

Backgrounder

What makes change happen in women's lives?

With funding from the British government's Department for International Development (DfID) and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Norway and Sweden, researchers in a diversity of places - from Afghanistan to Brazil, global policy institutions to rural Sierra Leone - are opening up long-held assumptions about women, power and social change to critical scrutiny. What we are exploring is an entirely different approach: one that is framed by lived experience rather than stereotypes, one that can countenance contradictions and celebrate plural visions and versions of empowerment that fit with the contexts in which they are voiced, and one that can reframe empowerment in ways that restore its power as a concept to serve the struggle for a more just and equal world. – Andrea Cornwall

Pathways of Women's Empowerment is an International Research and Communications programme made up of activists and academics, which explores and seeks to affect positive change in women's everyday lives. It is a five-year programme of work funded primarily by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). It is an international research and communications network linking academics, activists and practitioners to find out what works to enhance women's empowerment. The programme also includes research work on Afghanistan, Palestine and Sierra Leone, which is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs under our Pathways of Women's Empowerment in Countries in Crisis project.

Empowerment has often been regarded as a destination that can be reached through the development equivalent of a motorway: fast-track programmes that can be rolled out over any terrain. Our researchers view it as an on-going process; a journey along meandering pathways full of twists and turns, sometimes doubling back or reaching dead-ends. As a result, the focus is not on replicating the journey, but on understanding it so as to offer possibilities and give hints and warnings to other travellers. This perspective urges us to explore the everyday experiences of the women that development initiatives seek to empower, and to learn from them what helps and hinders them on this journey. The consortium investigates what enables women, individually and collectively, to empower themselves, how they can sustain these changes, and how development agencies' policies support or hinder this process. We want to make women's pathways of change visible and to build on them to inspire a radical shift in policy and practice.



Empowerment is more of a journey without maps

– Naila Kabeer, Pathways South Asia

Resources

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Pathways of Women's Empowerment RPC
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Pathways at a Glance

Just the facts:

40 Researchers working in 9 countries

5 Year mandate

5 Research hubs:

- Global
- Latin America
- Middle East
- South Asia
- West Africa

4 Research Themes:

- Conceptions of Women's Empowerment
- Empowering Work
- Building Constituencies for Equality and Justice
- Changing Narratives of Sexuality

3 Areas of Enquiry:

- Locate empowerment in women's everyday lives
- Policy processes
- Strategies for change

Pathways of Women's Empowerment aims to generate new thinking. It is a network that links academics, activists and practitioners working to advance women's empowerment locally, regionally and through global policy processes.

Goals:

- To identify where women are achieving real gains and discover the positive and negative factors that have influenced their journey;
- To shake up stereotypes, misconceptions and prejudices that exist around women and power;
- To seek change in the representations of women and power;
- To facilitate reflective practice among those working for women's empowerment in global policy spaces;
- To challenge and change the existing power imbalances detrimental to women's lives.

The consortium investigates what enables women, individually and collectively, to empower themselves, how they can sustain these changes, and how development agencies' policies support or hinder this process.

Our aim is to make pathways of change visible and to build on them to inspire a radical shift in policy and practice. By involving policy actors and practitioners directly in our research and learning, we hope our work will be in itself a catalyst for change.

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Pathways in the News

The State We're In – The Right to Divorce

Mulki Al Sharmani was interviewed by *Radio Netherlands Worldwide* about *Khul* the ancient Islamic form of divorce controversially reintroduced into Egypt in 2000. Her work for Pathways has looked at women's use of family courts and reforms in personal status laws. See

<http://www.rnw.nl/english/article/right-divorce>

People and Power - Righting Women's Rights

On the eve of International Women's Day, Andrea Cornwall, Director of Pathways, was interviewed by Samah El-Shahat for *Al Jazeera's 'People and Power'* programme. The programme discusses women's rights and how far we have got in achieving these in today's world. See

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rHrqk6Gbgl&feature=channel_page

Pathways to Women's Empowerment

by Safaa Abdoun. A report in the *Daily News Egypt* from the recent Mid-Term Analysis Conference for the programme held in Cairo. See <http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=19582>

Real World

The two documentary directors, Katrina Mansoor and Paulina Tervo, selected under the Real World scheme (jointly organised between Pathways and Screen South) have been filming in Brazil and Palestine during the second half of 2008. The films were submitted at the beginning of January 2009 and premiered in London in March 2009. See <http://www.birds-eye-view.co.uk/news/2009/03/08/a-little-more-info-on-real-world-films/>

The Key(Board) to Equality

by Tessa Lewin, *The Guardian.co.uk*, 20 December 2008

"Geeks and feminists have much in common. If feminism is about embracing and striving for some kind of utopian dream of human equality, then democratising knowledge is an important part of this process." Read the whole article at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/dec/20/gender-equality-technology>

More Pathways in the News:

- Women, Peace and Security: Actualising UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Sierra Leone, launch of the project featured in *Awareness Times* and *Awoko*, May 2009
- The Pathways South Asia Team's work on religion and media provided a special feature for International Women's Day in the *Daily Star*, Bangladesh, March 2009
- "All Women Work!" Hania Sholkamy featured in August 2008 *Euromed Thematic Edition Newsletter*
- Domestic violence bill, article by Takyiwaa Manuh picked up by *Pambazuka news*, Ghana
- Marking International Women's Day, Silvia Lucia Ferreira interviewed by *TV Educativa*, Salvador de Bahia, Brazil
- Women and politics, Alice Costa, full page spread, Salvador de Bahia, Brazil
- Women in the Media, Firdous Azim, panel discussion on *RTV*, Bangladesh
- Marriage and Culture, Firdous Azim, interview with national newspaper *Prothom Alo*, Bangladesh
- Brazilian government consultation with the Egyptian government, Hania Sholkamy, Egypt
- Conditional Cash Transfer programmes, mentioned in the *Economist, Egypt/ International*
- Should women's dress be controlled by legislation? Charmaine Pereira, *BBC World Service* interview for the programme: "Africa have your say", Nigeria
- "Spotlight on Egypt's Marriage Crisis," *BBC* interview, Hania Sholkamy, Egypt
- Multidimensional Poverty for Mexico.: 'Gender and Poverty Measurement: the Challenge', Naila Kabeer interview in *Reforma Nacional* newspaper, Mexico

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Did you know...

Reality check

Younger Ghanaian women are more likely to work in the formal sector than older women, however, they are more likely to work in the private sector which offers more insecure jobs than the public sector.

Women constitute 98% of Brazil's paid domestic workforce, but only 40% of these 12 million women enjoy any kind of employment benefits or social security. In total, there are 9.1 million domestic workers, or 5% of the Brazilian population.

For every 100 economically active men in North Africa, there are only 35 economically active women. This represents the highest gender gap in the world, which is closely followed by the Middle East where for every 100 men, only 39 women are economically active.

Women in local councils in Palestine won 17% of the seats as required by the quota law. However, some of these elected women were replaced with nominated supporters fuelling the division between rival political parties, Fatah and Hamas.

In Ghana, Pathways collected 36 in-depth life histories, with 12 groups of three women representing three generations.

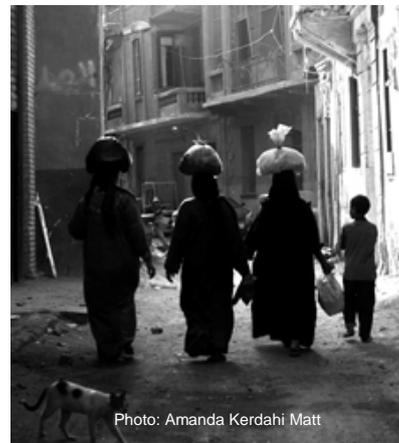
In a survey of political involvement in Ghana, Pathways researchers found that older people are more likely to belong to political parties. Women educated to middle school/JSS level are the biggest group with party membership.

A significant proportion of women (around 52%) in Bangladesh reported that sex of their child did not matter if they were restricted to just one child. This demonstrates that a notable change in terms of sex preference has occurred in Bangladesh where son preference is believed to be very strong.

The median age of marriage in Palestine is 18 but there is a high proportion of single women. For Palestinian men, marriage is almost universal.

The number of *khul* (divorce initiated by women, with the forfeit of alimony) cases brought to court across Egypt has been rapidly increasing from 2004 to 2007. On one hand, this means women are able to escape unwanted marriages through the *khul* process. However, these figures mask the fact that women are resorting to *khul* instead of judicial divorce to expedite the divorce proceedings even though it means the wife will not receive alimony.

For more facts and information about the Pathways research and activities, please contact: Tessa Lewin, Communications Manager T.Lewin@ids.ac.uk Tel: (44) (0)1273 915736



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Our work

What we are doing – in our own words

Using the latest technology to enhance our work:

The Feminist Tech Exchange brought dozens of women's activists together in November 2008 in South Africa for an intensive retreat geared towards sharing important technology and communications tools. I participated in the social networking track that trained participants in online platforms like Drupal, Blogger, Audacity, and Gimp, since these sites are excellent mediums for linking women and activists. Open source software allows computer users free access to programs for graphic editing, website building, and document processing. I found these gems of information priceless and practical because the Pathways research in the Middle East Hub can benefit from innovative communications methods. For activists operating in rural or underdeveloped areas, these tools are essential for constructing effective and safe communications channels and I plan to use many of the programs in my work with Pathways. - Joslyn Massengale, Middle East Hub

Helping others see the power of the media:

The Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Programme Consortium (RPC), based at the BRAC Development Institute of BRAC University in Dhaka, Bangladesh, organised a Workshop on Media, Gender and Representation. The workshop focused on how the media, through advertisements, films, music videos, forges notions of femininity and masculinity and what the constructions of sexuality in the popular realm reveals about sexuality in contemporary times. The programme delved into issues of representation through images and the truth claims associated with documentary films, explored the case of the 'popular' cinema of Bollywood and the troubles with censorship, and highlighted debates around violence and pornography. The lectures were illustrated with visual clips and film screenings, and energised by participant exercises and lively discussions. The workshop was attended by 29 participants, comprising primarily researchers, journalists, reporters, advertising agents and other members of the media production industry. The workshop allowed participants to understand why certain narratives and images appeal to people today and the particular representations of self and sexuality that these images validate. – Samia Rahim, South Asia Hub

Using art to express the goals of our research:

The West Africa Hub ran a photo competition under the theme, Changing Images of Women in Ghana, inviting entries from both amateur and professional photographers. The competition mandate was to use images to provoke discussion and seek out innovative and alternative ways to depict women and counter gender stereotypes. Photo entries were reviewed by Anna Kari and Guilhem Alandry from Documentography Collective; and Tessa Lewin, Akosua Adomako Ampofo and Nana Akua Anyidoho from Pathways. Kwabena Danso was the winner, with his photo, "Long time no see." - Akofa Anyidoho, West Africa Hub

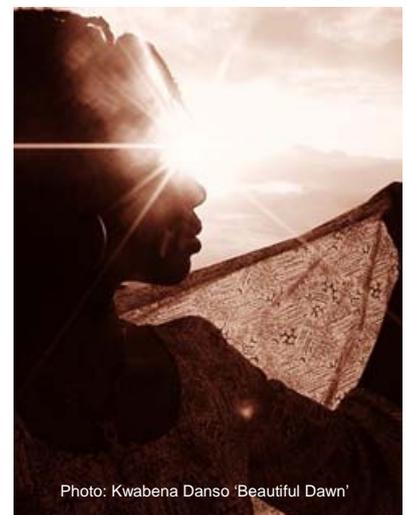


Photo: Kwabena Danso 'Beautiful Dawn'

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International network

Pathways around the globe

Global Hub

Location: Institute of Development Studies (UK), University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

Role: Host of research into 'global' policy spaces

Core Partner: UNIFEM at global, regional and national levels

RPC projects: Changing Markets, Changing Lives - Opening Global Spaces for the Rights of Women Workers; Conceptualising Empowerment in Global Spaces and the Shaping of International Policies and Practice About Women and Feminist Activists in Global Policy Organisations; Exploring Positive Approaches to Sexuality; and Mobilising Resources for Women's Organising

Latin American Hub

Location: The Interdisciplinary Women's Studies Nucleus at the Federal University of Bahia (Brazil) with partners in Latin America

RPC projects: Conceptualising Empowerment in Brazil; Policy discourse and the Discourse of Feminist NGOs and Making Private Harms into Matters of Policy; Building Constituencies for Political Reform, Quotas as an Instrument of Change and Learning for Change: The Experience of Brazil's Feminist Schools for Women Politicians; Feminisms and the Struggle for Reproductive Rights in Latin America; Empowering Domestic Work: The Organising of Domestic Workers in Brazil; and Zone: A Study of Sex Workers' Radio Station in Bahia.

Middle East Hub

Location: Social Research Centre at the American University in Cairo (Egypt) with partners in the Middle East

RPC projects: Family Courts in Egypt: An Exit from Marriage on a Pathway to Empowerment?; Talking Empowerment in Plain Arabic; Conditional Cash Transfers in Egypt; Working Group on Gender and Work in Egypt: Exploring Pathways for Empowerment; Local Governments between Building the Islamic Nation and Women's Empowerment; Dynamics and Discourses of Choice, Embodiment, Responsibility, Power and Survival in the Lives of Single Palestinian Women; Tracing and Measuring Empowerment and Change in Women's Lives through Revisiting Different NGO Trajectories of Development Discourse and Local Lay Women's Conceptions of Empowerment; and Poor Women's Agency in Gaza: Between 'Doing' and 'Being'

South Asia Hub

Location: BRAC University (Bangladesh) with partners in the South Asia region

RPC projects: Women and Media, Women and Religion and National Discourses on Women's Empowerment: Enabling or Constraining Women's Choices; Working Women Creating Particular Pathways of Change, Review of Strategic Approaches to Building Constituencies by Women's Organisations and Women in Local Government in Bangladesh and Pakistan; Lady Health Workers Changing Lives: The Unintended Consequences of a Government Programme in Pakistan; and Changing Narratives of Empowerment: Trajectories of Desire and Mediation of Socio-Culture Spaces

West Africa Hub

Location: Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy at the University of Ghana (Ghana) with partners in West Africa

RPC projects: Interrogating Policy Discourses and Practice on Women's Empowerment in Ghana; Changing Representations of Women in Popular Culture; Inter-Generational Perspectives on Women's Lives and Empowerment; Women District Assembly Members; Sexuality and Empowerment: The Case of Anita Hogan; and Grassroots Politics: The Push for Women's Representation at the Ward Level in Post-War Sierra Leone

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Collateral

Further resources

Agendas for change

Pathways of Women's Empowerment launches its new publication 'Agendas for Change' with the first paper on 'Women's Empowerment needs a *People-Centred Economy*', drafted by Marzia Fontana and edited by Rosalind Eyben, Convenor of the Pathways Global Hub.

This occasional series will be looking at issues lying at the heart of gender justice and proposing alternative visions for change. http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/IDS_agenda_for_change.pdf (pdf file 476 KB)

Pathways Annual Report 2007/2008

Find out more about our activities during 2007/08.

<http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/Annual%20Report/AnnualReport.html>

Women Writing Africa. The Northern Region, New York: Feminist Press. Fatima Sadiqi, Amira Nowaira, Azza El Khouly and Moha Ennaji (eds), 2009.

Global Gender Gap Report 2007 Link to the **Global Gender Gap Report** from the World Economic Forum <http://www.weforum.org/en/Communities/Women%20Leaders%20and%20Gender%20Parity/GenderGapNetwork/index.htm>

Poverty in Focus: Gender Equality

Number 13, January 2008, International Poverty Centre. Naila Kabeer is the lead author in this issue with her article on 'Gender, Labour Markets and Poverty: An Overview'. The issue is available at: <http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/pub/IPCPovertyInFocus13.pdf>.

For a comprehensive list of recent Pathways reports, papers and press releases, please visit our website: http://www.pathways-of-empowerment.org/resources_pathways.html



Photo: Adelaide Otoo

Making political institutions more responsive and accountable is about more than getting more women into politics.

– Ana Alice Costa, Pathways Brazil

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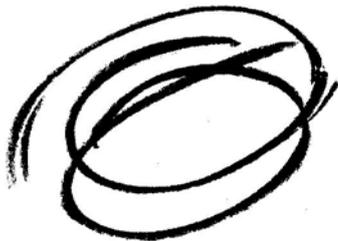


Tools

What makes change happen in women's lives?



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Interviews Available

Pathways spokespeople

Andrea Cornwall

RPC role: Director of RPC and Convenor Conceptualising Empowerment Theme @ Institute of Development Studies, United Kingdom

Professorial Fellow at Institute of Development Studies

Available for interviews on women's rights and empowerment, sexualities, sexual and reproductive rights, women's political and civic participation.

Rosalind Eyben

RPC role: Convenor Global Hub @ Institute of Development Studies, United Kingdom

Available for interviews on: Power and relationships in international aid, organisational learning and change, gender equality and women's empowerment, rights-based approaches, social analysis. Country experience: Recently Bolivia, Peru and India; has lived and worked earlier in many other parts of the world including Burundi, Cameroon, Zambia, DRC, Benin and Sudan

Cecilia Sardenberg

RPC role: Convenor Latin America Hub @ Núcleo De Estudos Interdisciplinares Sobre A Mulher/FFCH/Universidade Federal Da Bahia, Brazil

Anthropologist, Vice-Coordinator, NEIM

Available for interviews on: gender relations, family and work

Hania Sholkamy

RPC role: Convenor, Middle East Hub @ The Social Research Center, American University in Cairo, Egypt

Assistant Professor of Anthropology

Available for interviews on: health, particularly reproductive health, gender, population and qualitative methods

Islah Jad

RPC role: Palestine Coordinator and Convenor for Voice Theme @ Birzeit University, Palestine

Professor, Institute of Women's Studies

Available for interviews on: political participation, gender and development studies

Maheen Sultan

RPC role: Convenor, South Asia Hub @ BRAC University, Bangladesh

Available for interviews on: women's work, women's organisations, women's rights and empowerment

Naila Kabeer

RPC role: Coordinator for Work Theme @ Institute of Development Studies, United Kingdom

Professorial Fellow at Institute of Development Studies

Available for interviews on: women's rights, women's work and the informal economy, social protection

Takyiwaa Manuh

RPC role: Convenor West Africa Hub @ University of Ghana, Ghana

Director, Institute of African Studies

Available for interviews on: women's rights and empowerment in Ghana, contemporary African migrations, African development issues, and African Higher Education systems.

To arrange an interview with one of our spokespeople, please contact Tessa Lewin, Communications Manager: T.Lewin@ids.ac.uk Tel: (44) (0)1273 915736

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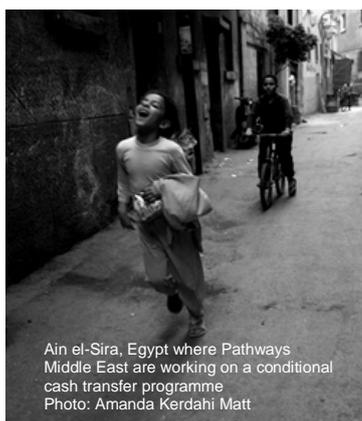
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Photo Gallery

A picture speaks a thousand words: images from our work



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Contact

Want to know more?

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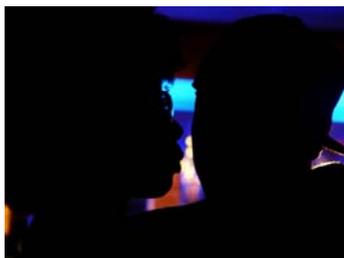
Tel: (44) (0)1273 915736

Latin America Hub - Lea Santana: leasantana@gmail.com

Middle East Hub – Kristina Hallez: khallez@aucegypt.edu

South Asia Hub - Samia Rahim: samia.rahim@bracu.ac.bd

West Africa Hub - Akofa Anyidoho: akofa1@gmail.com



Winner West Africa Hub Photo Competition:
'Long Time No See', Kwabena Danso



Winner South Asia Hub Photo Competition:
'Celebrating Life' Sheikh Rajibul Islam

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