THE BIGGER PICTURE:
GENDER AND POLITICS IN PRACTICE

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ABOUT THE GENDER AND POLITICS IN PRACTICE RESEARCH PROJECT

How can a gendered understanding of power and politics make development work more effective? Many development programs tend to look at gender issues and politics separately. Through a series of case studies, this research asks what we can learn from more integrated approaches. It includes:

- a literature review on thinking and working politically and gender equality

- a context paper, and three in-depth studies that examine how gender and politics came together in social change processes

  - women political leaders in the Pacific

  - labour reform in Vietnam's garment industry

  - transgender empowerment and social inclusion in Indonesia

- 14 short case studies of development programs that aim to be both politically informed and gender aware, and a synthesis of their key insights

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SUMMARY

This paper explores how the findings of the Gender and Politics in Practice (GAPP) research on development programming relate to broader processes of social, political and economic change that shape development outcomes and gender equality. Institutions remain important, but more attention needs to be given to issues of politics, power and agency. This in turn means looking more closely at the role of leaders, organisations and coalitions in shaping effective institutions, mobilising various interests, and in working strategically within existing social norms to achieve change. This research indicates that understanding the relationships between context, locally driven change and gendered power relations needs to be central to all development work.

CONTEXT IS KEY – AND GENDERED

Social change occurs within a complex ecology of macroeconomic and geopolitical forces on the one hand, and local constraints, political dynamics and social norms on the other. Gender is often forgotten, misunderstood or analysed separately when considering these broader political economy factors. The GAPP research illustrates the importance of these factors in both advancing and limiting reform processes. It highlights that a gender lens helps us understand the political nature of 'context' – which is too often misread as a static and intractable set of economic or political facts, or unchanging social norms. A gender lens helps reveal how the formal and informal power relations between men and women are evolving.

LOCAL ACTORS, ORGANISATIONS AND MOVEMENTS ARE CENTRAL

Contextual factors were important variables in the processes of social change and development (including changes in gender relations) in all the cases this research project explored. However, in line with other DLP research, the agency of local people – their capacity to choose a course of action and carry it out – was also crucial. Five common reasons emerge from the GAPP research about why this is particularly important for politically informed, gender aware approaches:

- Domestic actors have the local (and sometimes international) connections and relationships to work politically. Being a capable 'border crosser' can be important for some women because this allows them to transcend local gender stereotypes.

- Domestic actors have the legitimacy necessary to promote change – i.e. as genuine representatives of certain groups; having the skills, knowledge or experience to play a particular role; or as institutions in sufficient alignment with local norms and values.

- They are aware of and can exploit 'cracks' in social norms in ways that outsiders cannot. This awareness is particularly important when gender equality is the primary objective.

- They frame gender issues in politically savvy ways based on their knowledge, relationships and risk appetite.

- Promoting transformational change in gender relations takes time, commitment and courage. It nearly always requires being part of the society in which change is being sought – but at the same time, being bold enough to contest the status quo.

AID AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS CAN ONLY DO SO MUCH…BUT THEY CAN DO IT BETTER

Aid programs operate within broader drivers of change, and alongside local actors and organisations. Aid programs are never the primary agents of change. However, it is also clear from this research that a) aid and development programs can, and do, contribute to gender aware political reform, and b) that a politically informed, gender aware way of working is important for all programs. Five 'success factors' emerge from this research:

- Support inclusive local leadership…

  - … to bring political and gender analysis together – and use it;

  - … to drive politically informed, gender aware action for change;

  - … to plan for uncertainty and learn through adaptation;

- Shape management systems to support these ways of working.

THERE ARE OTHER STRATEGIC AVENUES FOR PROMOTING GENDER-EQUAL DEVELOPMENT

Bilateral donor organisations can use many avenues to promote and support gender equality. In addition to traditional aid programs, there may be opportunities in trade negotiations and other international fora. It is important for bilateral donors to look at the broad suite of available options, and to find areas where one part of the portfolio can reinforce the goals of other parts. These may include:

- Policy mechanisms such as trade agreements that include commitments to female workers' rights or other elements of what some countries have called feminist foreign policy

- Education, such as tertiary education for women and girls, or creating opportunities for dialogue among citizens pursuing common agendas, such as peace negotiations

- Furthering international norms in ways that bring reformers together, and helping influential women to extend their networks and access to resources.

1 INTRODUCTION

Gender relations are power relations that affect both formal and informal rules and systems. They affect interests and ideas, and enable and create inequitable outcomes – such as by restricting access to resources, rights, and voice. Gender relations are central to the public *and* private spheres. They shape, and are shaped by, broader social norms, stereotypes and ideologies.

Gender-blind political analysis and development practice have led to missed opportunities to promote meaningful change - both in relation to gender equality and more widely. For example, despite the fact that women's influence in peace-making is positively correlated with success, most negotiation and mediation processes still do not see the inclusion of women and gender issues as essential components (Paffenholz et al., 2016). The Gender and Politics in Practice (GAPP) research project explores the degree to which gender aware political approaches have been adopted and what the consequences have been. It aims to identify insights to help practitioners *in all sectors* develop more effective development initiatives.

The centrality of gender equality in the quest for better development outcomes, and the recognition of the need for politically informed ways of working, means these approaches need to be integrated into <u>all</u> development work (Waylen 2014). So it is not just a question of how these elements might be combined, but also how they can be placed at the heart of development agencies' 'operating systems'. Derbyshire et al. discuss these issues in some depth in their synthesis of lessons from development programs: *From Silos to Synergy* (2018).[1]

This paper explores how the findings of the Gender and Politics in Practice (GAPP) research on development programming relate to broader processes of social, political and economic change. This is important if we are to understand development efforts as part of the continuous processes of contestation and bargaining that drive change (DLP synthesis report 2018).

The first section of this paper draws on a GSDRC literature review of thinking and working politically and gender equality, including insights from previous DLP research, to outline the story so far. The second section explores the importance of context using material from three in-depth GAPP case studies on (a) women political leaders in the Pacific (Spark et al. 2018), (b) the gendered implications of labour reform in Vietnam's garment industry (Evans 2018), and (c) transgender empowerment and social inclusion in Indonesia (Koenig et al. 2018). The third and fourth sections analyse the role of local leadership and how external agencies can support it. These sections draw from the three in-depth studies, but in particular from the synthesis of lessons from development programs[2] that aim in various ways to integrate politically informed and gender aware ways of working (Derbyshire et al., *From Silos to Synergy,* 2018). The final section draws on the GAPP research and other literature to look at what might be done 'beyond aid' to promote gender equality.

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1 See dlprog.org/gapp
2 A list of all case studies is found in Annex 1 of this paper

2 GENDER AND POLITICALLY INFORMED PROGRAMMING: THE STORY SO FAR[3]

The broad family of politically informed development approaches agree that domestic factors of power and politics are usually central to the outcomes of development programs. In response, increasing numbers of development practitioners are emphasising 'working with the grain of local politics', cultivating local leadership and coalitions, political settlements analysis, and open-ended 'adaptive' program design and management.[3]

However, politically informed approaches have been criticised for their lack of gender analysis (Nazneen and Mahmud 2012; Browne 2014; Koester 2015), particularly as gender is so fundamental to any society's power relations. Waylen (2014) has made a convincing case that political economy analysis must include a gender lens if it is to be credible. A further concern expressed in the literature is that 'working with the grain' of politics could imply a tacit acceptance of the status quo and reinforce structural inequalities, including harmful gender practices.

In practice, there are many examples of politically informed programs that do place gender at the centre of their work. These include the Pacific Leadership Program and other coalition-building programs (Denney and McLaren 2016; Fletcher et al. 2016; Rousseau and Kenneth-Watson 2018; Spark and Lee 2018). These coalitions vary in scope and size. Some are quite large, while others involve relatively few members and work within elite circles to help change gender norms (Ahikire and Mwiine 2015; Castillejo 2016; Domingo et al. 2016).

If politically informed approaches have neglected gender, much gender-in-development practice has had little engagement with political economy analyses, or with the political settlements and adaptive programming literatures. This is despite the fact that gender analysis can help to identify both agents of, and routes to, positive change that can be overlooked in traditional political economy analysis processes. Many gender equality advocates have proved themselves deft at negotiating political dynamics, even if they have not been directly influenced by discussion of politically informed ways of working, as expressed in literature on thinking and working politically. One problem, therefore, is how to collect and apply their insights to development programs more broadly. Not least because gender analysis emphasises understanding and shifting power relations in ways that promote the 'sticky change' that lasts beyond an intervention's life cycle. It is therefore argued that both 'sides' may benefit from bringing gender aware and politically informed approaches closer together (ESID 2014; O'Neill 2016), particularly if the politics of local gender dynamics are to be understood within a broader context of international power relations (Phillips and Hunt 2017).

To date, the clearest *documented* examples of the integration of gender awareness with politically informed approaches have come from post-conflict situations where the political settlement has been disrupted and is under renegotiation. These environments have provided opportunities for women to be included in politics and rebuilding processes. However, these gains for women can be quickly lost. After the crisis period has passed, men typically reassert control and women's leadership is relegated to minor roles (Domingo et al. 2015; Phillips 2013).

The literature review seems to suggest that significant sectoral gaps in the literature on the intersections of politically informed and gender equality programming include: LGBTI rights, climate change adaptation and natural resources management. There are some limited connections between politically informed approaches, gender and labour rights, as well as with elections, political leadership and peacebuilding work. GAPP case studies explore all of these areas. These gaps in *documented* practice do not of course mean that development programs are not addressing these issues.

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3 This section summarises the literature review undertaken by GSDRC as part of this research program.

One strand of the broad family of politically informed approaches is political settlements analysis (PSA), led by the Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre (ESID). PSA has made some significant advances in bringing questions of gender to the fore. A recent discussion paper (ESID 2014) lays out a three-step process for PSA practitioners to use in thinking systematically about gender, emphasising the roles of women in the history of state formation and how women may be included and excluded by patronage politics. Such tools can help program managers to think through the links between geopolitical and macroeconomic factors or national politics and their impacts on households and individuals.

In summary, the literature review of politically informed approaches and gender suggests poor integration, and unevenness across sectors. However, it is also clear that there are undocumented examples of attempts to integrate power and politics and gender across all sectors. The GAPP case study work has sought to focus on these attempts to improve integration, as well as to explore some of the sectoral gaps – see Derbyshire et al.'s paper, From *Silos to Synergy* (2018).

3 CONTEXTUAL DRIVERS OF CHANGE ARE KEY – AND GENDERED

Social change occurs within a complex ecology of macroeconomic and geopolitical forces on the one hand and local constraints and dynamics on the other. The latter may include broad social norms as well as more institutionalised aspects of the country context – such as political settlements, state-society relations, particular government or civil society institutional histories, patronage networks and political rivalries. The literature has argued persuasively that donor initiatives are unlikely to succeed unless they understand these contextual factors and can find ways of working that are both technically and politically feasible.

However, sometimes development agencies' own organisational structures and incentives have hindered effective analysis of program context. These internal factors may encourage ways of working from the agency or the program 'out', rather than beginning (and continuing) with the context and working 'in'. This can lead to expectations of direct causal influence or of predictable results that are unrealistic in a dynamic context. GAPP research, along with much other scholarship (e. g. Phillips 2013), points to a more modest role for development agencies that is grounded in the recognition of the broader external structures and dynamics that drive or constrain change.

Gender is often forgotten or poorly integrated when considering these broader political economy factors. Macroeconomic shifts are still routinely analysed through gender-blind lenses, as if economics were a male domain. The same is often true of geopolitical analysis. There is little reflection on how women are structurally excluded from 'big picture' economic and political debates, unless they are considered as an afterthought as the victims of poor working conditions or patriarchal political norms that consign them to a constrained domestic sphere (Waylen 2014).

The case studies discussed below aim to illustrate how gender can be placed at the centre of analysis of the context and wider social drivers. This method provides a sound foundation for understanding processes of change, and helps to identify a fuller range of opportunities and constraints for programming. A gender lens is a particularly effective means of bringing to light the continually contested and political nature of 'context', which is often misread as a static and intractable set of given economic facts or unchanging social norms. Indeed, often gender equality goals can be achieved by finding opportunities within existing social norms to allow women to exercise more agency (Tadros 2011).

THREE IN-DEPTH STUDIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

The following three case studies provide examples of the interplay of gender and the environment of culture, norms and institutional rules that make up the social and political context. They are not intended as comprehensive in scope, but each draws out distinct aspects of gender, structure, agency, 'working with the grain' and context, considered not only at the local scale but in terms of larger geopolitical and economic forces.

Waria and social inclusion in Indonesia

The Asia Foundation's case study of Program Peduli's support for greater social inclusion for the *waria* (transgender women) of Banjarmarsin (South Kalimantan, Indonesia) illustrates how 'working with the grain' through local leadership can have emancipatory effects. *Waria* have a particular cultural recognition as one of the five genders of traditional Bugis society. However, the legitimacy of their status is currently under threat from more fundamentalist interpretations of religion, backlash against gender rights activism (seen by some as a foreign intrusion destructive of Indonesian culture) and disruption of historically protective kinship structures.

Challenges for *waria* include discrimination and bullying, and difficulties accessing health services, education and legal protection. Because their access to more 'respectable' work is limited, many *waria* are involved in sex work. They are increasingly being criminalised for this as well as for non-commercial sexual activities.

Kalimantan is generally a more tolerant part of Indonesia, with higher levels of acceptance of *waria*, particularly as beauty advisors for weddings and other roles that rely on gender stereotypes. When they can use these stereotypes in positive

ways, *waria* in Banjarmarsin are able to have some success in business, contribute to the household economy, and remain integrated within their families. This case study shows how a locally-led program was able to revitalize inclusive traditions and increase acceptance of *waria* in Kalimantan, despite strong national counter-trends.

Being the First: The agency of powerful women within the constraints of Pacific political systems

This study sought to open a new conversation about women in politics in the Pacific by interviewing women politicians (and many of their supporters) who have reached high office. The Pacific Islands region has some of the lowest numbers of female MPs in the world (McLeod 2015; Zetlin 2014). Explanations for this focus on social norms – often defined by reference to traditional culture but usually involving a Christian religious justification – that are seen as relegating women to a subordinate, domesticated position within most Pacific communities.

The reflections of the three women – President Hilda Heine from the Marshall Islands, Dame Carol Kidu from Papua New Guinea and Fiame Mata'afa from Samoa – provide examples of elite women using their social and cultural capital (family ties, education, community connections, and international networks) to develop successful political careers. Elite men also use these connections and resources as they enter politics and advance themselves through the system (Corbett and Liki 2016). However, women must either have particularly strong social and cultural capital or be adept at manoeuvring within the male-dominated political arena.

Macroeconomic drivers of change and the Vietnamese garment industry

While local social, cultural and political dynamics are crucial to consider in politically informed and gender aware approaches, macroeconomic and geopolitical forces are also important drivers of change that can rapidly destabilise power structures. Such disruptions may also create openings for constructive dialogue and positive change. The case study of the ILO's Better Work Vietnam program concludes that these 'macro' factors were the major drivers of reforms to labour practices within the Vietnamese clothing industry.

In responding to this external environment, the Vietnamese one-party Communist state found that its historically authoritarian modes of dealing with crises were failing. Neither government nor the sole Vietnamese trade union were able to contain 'wildcat' strikes organised by workers.

The paper describes a complex combination of external impacts that disrupted the industry and brought opportunities for some reforms. International buyers were demanding improvements to workers' conditions out of concern for the reputations of global brands. New labour norms were being discussed in negotiations over the Trans-Pacific Partnership in a context where the geopolitics of Vietnam's position in relation to both China and the United States gave the TPP added diplomatic significance. In this case, these external factors may have been stronger drivers of change than the concern over wildcat strikes. But both international and local pressures undermined the influence of historical structures, and produced a context in which reform was possible.

Most garment workers are women. Most officials, including trade union leaders, are men. This is therefore a context where work roles are based on gender binaries and stereotypes, particularly that of women as submissive and hard-working (Evans 2016). The ILO program did not directly confront these norms within the industry. Nevertheless, it has contributed to some improvements for women workers, including more participation in discussions with management. These modest gains illustrate how broader change processes can prepare the ground for subsequent reforms.

4 LOCAL ACTORS, ORGANISATIONS AND MOVEMENTS ARE CENTRAL

While it is clear that contextual factors played a key role in the processes of social change and changes in gender relations in all the GAPP cases, the agency of local people was also of critical importance. In line with the Developmental Leadership Program's broader research findings, and some of the research summarised in the literature review, GAPP findings provide further evidence of how individuals, networks and organisations have successfully sought reform, and how central both power and politics and gender relations have been in this work.

GAPP research highlights five characteristics of successful local actors, including women in positions of leadership, which help them to work in ways that are politically informed and gender aware. These findings do not diminish the importance of recognising that geopolitical or macroeconomic factors play a role in shaping local power and gender dynamics. However, the findings do indicate how changes at a geopolitical or macroeconomic scale can create opportunities for new leaders to emerge or for coalitions of local actors to redistribute power and resources (Phillips 2013). This is not to suggest that all local actors or organisations are willing or able to do this, or can achieve these changes unassisted.

CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS: AT HOME AND AWAY

In several cases the importance of connections between individuals and their various local constituencies was emphasised, whether that be between women political leaders and the communities they come from in the Pacific (*Being the First*); between leaders of LGTBI groups and their members (*waria of Banjarmasin*); or between gender activists and powerful male champions. As other DLP research suggests, the role of personal connections and friendship seems to be significant, particularly for women's coalitions and networks. In contrast, men tend to have more systematic access to professional networks as well (Spark and Lee 2018).

Interestingly the *Being the First* study also noted the importance of international connections. For example, these connections bolstered the authority of women political leaders by allowing them to project their ability to successfully work locally and internationally at the same time. The *Being the First* case also suggests that being a capable 'border crosser' is particularly important for some women because 'it enables them to transcend some of the limitations that can be associated with femininity and gender roles as they are constructed locally' (Spark et al. 2018).

LEGITIMACY

In order to promote change, local actors or organisations need to be seen to be legitimate. They need to be perceived as: genuine representatives of certain groups; having the skills, knowledge or experience to play a particular role; or as institutions that behave in sufficient alignment with local norms and values. As other DLP research has suggested, legitimacy can take 'a long time to make, but a short time to break'. It can rarely be conferred or created by external actors. Links with external agencies seen to represent 'foreign' or alien interests can delegitimise local actors and make them politically vulnerable.

In Tonga, for example, a perceived threat to local norms helped derail the country's ratification of the UN Convention on the Eradication of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. Opponents of the bill mobilised significant numbers of people against it relatively easily because 'gender equality is perceived as threatening Tongan culture and 'tradition', which most Tongans are deeply committed to retaining' (Lee, 2017: 82). Such undermining of local activists' legitimacy can be intensified if they are seen as supported by western feminist organisations.

AWARENESS OF 'CRACKS' IN LOCAL NORMS

Effective gender analysis expands our understanding of politics to include the deeper social norms and values that underpin more visible power relations, and which determine how societies define what is considered 'normal'. As Bicchieri notes, this includes an individual or group's beliefs about what others in their reference group do, which she calls 'empirical expectations'. It also includes beliefs about what others *think or expect* one should do – 'normative expectations' (Bicchieri

2017: 11-12). As the study of labour reform in Vietnam notes, this means understanding how these 'internalised' beliefs interact with how others are expected to react (Evans 2018: 8). Raising awareness, for example about human rights, is unlikely to make much difference if people have low expectations about how companies or the government are likely to respond to claims of rights violations. When these expectations are aligned, and strong incentives or social sanctions are in place, these norms tend to endure.

Identifying, creating or exploiting 'cracks' in these norms (for example when there starts to be a difference between empirical and normative expectations, or when sanctions stop being applied to the same degree) requires deep contextual knowledge. This requires donors to allow local actors to set and drive the agenda. It requires trust, flexibility and experimentation that can at times be uncomfortable for agencies used to a 'command and control' approach.

Some fear that women's interests may not be adequately represented if donors adopt a 'working with the grain' approach in highly patriarchal societies. However, even in very conservative societies, there are 'multiple grains' (Denney and McLaren 2016). A growing body of evidence confirms that politically astute activists can be highly successful at using social norms to boost gender equality (e.g. Phillips 2013; Tadros 2011).

Local agents who are embedded in relationships in which these norms play out on a daily basis are much better placed to do this. For example, *waria* in Banjarmasin, Indonesia used local norms and stereotypes about their role in the beauty industry to gain social acceptance and greater financial security. The *Being the First* research notes that President Heine of the Marshall Islands, when dealing with senior men and traditional leaders, observes respectful cultural protocols. However, she also uses her knowledge of cultural norms to create political space in modern domains (Spark et al. 2018: 9).

POLITICALLY INFORMED FRAMING

Local individuals, organisations and coalitions who are successfully influencing social norms are almost by definition working in ways that are politically informed and gender aware. Given the way politics, legitimacy and gender relations interact, and the importance of underlying social norms, how social change that threatens powerful interests is framed is very important. This can often mean developing reform narratives that build bridges with other political interest groups, marginalise opposition, or avoid contentious issues.

In many of the cases studied this meant avoiding the language of gender or women's rights, or deliberately not putting gender equality front and centre in advocacy. It also meant avoiding the language of politics, while working with men in politically informed ways. As the female leaders in the *Being the First* study note, there can be advantages in allowing male colleagues to take the lead on gender issues. This indicates broader political backing so that gender concerns are not seen as something just championed by women (*SAVI case study)*.

LONGEVITY AND COMMITMENT

It can be argued that the promotion of social change and sustainable development, like the work of public administration, is a craft (Rhodes, 2015). It takes motivation, time and commitment. The skills required are honed through practice and experience, not one-off training. Exploiting cracks in social norms, building alliances and gaining legitimacy takes years, if not decades. It demands persistence, political manoeuvring and willingness to risk personal and professional backlash. Further, it nearly always requires being part of the society in which change is being sought. Outsiders can eventually become part of a political community – as has been the case with Dame Carol Kidu in PNG (one of the political leaders whose career is explored in the *Being the First* study). However, this is rare, takes a long time and often depends on local relationships (i.e. in Dame Carol's case, her marriage to Buri Kidu, PNG's first indigenous Chief Justice).

Nearly all of the GAPP research cases point to the vital role of motivated, committed and courageous local individuals, organisations or coalitions who have battled for many years to improve circumstances, and promote progressive change. The profiles of the three women in the *Being the First* study perhaps most clearly demonstrate the long-term nature of processes that lead to substantive and sustainable change, as well as the hard work and relationships required.

5 AID AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS: WHAT THEY CAN AND CAN'T DO

The case studies undertaken for this research project illustrate that the influence and impact of aid programs require working strategically in ways that are linked to broader, more structural drivers of change, and in partnership with local actors and organisations. This is particularly clear in the *Being the First* study and the *Vietnam labour reform case*. However, it is also clear from nearly all the cases, that a) aid and development programs can contribute to gender aware political reform, and b) that working in politically informed, gender aware ways is important for all programs.

Indeed, it can be argued that practice is outstripping research and analysis in bringing together politically informed and gender aware approaches. The findings also suggest that there is a great deal to be gained from bringing these two ways of working together: mutual learning; better and deeper analysis; greatly strengthened practice; and improved results. So what can be learnt from programs that are using politically informed *and* gender aware approaches?

SUPPORTING LOCAL ACTORS AND INCLUSIVE LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Harnessing and sustaining change requires local people and collective action to drive reform. This usually requires a mix of individuals and organisations with a range of skills, resources, experiences and connections. How all groups function in all sectors is both constrained and enabled by gender and wider social norms. At the same time, they either reproduce these constraints or contribute to changing them. As the *waria* case demonstrates, these wider norms can be used or framed in ways that benefit particular groups. However, 'going with the grain' can reinforce existing power relations (Nazneen and Masud 2017:26-27). Denney and McLaren (2016: 23) note:

> *… there are, in all societies, multiple 'grains' and working with the grain is partly about being politically savvy in finding those that are developmentally inclined. Going with the grain should not imply an unquestioning acceptance of the status quo. Instead, it should mean searching for developmental change processes that have local resonance (and may be ongoing or in existence already) …*

Local individuals, organisations and coalitions who are successfully influencing or challenging social norms need to be identified, approached and engaged from the outset. As the *Being the First* study shows, learning from such 'positive outliers' can provide unique insights, which for example move 'beyond an analysis of the political and cultural obstacles to women's leadership to understanding and learning from the experience of successful senior female politicians' (Spark et al. 2018: 16).

Programs in our sample are addressing these challenges by:

- reaching out beyond the 'usual suspects' to engage partners with local legitimacy and a strong commitment to reform, including those with a direct personal stake in change and those involved in existing change processes;

- brokering new working relationships bringing diverse partners together in strategic coalitions;

- working behind the scenes;

- nurturing locally led processes of change not dependent on or driven by external support;

- mainstreaming gender by bringing women's groups together with other local actors, raising awareness though joint work.

BRINGING POLITICAL AND GENDER ANALYSIS TOGETHER

Exploring contextual drivers of change as described above is also critical. A gendered analysis of the context is important for understanding how men and women are affected – in different ways – by struggles over resources and power.

Political Economy Analysis examines power, politics and change, typically focusing on formal institutions. Gender analysis examines gender difference, inequality and power relations, across formal and informal institutions, including the often invisible (especially to those in power) cultural and social norms that underpin visible manifestations of power. Together they expand our understanding of power and politics by examining less public, less visible realms.

Programs in our sample are addressing these challenges by:

- bringing political scientists and gender specialists together to develop more holistic analysis of gender, power and political dynamics;

- using participatory and accessible approaches to actively involve staff and local partners in analysing the gender, power and political dynamics of their context;

- supporting staff and local partners to use this information to inform their planning and learning.

SUPPORTING POLITICALLY INFORMED, GENDER AWARE ACTION

Women's organisations and programs have decades-long experience of campaigning for women's and girls' rights, and their successes demonstrate effective ways of negotiating with power to achieve change. This is a *dynamic process* – informed by an astute understanding of context, a vision of change, a nuanced grasp of entry points and opportunities, and a continuous finely tuned balancing act between pragmatism and ambition. It often involves 'playing the game to change the rules'. It is therefore important for local actors to be able to articulate gender equality and social change in terms that they think address contextual opportunities and sensitivities.

The cases explored suggest that this often may require working with men and male leaders, including within programs. For example, the SAVI program in Nigeria sees the importance of not only gender balanced teams, but also in some conservative states of working with high-status male leaders motivated to champion gender equality and build support among political and religious leaders, who are almost all male.

Programs in our sample are valuing the experience of local actors and supporting them, where needed, to articulate objectives and develop strategies – including in relation to gender equality and rights – in politically informed ways. This involves:

- carefully framing issues and demands to promote buy-in and build support;

- identifying soft and acceptable entry points, focusing on issues and approaches that have potential local traction, taking advantage of opportunities and getting the timing right;

- looking for ways of securing the support, or at least minimising the opposition, of powerful players and potential opponents.

PLANNING FOR UNCERTAINTY AND LEARNING THROUGH ADAPTATION

Working with gender, power and politics means working with uncertainty. Changes in power relations and gender norms take place over the long term in unpredictable ways. Simply adding up changes at an individual level fails to explore how these combine to produce systemic social change.

Monitoring changes in gender and social relations requires understanding how power and politics, as well as attitudes and behaviours, are shifting. This requires more effective ways of: a) assessing changes in the nature of relationships and social norms (captured for example through imaginative social network analysis,[4] or changes in norm perceptions) (CARE 2017); b) assessing whether effective learning and feedback loops are in place; c) and encouraging multi-level analysis, learning and sense-making. It takes some effort to ensure that these feedback loops and learning and M&E processes appropriately account for gender – beyond the simple disaggregation of impact data.

Programs in our sample are giving significant scope to local partners to adjust their activities in response to learning and changing conditions. This involves:

- Putting in place structures for front-line staff and partners to reflect on and learn from experience. This includes nurturing relationships of trust and honesty that enable them to recognise, admit to and learn from strategies that are not working, as well as those that are.

- Developing monitoring systems that reflect on partners' ways of working – including their attention to gender, power and politics – and the extent to which these are contributing to the achievement of headline results.

- Monitoring changes in power, politics and gender relations in wider society. Achieving change at this level is a long-term process, and has implications for program time frames, levels of ambition and commitment from donors.

SHAPING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT POLITICALLY INFORMED, GENDER AWARE WAYS OF WORKING

The extent to which front-line staff and partners are able to work in a politically informed, gender aware way depends on the extent to which program management systems (and the broader political economy and culture of donor organisations) enable this – or disable it. Conventional approaches to staff recruitment, training, financial management, planning, monitoring and reporting can all reinforce a top-down, technical, results-driven approach.

Empowering front-line staff and partners

If social change needs to be locally driven AND politics and gender relations are central to this, then these processes need to be owned by local actors and local program staff. This means that a politically informed, gender aware approach needs to be central to the roles of all front-line staff and partners – not just of specialists.

If outside actors, rather than local actors, do the kind of gender and contextual analysis described above, this ownership – and arguably the analysis – will be undermined, though it may serve the purpose of providing a quality report for donors. This highlights the importance, as the *waria of Banjamarsin* case notes, of simplifying and contextualising analytical and programming tools, and of working collaboratively with local staff and partners on developing these. Consultants too often end up simply writing sophisticated political economy analyses, which are often-inaccessible 'Theories of Change', in order to produce what is perceived to be a quality proposal or report.

Further, it is not a question of simply providing training in how to work in a politically informed way, or how to do gender analysis or gender mainstreaming. If the promotion of social change requires practice, learning by doing, and experience, then this means recruiting the right people and supporting them in ways that are consistent with this understanding.

This can involve coaching and mentoring rather than one-off training, for example, but it also requires much more: leadership, systems, processes, human resource strategies and funding mechanisms that encourage rather than undermine this way of working. In other words, it means that the organisational DNA or operating system has to be aligned with these purposes.

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4 See for example https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/1263/socialnetworkanalysise-handbook.pdf and https://gph.ucsd.edu/cgeh/Documents/Social%20Networks%20Brief.pdf

Flexible management systems and processes

Recruitment, reward systems and funding practices can easily distort incentives and undermine effectiveness. Program managers will often need to create new operating norms and propose alternative ways of doing things.

Systems need to support flexibility and donors need to trust partners to identify opportunities themselves. This requires sophisticated program management accountability processes that face in two directions: to the donor or Head Office and to local stakeholders.

This also requires program management to apply their skills in political economy and power analysis to their organisational relationships, or with their donor. They need to understand when to comply with donor requirements, and when to 'push back' to protect local ownership, and allow for flexibility, uncertainty and change.

A shared vision of change

The importance of effective communication and trust building, and potentially 'partnership-brokering', is essential, particularly when teams are new and unknown to each other, and the donor is under pressure to demonstrate tangible results. The factor most consistently identified as crucial to the success of programs in our sample was an alignment of approach between donors and program management. Without this shared vision, top-down pressures prevail by default.

> *"If the [donor] shares the program vision and has really bought into what you are trying to achieve, plus they have faith in the team, then Log Frame flexibility is a management tool. But if the [donor] is doubtful of the team, the Log Frame becomes a stick to beat them with." (Key informant interview, Derbyshire et al. From Silos to Synergy)*

6 OTHER AVENUES FOR PROMOTING GENDER-EQUAL DEVELOPMENT

As other research suggests, it can be ineffective or counterproductive for outside agencies to try and engineer reforms only by trying to identify and support 'champions' (Marquette and Scott, 2005: 9). However, donors can help foster an environment that encourages collective action to emerge. This requires a long-term, strategic and patient approach.

As the *Being the First* study suggests, this might for example require greater support to tertiary education, or as the *waria of Banjarmasin* study notes it might mean more emphasis on addressing norms and values that lead to greater social acceptance of particular groups. And it might mean thinking more strategically about how non-aid policies contribute to these agendas.

What is important about such approaches is that they recognise that *how* local leadership emerges is important for its legitimacy, sustainability and therefore likely success. This process by which durable, legitimate institutions emerge is at the heart of the development challenge and is not something for which short cuts exist (DLP synthesis 2018).

The more direct program roles for donors discussed in the previous section do not exhaust the options for those seeking to promote gender equality, including through public diplomacy and other dimensions of foreign policy. As the case studies indicate, many other ways of working can contribute to indirect outcomes where aid programs are not necessarily the primary agents driving change. These cases provide examples that have been grouped into three broad categories: non-aid policy mechanisms; education and inclusive dialogue; and international norms.

NON-AID POLICY MECHANISMS

These include sectors that lie outside the traditional remit of development agencies (though they may be the domain of Foreign Affairs Ministries), such as international agreements on climate change, migration, or trade policy. As the Vietnamese clothing industry case study shows, trade agreements that include commitments to workers' rights and conditions can influence progressive development, particularly when coupled with support from international supply chains concerned about brand value and corporate social responsibility. Broader diplomacy can also have these effects. Sweden and Canada are experimenting with feminist foreign policy, with the Swedish Government famously cancelling arms sales to Saudi Arabia on gender grounds.

Further, much more can be done to promote greater and more substantive representation of women and their organisations in the governance and decision-making fora of global institutions. These include the IMF, the World Bank, the United Nations and the WTO, for example, as well private sector organisations.

EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE

Education and inclusive dialogue play the long game to influence change. They rely on investments that build women's cultural capital, such as formal education and the opportunities it provides for developing diverse networks, especially if undertaken overseas. As an example, the goal of increasing women's representation in parliament might be better served by investing in long-term drivers of social change that will improve gender equality, particularly tertiary education of women and girls, than through candidate training and similar interventions that focus on elections.

Donors can also enhance women's voices by introducing new methods of dialogue that involve consultation and active engagement of all relevant stakeholders. Ideally this will allow women to participate in discussions of issues that directly affect them. Even if this is not achieved in any given case, however, dialogue still introduces an ethic of inclusion that can shape future political discussions and decision-making.

The ILO's method of building dialogue among Vietnamese garment industry stakeholders enabled discussion of new ideas and approaches, pilots and experimentation. These in turn have the potential to achieve valuable outcomes for women workers via the ensuing reforms to trade unions, creating more opportunities to make their voices heard.

In relation to peace negotiations, some have argued that, for example, Track II diplomacy (unofficial, informal dialogue among citizens across nations), can provide important opportunities for women's voices to be heard. Formal Track 1 processes are often more male affairs (Reimann, 2014).

INTERNATIONAL NORMS

International norms of gender equality cannot of course simply be imposed in other countries by development agencies (and can create backlash if they are not supported sensitively). Nor are these ideals fully realised in those countries providing development assistance. Nevertheless, international norms can be very influential as elites work outside their country context and interact with women leaders from other states and transnational organisations and companies. Governments, private companies and non-governmental agencies seeking to improve gender equality have a role in modelling women's leadership within their own organisations and supporting women leaders in global fora.

More formal institutionalised commitments to gender equality such as international labour standards and human rights treaties are also very important in contributing to processes of change. Sometimes legislation based on international treaties can lead to changes in social norms, as Kenny and Patel (2017) have argued regarding the legalising of homosexuality across a number of countries. International connections through regional conferences and summits bring reformers together and help influential women to extend their networks, build coalitions and increase their access to resources. These connections may also form an important part of women's political capital, as the Pacific case study indicates.

7 CONCLUSION

To summarise, this paper argues that:

- **Context is key** - and gendered. In other words, it is not just that 'context matters'. A gendered understanding of the context reveals the broader drivers of change and of the *status quo*. This helps identify both opportunities and constraints.

- While these drivers are important, **the agency of local people, activists and movements is also a critical element** in promoting gender equality and social change. Not least because domestic actors have the connections, relationships, local knowledge and legitimacy necessary to promote change.

- **International aid and development programs can only do so much...but they can do it better**. Aid programs operate within broader drivers of change, and alongside local actors and organisations. Aid programs are never the primary agents of change. However, it is also clear from this research that a) aid and development programs can, and do, contribute to gender aware political reform, and b) a politically informed and gender aware way of working is important for all programs. A number of 'success factors' are proposed that emerge from this research.

- **There are other strategic avenues for promoting gender-equal development.** These include trade or immigration policies, tertiary education or citizen exchanges, and the furthering of international norms.

This paper has drawn on GAPP research to explore the broad processes of social, political and economic change that shape development outcomes. It has underlined the vital roles of structural and contextual drivers of change, of local actors and organisations, and the complex relationship between the two. This perspective highlights that managed change financed by outsiders is only part of the bigger picture. This broader analysis can help reveal different – and potentially more sustainable and impactful – ways of supporting and leveraging existing change processes. And while the contribution of development agencies might be modest, it can be enhanced in practical ways. These include genuinely engaging with, and learning from, local women and their organisations and movements.

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ANNEX 1: CASE STUDIES EXPLORED IN THE GENDER AND POLITICS IN PRACTICE RESEARCH

PRIMARY CASES

- **Being the First**: A study of three female political leaders – President Hilda Heine from the Marshall Islands, Dame Carol Kidu from Papua New Guinea and Fiame Mata'afa from Samoa – who were the first women to reach high political office in their countries

- **The *waria* of Banjarmarsin, Indonesia**: The Asia Foundation's case study of Program Peduli, which aims to improve social inclusion for the *waria* (transgender women) of Banjarmarsin (South Kalimantan)

- **Labour reform in the Vietnam garment industry**: A study of the factors that contributed to the reforms in Vietnam's garment industry and the role of ILO's Better Work Vietnam program

SECONDARY CASES

Targeted initiatives

- *Pacific Leadership Program: Advocacy for CEDAW in Tonga: women's* empowerment and leadership

- *Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (MAMPU), Indonesia*: women's empowerment and poverty reduction

- *UN Women Asia Pacific, 22 countries*: women's empowerment

- *Voices for Change (V4C), Nigeria*: women's empowerment

- *CARE Australia, 23 countries:* poverty and gender equality

- *We can, 16 countries*: viral campaign on violence against women

- *Peace Leadership Program (PLP), Myanmar*: support to women's leadership

- *Gender and Climate Change, Bangladesh*: women and climate change (research study)

- *Women in Leadership Support Program (WLSP), Papua New Guinea*: women's political representation (research study)

Sector programs

- *Enabling State Program (ESP), Nepal*: governance, civil society and state building

- *Empowerment, Voice and Accountability for Better Health and Nutrition (EVA), Pakistan*: accountability for better health services

- *Mobilising for Development (M4D), Nigeria*: accountability at local government level for better services

- *State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI), Nigeria*: citizen engagement in state level governance

- *Sudokkho, Bangladesh*: markets for the poor, skills development in garment and construction industries

ANNEX 2: UNPACKING THE CONCEPTS 'POLITICALLY INFORMED' AND 'GENDER AWARE'

This research project uses the following definitions of these terms.

'GENDER AWARE'

Being 'gender aware' is a way of working to achieve greater gender equality. Gender aware programs are often associated with more robust and sustainable development results.

It involves analysing how women and men, girls and boys, experience an issue differently and/or unequally and the power relations that sustain these inequalities. Sex disaggregated data on quantitative gender gaps is complemented by qualitative information on roles, norms, experiences and priorities. This information is used to inform program design and monitoring.

A robust analysis also looks at the ways gender intersects with other forms of diversity such as race, religion, ethnicity, class and disability.

There is increasing recognition of the discrimination faced by people who do not identify as straight women or straight men. Where relevant and appropriate, gender analysis examines the experience of people with non-binary gender identities or diverse sexual preferences.

'POLITICALLY INFORMED'

Being 'politically informed' is a way of working to achieve reform in complex contexts – where power dynamics are complex and change pathways messy, dynamic and unpredictable. It is not about formal governance reforms – financial management, elections, civil service reforms – but about a way of working that recognises that power and politics shape all sectors and issues.

It involves analysing the dynamics of power and politics to understand what is politically feasible. These dynamics include stakeholder interests and incentives, the formal and informal rules shaping decision-making and agenda setting, and the politics of trade-offs, coalitions and deals. The approach recognises that change produces winners and losers, and that losers may need to be compensated or won over.

Ideally, this analysis is practical and regularly updated. It helps programs and partners identify entry points for reform, potential champions, and the people and systems blocking change, and to strategise accordingly. And it helps them adapt to shifting opportunities as the political context changes.

A number of approaches to politically informed programming share a family resemblance. These include, but are not limited to, political economy analysis (PEA), thinking and working politically (TWP), doing development differently (DDD), adaptive programming, problem driven iterative adaptation (PDIA), and development entrepreneurship (DE).

See: the GSDRC Topic Guide on PEA at www.gsdrc.org/?p=42965; the TWP Community of Practice at www.twpcommunity.org/about-us/what-is-twp; the DDD Manifesto Community at www.doingdevelopmentdifferently.com; ODI's paper on adaptive programming: odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10401.pdf; Harvard University's Building State Capability program for details of PDIA at https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/about; and The Asia Foundation's introduction to DE: www.asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/OccasionalPaperNo12.pdf