (2) gender as women's rights and empowerment, and (3) gender as relations of power requiring personal transformation. Interviews with 32 gender practitioners in 26 South African non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and observations of meetings between these organisations show how these narratives lead to unhelpful conflicts between practitioners. These conflicts inhibit both the uptake of gender policy recommendations and collaboration between practitioners in ways that undermine efforts to address gender inequalities in the South African context.

Key words: policy narratives, international development, practitioner perspectives, policy implementation

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores barriers to the implementation of gender policy in international development. It does this through an analysis of gender narratives embedded in policies of international donors and national government, and their uptake by gender practitioners working for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in South Africa. This paper argues that barriers to gender policy are not always related to cultural resistance as is commonly claimed, but that the presence of different policy narratives in particular contexts can also create unhelpful forms of conflict between practitioners that inhibit policy implementation and collaboration.

Gender equality has been well established as a policy goal of international development agencies since the early 1990s (Eyben 2010). Associated policies attempt to address long-standing feminist concerns with the ways certain societal practices systematically disadvantage some groups (e.g. women) in comparison to others (e.g. men). These include the practices and processes of international development agencies and organisations (Kabeer, 1994; Levy, 1996; Moser, 1993). Development agencies have developed policies to target this systematic disadvantage and its manifestation in political, economic and cultural spheres. For instance, development agencies target the social structures that assign valued forms of labour to men (e.g. paid work, higher-paid professional occupations) and devalued forms of labour to women (e.g. unpaid care work, lower-paid domestic labour) through policies that support women-focused microfinance and cash transfer programmes, provide leadership or entrepreneurial training for women, and establish care positions specifically for men (Rai & Waylen, 2013). Similarly, cultural inequalities that privilege traits associated with masculinity over those associated with femininity are targeted through policies that support cultural change in gender norms, such as gender-awareness training and efforts to infuse mainstream development organisations with a gender perspective (also known as gender mainstreaming) (Eyben, 2010).

Despite the good intentions of development agencies, empirical case studies point to consistent failures in the implementation of gender policy by development agencies themselves and their partner organisations in low- and middle-income countries (Hadjipateras, 1997; Moser & Moser, 2005; Moser, 2005; Razavi & Miller, 1995). Cultural norms and resistance within organisations is often cited as the main reason

for gender policy failures (Buchy & Basaznew, 2005; Hadjipateras, 1997, 1997; Tiessen, 2004, 2007). Thus, for example, Tiessen (2007) emphasises cultural resistances within NGOs to the redistribution of power between men and women. Similarly, Hadjipateras (1997) highlights the hostility that arises in response to efforts to address culturally established gender inequalities. Anthropologists argue that the gender policy produced by development agencies is largely irrelevant for the cultural specificities of gender relations in local contexts (Oinas & Arnfred, 2009; Woodford-Berger, 2004). An emphasis on culture is contested by feminist scholars, however, who suggest that international development agencies have themselves rendered gender policies redundant through their separation from feminist politics (Baden & Goetz, 1997; Palmary & Nunez, 2009; Porter & Sweetman, 2005; Ravindran & Kelkar-Khambete, 2008; Smyth, 2007).

This paper seeks to add to debates about gender policy failures by examining the narratives on gender embedded in development policy, and the uptake of these narratives by gender practitioners in South Africa. Policy narratives are stories about social problems and how they need to be solved (Roe, 1991), which belong to broader discourses or claims to 'Truth' about the social world (Foucault, 2002). Investigating the narratives inherent in policy contributes to understandings of gender policy failures by considering the role of broader discourses in framing different approaches to gender inequalities. Different discursive frames or narratives can lead to unhelpful forms of conflict that undermine the success of gender initiatives in ways that are both explicit (by creating disagreements between gender practitioners that undermine collective action against gender inequalities) and implicit (through hidden paradigmatic differences that work against one another).

Discourse analyses of policy have contributed important insights into the types of conflict that occur between gender policy discourses and local understanding of gender issues. For example, Newsom and colleagues' (2011) analysis of the U.N.'s discourses on gender in technology policy points to their incompatibility with local knowledge drawn on by women's organisations in the middle east and north Africa. In a similar vein, Seckinelgin (2009) writes of the homogenising tendency of the categories used in global HIV/AIDS activism, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) and men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM), and the limits of these discursive frames in representing local sexualities. Conflict between

discourses can undermine gender-related outcomes; for example, Kahu and Morgan (2007) show how a government policy aimed at improving women's outcomes in New Zealand has had negative influences on women's lives through perpetuating discourses that polarise the sanction of women's choice on the one hand and its restriction on the other. Equally, discursive conflicts can lead to explicit disagreements between groups working to advance gender equality through unintentionally provoking the production of counter-discourses that stand in opposition to gender policies (E. Johnson, 2005; Marshall, 2000). Overall, studies highlight how the discourses embedded in gender policy can constrain efforts to address gender inequality in particular social contexts. This paper builds on this literature by exploring the implications of conflicting policy discourses for the implementation of gender policy in South African development NGOs.

South Africa provides a particularly interesting case for exploring policy discourses on gender within the field of development. With the end of the government system of apartheid in 1994, widespread international embargoes that had been placed on South Africa were lifted and international donor agencies keen to be part of the formation of a 'new' country with a new constitution and new laws flooding the country. The transition to a democratic government in 1996 led by Nelson Mandela brought the creation of a new constitution (one of the most recent and 'progressive' constitutions in the world's history) and an influx of bilateral and multilateral funding to South Africa, marking the beginning of a period of international intervention that had not existed in the years previous. This coincided with a shift in global gender policy during the 1990s from a focus on integrating women into development towards a focus on the ways in which development agencies themselves needed to change in order to effectively address the specific needs and interests of women. South Africa provided an ideal test case for rolling out evolving international priorities, complete with a woman's movement that had been actively involved in the anti-apartheid struggle, a new constitution and a democratic government committed to principles of equality, all of which seemed to offer a tremendous opportunity to break down the gender norms of the past and establish new gender policies that promoted equality and women's rights. Led by South African feminists and backed by development agencies, strong government policies and government machinery on gender were established in South Africa throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s.

This interest in achieving gender equality for South Africa from both international development agencies and local feminist activists has translated into a large number of gender-related programmes run by local NGO-based practitioners. The majority of gender programming in South Africa tackles two broad issues: the high rates of HIV prevalence among the general population, and particularly among women (21.1% for women and 5.1% for men age 20-24) (Republic of South Africa, Ministry of Health, 2010); and the related issue of gender-based violence. The activities gender practitioners carry out to address these issues are quite diverse. Practices may include: activism at local and national levels following a strong history of feminist activism in South Africa; implementing micro-credit or small enterprise opportunities for women; instigating community-level discussions to address 'harmful' gender norms that contribute to gender-based violence and the spread of HIV infection; or implementing gender-related organisational changes. Men are also increasingly being targeted as part of gender interventions in South Africa (Peacock, Khumalo, & McNab, 2006). This diversity in approaches stems from different meanings associated with the term 'gender' and related solutions for addressing gender inequalities.

The first part of this paper shares the results from an analysis of the narratives that have informed gender policies for the South African development sector. The second part of the paper draws on findings of a multisite observational study of gender practice across 26 different South African organisations to illustrate how these policy narratives are being taken up by practitioners. The findings from both studies are discussed in light of Nancy Fraser's distinction between the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution in feminist activism (1995; 2003; 2005). For Fraser, a politics of recognition is one associated with feminist strategies that seek to promote women's specific needs and desires, and femininity as socially valuable. A politics of redistribution is associated with strategies that attempt to eliminate the division of labour between men and women. The contrast between these two approaches serves as a conceptual framework for a discussion of how different approaches to addressing gender inequality often stand in tension with one another. While recognition relies on strategies that identify women as a group which has traditionally been devalued, accentuating gender difference, redistribution attempts to erase group differentiation altogether. For Fraser (1995), the contrasts between these two conceptual categories constitutes a 'recognition-redistribution dilemma' (p.80). In discussing the findings,

this conceptual contrast is used to explore the different ways in which gender policy narratives may often be inherently opposed, and conflict with one another in unhelpful ways through different associated approaches to gender adopted by practitioners.

METHODS

Findings are drawn from the analysis of two different datasets, each part of a large multisite study of the relationship between gender policy and practice in South Africa. The first dataset includes policy documents from four different policy sources covering the study period (October 2010-October 2011): (1) Official policy documents collected from the development agencies of the top bilateral donors to gender projects in South Africa: UK, Germany, Holland, France, Canada, Sweden, Finland, Ireland and Belgium; (2) Website materials and online resources collected from key international non-governmental organisations operating in South Africa, including Oxfam and CARE International; (3) Annual reports retrieved from the Commission for Gender Equality and the Ministry for Women, Children and People with Disabilities in South Africa; and, (4) Organisational materials (including brochures, manuals and policy papers) collected from a cross-section of South African NGOs running gender programmes. Yanow's (2000) interpretive policy analysis was used to identify the narratives underlying this collection of different policy texts, which together constitute a 'community of meaning'. Yanow's approach involves detailed readings of policy texts with three key questions in mind: (1) how is the 'problem' of gender being defined in this case?; (2) who are the target groups of this policy?; and, (3) what solutions are being suggested for addressing this 'problem'?

The second dataset includes in-depth semi-structured interviews with 32 gender practitioners across 26 domestic South African NGOs, as well as observational field notes from meetings within and between these organisations. All interview participants worked directly with gender programming for their organisation. However, depending on the size of the organisation, the participants held quite different roles including executive director, manager, and field worker. In total, eight men and 24 women were interviewed from different cultural, religious and racial affiliation in three different locations (Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban)

between October 2010 and June 2011. Interviews were audiotaped (with the signed informed consent of participants) and transcribed for analysis using thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

GENDER POLICY NARRATIVES FOR SOUTH AFRICA

There are many different understandings of gender, and an emphasis on gender in policy does not always mean the same thing to all people (Baden & Goetz, 1997). In the South African policy environment this translates into contradictions among policy narratives that foreground how gender equality is instrumental for better economic development, those that emphasise the attainment of women's rights and empowerment as the end goal of gender policy, and others with an interest in disrupting power relations through a post-modern understanding of everyday practices of power. As will be outlined below, each of these three policy narratives have quite different implications for how gender inequalities should be addressed.

Instrumentalism: Gender equality for economic development

Policy documents of large bilateral donor organisations often conceptualise a gender focus as necessary to facilitate economic development: gender is constructed as instrumental to development objectives and economic gains. Gender inequality and the related absence of women in economic and political spheres are associated with a loss of economic potential. The gender equality document produced by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs illustrates this particular narrative. Published in 2010, the 12-page public promotional document outlines why gender equality is a priority for France, a diagnosis of the problem, and France's 'strategic orientations' and plan of action. In answering the question of 'why gender equality is a priority' the document reads:

All economic and development policies impact gender equality either by reducing, maintaining or worsening disparities between men and women. When a country sustains a socio-economic environment that encourages gender inequality, it condemns itself to failure, as 50% of its vital forces are brushed aside. (Ministère des affaires étrangères et européennes, 2010, p. 2)

The problem of gender inequality in this text is that it inhibits economic growth. This justifies the need to consider the role of economic and development interventions in ‘maintaining or worsening disparities between men and women’.

Since the role of the narrative in policy documents is to justify particular policy solutions (Roe, 1991), this framing of the problem leads to a particular set of possible solutions. Many bilateral donor agencies draw on a two-pronged approach to addressing the problem of gender inequality: (1) integrating measures and indicators for gender inequality into development agency procedures (e.g. gender mainstreaming), and (2) addressing gender equality through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including political inclusion, attention to the ratio of boys and girls in education, and increasing women’s access to formal sector work opportunities. These solutions follow logically from the diagnosis of the ‘problem’ of women’s lack of participation in the economy. In order to solve this ‘problem’, women are constructed in the policy narrative as needing work opportunities, education and political power.

Drawing on Fraser’s redistribution/ recognition distinction, this narrative of development instrumentalism aims to redistribute development resources in order to erase the gap in outcomes between men and women, for example through integrating women into education and formal work. This emphasis has been widely contested by feminist scholars and activists committed to a politics of recognition who see this approach as an insufficient means of addressing the underlying social norms that create and perpetuate injustices for women (Antrobus, 2005; R. Johnson, 2005; Painter, 2005). As Fraser (1995) argues, economic redistribution can only be a partial solution to addressing gender inequalities because of the ways in which the political economy is structured around sexist cultural norms that contribute to women’s social position vis-à-vis men. In general, the development instrumentalism narrative ignores this complexity and focuses instead on the potential of economic redistribution to erase gender categories of difference.

Women’s rights and empowerment

A second narrative identified in the policy analysis is that of women’s rights and empowerment. The ‘problem’ of gender constructed in this particular narrative is that women are unable to share in the potential benefits of development as a result of

discriminatory structural and legal frameworks and/or their lack of power/ access to these frameworks. For example, the Minister of the State at the Department of Foreign Affairs' statement in the *Forward* to Ireland's gender policy document speaks specifically to women's lack of political and economic decision-making:

There are many obstacles to women's equal participation with men in political and economic decision-making and lack of time is possibly the most serious. Women's involvement in unpaid work, which is invisible in economic statistics, is vital to the survival of families and communities and yet prevents women's participation in decision-making at various levels. Discriminatory laws and customs are additional hurdles to participation in economic and political developments. (Development Cooperation Ireland, 2004, p. 6)

The 'problem' is defined here as women's inability to participate in political decision-making because of the demands placed on their time through unpaid labour. On this point, an empowerment narrative for gender is similar and mutually compatible with the instrumentalism narrative. Both see women as unable to participate in the economic and political gains of South Africa's development. However, the two narratives divide on the solutions they propose for addressing this inequality. In contrast to the instrumentalism focus on redistribution, the women's empowerment narrative focuses on recognising women as the solution: through giving women as a group greater access to their rights. For example the German development agency BMZ's action plan for gender equality from 2009-2012 states:

Targeting actions to empower women include women-specific approaches that are necessary in order to compensate for actual gender-specific disadvantages and discrimination. Here, the task is to reform overall conditions by empowering women to assert and exercise their rights as stakeholders and rights holders with the same rights and duties as men. (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 2009, p. 7)

The solution to the problem of women's inability to access the benefits of development is proposed here as improving their recognition within legal frameworks and then 'empowering' them to exercise these legal rights. 'Women's rights are human rights' is the tagline used by several of the policy actors drawing on this policy frame, including Germany's BMZ, the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE), and the Ministry for Women, Children and People with Disability in South Africa. This points to the emphasis on the recognition of women's unique needs underpinning this narrative, as opposed to the redistribution of resources.

Gender as social transformation

The need to transform gender relations through attending to everyday practices of power is a policy narrative that largely circulates among policy actors embedded in the South African context, including some multinational NGOs and several local South African NGOs. Within this narrative the ‘problem’ of gender is defined as power relations, which are seen as creating and perpetuating a social hierarchy between men and women. It is exemplified in the policy of Gender at Work, a multinational NGO that works with organisations using participatory approaches to bring about gender-related change in organisations across South Africa (as well as in other contexts). The ‘problem’ defined by Gender at Work is the existence of gender ‘institutions’ – socially embedded ‘rules’ – as explained in the following excerpt from the organisation’s website:

To have a significant impact on gender inequity, we must change institutions...Organisations are the social structures created to accomplish particular ends but which embody the institutions (rules) prevalent in a society. Although much has been accomplished toward gender equality, nowhere in the world are women and men truly equal in political, social or economic rights. We believe that this is because the bulk of the efforts toward gender inequality ignore the role of the institutions, those all-important but often unrecognized “rules” that maintain women’s unequal position. Our framework helps organisations uncover those inequities and creates a pathway to developing and implementing projects that engender real change. (www.genderatwork.org/gender-work-framework, retrieved 26 April 2012)

Gender At Work focuses on organisations as the target for transforming the social rules that guide everyday actions and maintain gender inequalities in society. Other organisations using this policy narrative emphasise the role of collective organising of women as a route to this change. In addition, a growing number of South African organisations use this policy narrative to justify strategies that focus on men and the social transformation of men and masculinities in relation to gender-based violence and risky sexual behaviours that make women more vulnerable to HIV. The proposed policy solution common across each of these policies regardless of the target population is the need to address the social rules embodied in everyday actions that maintain power relations between men and women.

Working with men to address ‘harmful masculinities’ is a policy solution that resonates with many men-focused policy actors in the South African context, including Sonke Gender Justice, Engender Health and Brothers for Life. The rationale

for working with men as a gender policy is explained clearly in the manual used by Sonke Gender Justice for its One Man Can campaign:

Men are socialised into violence and commit the vast majority of violent acts. Men learn violence as a result of experiencing it in childhood or as adults. But violence is learned behaviour that can be unlearned. Men can choose not to behave violently towards women, children, and other men. Saying that men choose to use violence, rather than that men lose control and become violent, is the first step in holding men accountable for their decisions and actions. This principle of accountability is central to any program focused on stopping gender-based violence. Choosing not to use violence and to live in equal relationships with women will involve men in “breaking the gender rules” and they need support as well as the pressure of accountability to do this. Support from women and other men can help men break the gender rules and end gender-based violence. (<http://www.genderjustice.org.za/onemancan>, Retrieved 1 July 2012)

The policy narrative of social transformation is drawn on in this discussion of the role changing the behaviour of men can play in changing gender ‘rules’ and gender inequalities. This represents a significantly different policy narrative than those put forward by development instrumentalism and women’s empowerment. In framing the problem of gender inequality as rooted in the relationship between men and women, the social transformation narrative leads to solutions that challenge the existing terms of this relationship. From a social transformation perspective the focus of development instrumentalism on redistributing political-economic resources to women does little to directly challenge the interpersonal relationships with men that perpetuate women’s oppression. Similarly, the focus on recognising women’s needs and power through rights frameworks does little to address the influence of how men feel and behave in response to women’s empowerment. Social transformation policy frames counteract these perceived limitations by putting forward policy solutions that include working with men, women and organisations to challenge genders inequalities through looking for and addressing the deeper causes of gender-related norms and behaviours. At its best, social transformation offers the possibility of combining both a politics of recognition (by recognising women’s inferior social position vis-à-vis men) and a politics of redistribution (by addressing the social relations that contribute to the division of labour within the household and in the workplace). However, this political agenda is carried out through an interpersonal approach to bringing attention to the negative implications of gender inequalities in both men’s and women’s lives.

In the remainder of the paper, I explore how these three policy narratives have created conflict among gender practitioners tasked with implementing gender policy in South Africa. As outlined below, tensions arise between practitioners using different approaches to gender in practice. I argue that this may be undermining collaboration between these practitioners.

CONFLICT AND CONTESTATION BETWEEN POLICY NARRATIVES

The basis for conflict between the three different policy narratives identified in the South African policy environment lies in the different approaches to gender inequality inherent in these narratives. Development instrumentalism narratives see the redistribution of education, work opportunities and decision-making power to women in order to eliminate gender difference as the way forward. Women's empowerment narratives counteract this by calling for the recognition of women's rights as the starting point for both justifying interventions and proposing solutions, arguing that women's unique needs have been a neglected area of development policy and practice. Social transformation narratives alternatively focus on social relations between men and women, and prefer solutions that target everyday practices of power. In this section, I explore how these different approaches are contested in practitioners' efforts to address gender inequalities in South Africa. This supports my argument that gender policy for South Africa is a space defined by conflict and the strategic positioning of policy actors. Drawing from both interviews and field notes, I look at two specific empirical cases where this conflict between policy narratives has led to fractured relationships between policy actors: the experience of gender mainstreaming in South Africa, and the debate about involving men in gender programmes.

Conflict over mainstreaming gender in South Africa

The practice of bringing a gender lens into 'mainstream' development organisations, or 'gender mainstreaming' has been a major focus of gender policy since 1995. As a policy term, gender mainstreaming has been used by multinational organisations and donors to refer to a specific type of gender capacity building. Gender mainstreaming is often associated with particular practices, including: the development of organisational gender policies; gender budgeting frameworks (assessing the extent to

which budgets are allocated with gender considerations in mind); staff training; the integration of gender considerations into programme planning and reporting; and gender audits or reviews to assess the extent to which gender has been integrated into all organisational practices. Introduced by bilateral donors and large multinational NGOs to South Africa in the early 2000s, gender mainstreaming has been largely rejected as a policy measure by organisations in the country (Mannell, 2012).

In the interviews with practitioners, many of whom draw on social transformation in their organisational policies, gender mainstreaming policy was criticised for not taking into consideration other relations of inequality such as race and class. It was seen as permitting organisations to mention gender in documents without real commitment to its transformation, and for turning gender into a euphemism for women and men. In addition, practitioners felt that mainstreaming had created confusion about gender through an over-emphasis on tools and methodologies. These various claims can be boiled down to two main critiques, which are consistent with a broader critique of the development instrumentalism policy narrative associated with gender mainstreaming. The first is that gender mainstreaming is no longer about gender as summarised by an independent gender consultant:

Organisations could say ‘yeah, we’re doing gender mainstreaming’, while what that meant was they were collecting sex segregated data, or maybe they would remember to make sure that there was enough women in a training meeting. Or they might think of gender equity when doing employment related stuff. But I think it also created a space where a lot of people really didn’t know what they were doing. Even with the best intentions, they didn’t know how to do it. Through mainstreaming we basically made gender invisible by pretending you were doing it everywhere all the time with little actual commitment to gender.

(Interview in Durban 14 October 2010)

Practitioners working on gender interventions criticised mainstreaming for making gender ‘invisible’ within organisations, and allowing it to be added into documents and organisational policies without any real commitment to transforming the way in which the organisation’s practices are actually gendered. The focus on including women in training or in employment-related practice and collecting sex-disaggregated data echoes the development instrumentalism narrative and its redistributive focus on including women in existing political-economic structures.

The second critique is that putting gender at the centre of everyday practice puts an emphasis on gender that obscures other social inequalities.

I think in many ways, I don't know how this is going to go down in your research, but in many ways the issue of gender inequality is sometimes used to shadow out class inequalities.

(Interview in Durban 14 October 2010)

This critique reproduces the focus on class and race inherent in the anti-apartheid movements that helped shape women's political involvement in South Africa (Meer, 2005), and is therefore of concern to many of the practitioners that were aware of, and intimately involved in, these movements. It also draws on the social transformation narrative and its focus on social relations in arguing that gender mainstreaming has not adequately considered the intersections between gender and race, sexuality, class, nationality, ethnicity and power, and that a more plural understanding of social relationships is needed. In this light, the critique of gender mainstreaming summarised here can be seen as a critique of development instrumentalism from the perspective of social transformation. It points to how a conflict in the approaches underlying these two policy narratives has led to disagreement over policy solutions. While development instrumentalism sees gender mainstreaming as being able to bring about better, more equal development outcomes, social transformation sees gender mainstreaming as a set of empty tools and checklists that makes no contribution to real social change.

This conflict leads to certain consequences for efforts to address gender inequality. The backlash against gender mainstreaming policy and its inherent focus on redistributing resources in organisations through frameworks and tools has led many practitioners to reject the idea of gender policies for organisations altogether. Gender policies clarify how tasks and resources are to be allocated within organisations, based on a politics of redistribution. However, practitioners reject gender policy because of the way this emphasis on redistribution of organisational tasks and resources has led to an absence of critical reflection about gender inequalities. For example, a practitioner who works with organisations to build capacity on gender issues through a social transformation frame explained the rationale of her rejection of the idea that an organisation should have a gender policy in the following way:

When we go into an organisation and they say they need a gender policy, I'll ask 'why?' And I'll go to the policy last because if it's not rooted in an awareness and an attempt to look at

challenging norms and they're going to let the policy guide them in the first instance well, what is it going to mean?

(Interview in Cape Town, 16 June 2011)

This points to one of the consequences of the conflict that exists between social transformation and development instrumentalism narratives, which is rooted in the exclusive focus on a politics of redistribution within development instrumentalism. Practitioners adopting a social transformation approach perceive gender policies as removing differences between men and women through the redistribution of resources, but also ignoring the social norms that have contributed to injustices in the distribution of resources in the first place. For example, organisational policies that encourage equal numbers of women and men at all levels are seen as ignoring the deeper social interactions within the organisation and how this manifests in inequalities between men and women at various levels. However, this political position also leads practitioners adopting a social transformation narrative to be blind to the potential advantages that gender policies may have, for example by providing a platform for employees to make claims about gender inequalities in the organisation. More broadly, this has led to a widespread rejection of the redistributive organisational tools associated with gender mainstreaming (e.g. gender policies, budgeting frameworks, training): as the senior manager of a gender programme told me, gender mainstreaming has become a 'bad' word among gender practitioners in the South African context.

Conflict over involving men in gender interventions

In South Africa, there is an ongoing debate between practitioners that want to involve men and those that want to keep an exclusive focus on women, which frequently arose during interviews and in meetings between organisations. The conflict over whether or not men should be involved in gender interventions comes down to a conflict between the political approach underlying social transformation and women's empowerment policy narratives. The following quote is an example of the argument being made by the woman's empowerment side of the debate:

So, yeah, at this point I think for me it's easy to say that we're not interested in working or involving men. We have done that kind of work and we know that work is needed, but we also know that to bring men and women together, you need to first start to work with women separately and bring them to a point where they feel worthy. Otherwise you're going to have a

situation where men can say whatever they want in a workshop, but when they get home they will say: 'she needs to know where her place is.' Which is where by the way? 'It is as a quiet woman, crawling on the floor, bringing me food.'

(Interview in Durban 5 October 2010)

In this excerpt, the practitioner acknowledges that doing work with men is needed but justifies her organisation's policy of working with women in order to bring about change within people's lives and relationships. She draws clearly on a woman's empowerment frame in her argument that women need to be recognised and empowered first in order to stop men from perpetuating gender inequalities.

The other side of this divide approaches violence against women from the conviction that men have a vital role to play in challenging the gender inequalities that lead to violence, echoing the social transformation policy narrative:

...the form of masculinity that is in our society, it makes men violent, you know, it promotes male dominance over women. So we need to intervene on that as well.

(Interview in Durban 8 June 2011)

The rationale evident in the quote above is that violence is a product of certain masculinities, and that these masculinities can be addressed through working with men to reduce violent behaviours. It infers that working with women alone will not have the desired effect of changing gender relations or addressing violence against women. There is a strong conviction that bringing men into gender and development is the way to effect social change:

You can track that often these men do have somewhat questionable behaviours and that attitudes are sometimes vicious, but actually over a period of time their behaviours can change and become more equitable. There's been an evidence-base for sustained interventions working with men on issues of gender equality. Challenging social norms has led to substantial reductions in inter-partner violence, increases in condom use and increases in more equitable household behaviour among men. So men can and are changing.

(Interview in Durban 11 June 2011)

The dilemma of recognition and redistribution is at the base of this conflict. Practitioners drawing on a woman's empowerment narrative are committed to a politics of recognition, which acknowledges violence against women as stemming from the social position of women as less valuable than men. The women's empowerment narrative also adopts a politics of recognition in seeing women as the

solution – as those in need of the resources available to tackle problems of violence. The conflict this creates with a politics of redistribution, which emphasises the abolition of differences between men and women, can be seen in the following quote:

You're challenged [by donors] when you're working with groups of women. They say, oh, we also need to involve men. Okay, fine, let someone else involve men. I'm interested in taking women to a point where they feel that they are worthy and until they get to that point, I am not involving men! I'm not involving men because men are going to come in a crush. It's also quite difficult to talk about these issues; it's always taken as a fight because it's like you're attacking every man out there...and it's not like that but the majority of...the facts say that every twenty six seconds a woman is raped in South Africa and who's raping her?

(Interview in Durban 5 October 2010)

This practitioner emphasises her rationale for recognising women as the solution to tackling violence and her interest in working exclusively with women. She refers critically to those on the other side of the debate who argue for men's involvement and the need for the distribution of social development resources to both men and women.

I now turn to how this debate may be reducing the capacity in South Africa for collaboration between practitioners interested in addressing gender inequalities. Policy debates can fracture and split social movements, undermining attention to social change by dividing stakeholders and reducing the presence of a unified voice in the policy arena. Writing about the woman's social movement in South Africa, both Shireen Hassim (2006) and Denise Walsh (2011) have recognised an absence of unified calls for action among women's activists lobbying for policy change. Hassim's (2006) analysis points to weak ties between the national political project of gender equality and women's community organisations, which she says "appear again to be adrift from any politically cohesive project" (p. 256). Discussions with interview participants about the women's movement supported this view that the potential for collective or shared action among development organisations working on gender in South Africa is limited. Several gender practitioners spoke about the absence of a collective women's movement in the interviews, including the following woman with years of experience working in advocacy and the media in South Africa:

If we can all join forces and speak in one word, it's just that we all speaking the same language but in different policies. So there's no strong networks like there used to be during

the time of apartheid with people from Cape Town, from KwaZulu-Natal coming together on one day and supporting one agenda. Now everybody is trying to push their name.

(Interview in Durban 14 October 2010)

There is evidence that this absence of unified calls for gender issues stems in part from open conflicts between practitioners who emphasise the need for a politics of recognition focused on women and those who are interested in involving men. An example from a regional meeting on including women and girls in National Strategic Plans in October of 2011 showed how the debate on involving men has formed two politically divisive opinions drawing respectively on social transformation and women's empowerment narratives. In this meeting, the debate acted as a significant barrier for collective action towards address gender equality.

The meeting involved representatives from many of the major gender and development organisations across South Africa and the wider region. Its purpose was to establish a southern and eastern African framework for analysing national HIV/AIDS strategic plans using a gender lens. Soon after the meeting began, there was an objection by one member of the group over the inclusion of a 'men and boys' section in the draft version of the framework that had been put together by the organisers for discussion. The representatives from a men and boys organisation at the table fought this objection raising points about the value of including men as partners in any framework that hoped to better the lives of women and girls. Various members of the room took sides in this debate, which continued for well over an hour and was a reoccurring theme over the course of the one-day workshop. It seemed apparent that disagreement over this issue had the potential to completely derail the entire meeting. The group continued to work together after a reemphasis was put on working with women and girls by the organisers. However, the core debate over the involvement of men and boys in the framework was never resolved and continued to play a role in the editing and consultation processes that followed the meeting. This experience points to the divisiveness of the debate among practitioners over the involvement of men in gender interventions, and the ways in which this can limit the potential for collective action by those working to address gender inequality in South Africa. A politics of recognition by practitioners adopting the women's empowerment narrative in gender policy in this case has created negative reactions to efforts to incorporate men and masculinities in gender policy without considering how these approaches may be

compatible with the recognition of women and femininities. The focus of practitioners is on debating between approaches that focus on women and those that involve men, rather than searching for the space that may exist for collaborative solutions.

CONCLUSIONS

In the first part of this paper, the three gender policy narratives identified in the field of international development for South Africa provide an illustration of the gender policy environment, how gender inequality is being conceptualised as an issue in this context, and the solutions being raised for addressing it. Each of the three gender policy narratives operating in this environment – development instrumentalism, women’s rights and empowerment, and social transformation – have different discursive underpinnings, which frame the ‘problem’ of gender inequality and its ‘solutions’. This contributes to understandings of how gender policies do not reflect the ‘Truth’ of social inequalities between men and women in South Africa, but rather belong to different discourses with different political agendas.

The findings presented in this paper develop understandings of the ways in which these three narratives are contested in practice, and the consequences of the unhelpful forms of conflict that arise between them. Conflict between policy narratives can undermine the uptake of policy recommendations as shown in the example of gender mainstreaming. When practitioners disagree with policy narratives different from their own they may inadvertently reject valuable recommendations made by these alternative approaches. In addition, conflict can also be a major roadblock in collaboration between practitioners. This is evident in the debate about involving men in efforts to address gender inequalities, and the commitment by some practitioners to the political strategies aligned with the policy narrative of women’s rights and empowerment.

Nancy Fraser’s conceptualisation of the recognition/ redistribution dilemma in feminist politics has helped to elaborate the source of conflict between the three gender policy discourses. The women’s rights and empowerment discourse arises from the particular political project of recognition, which focuses on women as a valuable social category with unique needs. This stands in conflict with a politics of redistribution, which dominates the development instrumentalism narrative, and its

interest in erasing socioeconomic differences between men and women. The interest of the social transformation narrative in everyday practices of power lends this narrative to either a politics of redistribution or recognition. However, the interest of practitioners that adopt this policy narrative in interpersonal behaviours puts them in conflict with practitioners committed to a politics of recognition that relies on putting women, rather than men, at the centre of interventions. Equally, attention to interpersonal behaviours puts practitioners into conflict with those taking more economic approaches to gender such as those implied by the development instrumentalism narrative.

Unpacking these unhelpful forms of conflict between policy narratives makes an important contribution to current understandings of why gender policies may fail to be implemented. It suggests that barriers to implementation may not always be about resistance within organisations or opposition arising from cultural norms that conflict with the principle of gender equality. Equally, it might not always be a fault of one specific policy and its inappropriateness for the local cultural context. Rather, well-suited gender policies sometimes fail to be fully implemented by practitioners entirely committed to gender equality as an objective. A conflict between the narrative about gender used in policy and the political project of the individual practitioner or organisation can also lead to the rejection of policy recommendations and constrain efforts to address gender inequalities. This puts into question easily attained cultural explanations for gender policy failures by pointing to the inherently political nature of policy and its uptake into practice.

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