

Democratic Governance, Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Synthesis Report

2010

Background

The Women's Rights and Citizenship (WRC) Program, located within the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), is aimed at supporting applied research in the field of women's rights, citizenship and development. Part of IDRC's Social and Economy Policy (SEP) program area, the WRC program contributes to bringing Southern voices into current debates in the international gender and development field.

Although there have been notable gains for women globally in the last few decades, gender inequality and gender-based inequities continue to impinge upon girls' and women's ability to realize their rights and their full potential as citizens and equal partners in the development of their communities. While a variety of legal instruments commit the international community and individual states to uphold women's rights, the commitments made internationally are not adequately acknowledged in national laws or practice. States have often lacked the will or the knowledge to implement them, and where basic human rights do exist in domestic laws, many women lack the freedom and the means to claim them. As a result, for every right that has been established, there are millions of women who do not enjoy it.

The “Democratic Governance, Women's Rights and Gender Equality” Initiative

IDRC is developing an innovative new research initiative on “Democratic Governance, Women's Rights and Gender Equality.” This global initiative, launched in March 2010, stems from the recognition that there is a lack of substantive literature on the relationship between democratic governance, women's experiences and the advancement of gender equality. It intends to support new, groundbreaking research on whether and how democratic governance systems and processes respond to women's rights, needs, and interests, and how governance structures affect equality between women and men. The global approach of this initiative will enable findings to be compared both intra-regionally and across regions, contributing to the global agenda for women's political rights.

IDRC and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) have commissioned a series of eight regional and thematic background papers to provide global data and analysis on how democratic structures are impacting on citizens', and especially women's lives. This series of papers has informed the conceptual development of the initiative, providing valuable regional and thematic data as well as reflections on areas for future research and on the methodological challenges of conducting research on democratic governance and women's rights.

Five regional papers were produced, focusing on: West Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), South Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Three thematic papers were also commissioned to examine key topics in the field of women's rights and democratic governance that resonate throughout each of the regions: the impacts of women's political representation in parliament, the rule of law and women's access to justice, and the opportunities and challenges of integrating women's rights and gender equality in democratization processes in transitional and post-conflict situations.¹

Introduction

The concept of governance gained a status of international orthodoxy in the 1990s, and following this trend, democracy and rights-based approaches to development have gained popularity and resulted in a more coherent field called democratic governance. This concept presents greater challenges in transitional states, and very few attempts have been made to integrate a gendered women's rights analysis into understandings of democratic governance. While significant gains have been made in terms of women's schooling, health, and to a lesser extent, economic participation, there is still a gap in women's political participation, and therefore in their citizenship. Among all of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), MDG #3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women is the goal that it is least likely to be fulfilled, representing a democratic deficit that significantly impacts the quality and outcomes of democracy. Further, there has been a trend to measure women's involvement in democracy by measuring their participation in parliaments. However, numbers in parliaments are not a proxy indicator to women's participation in governance. Efforts to increase women's political representation and the various impacts of their participation are further explored in this report.

Concepts and Definitions

The notion of democratic governance is difficult to define; it varies over time, and across and within regions. It is often identified both as a cornerstone and a goal of good effective governance.² Some definitions of democracy emphasize principles such as fair, competitive elections, and freedom of speech and information. Others view democracy more broadly, in terms of civil and political rights and the distribution of power within society. Another definition of democracy emphasizes citizens' rights to participate in governance processes, either directly or by voting in fair and transparent elections for freely chosen representatives, and includes the need for governments to be responsive and accountable to citizens. The concept also reaffirms the right of citizens, including the most disadvantaged groups, to influence their governments and criticize governing bodies without fear of punishment. Therefore, a main debate raised in this field is that a women's rights perspective is an interrogation of democratic governance in its own right. It is important that democratic governance is conceived of as not only a system of governance, but also as a system in which individuals are treated equally, with dignity and respect.

Explicitly defining democratic governance as a process allows for different research entry points, at different levels of democratization. One of the most crucial definitions of democracy is in reference to a process, which is guided by human rights principles presupposing a genuine

¹Please refer to the Appendix for a list of the papers and corresponding author(s).

²United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (2002), *Deepening democracy in a fragmented world, Human Development Report*, New York: UNDP.

partnership between women and men in conducting the affairs of society.³ Liberal views on governance, democratic governance, democracy, and rights are often critiqued for being distanced from the lives of the most marginalised, and therefore it is critical to interrogate these issues from a Southern women's rights standpoint. The language of rights, while it has allowed for much advancement, can also solidify and actually obstruct its translation into entitlements, services, and claims for women; in other cases rights are completely alien. Democratic concepts such as the rule of law, transparency, and accountability are distant realities if they do not take into account the crossroads where women are located, especially in situations where the state is fragile, in crisis, or where it effectively does not exist.

Reem Bahdi's paper discusses the rule of law and its relationship with women's rights and gender equality. In her view, democratic governance entails not only a system of governance defined by "one person, one vote," but also implies a system where individuals living within a particular jurisdiction are treated fairly, respectfully, and equally. However, Bahdi also stresses that democracy is not only a process, but a means to a particular normative end, which is the dignity and equality of all.

Author Dyan Mazurana presents a discussion on liberal governance and development in her paper on conflict, women's rights, and democratic governance. She explains that the dominant liberal governance paradigm often posits that internal processes of underdevelopment are at the root of violent uprisings and conflict, particularly in the global South. These theories suggest that armed conflict is the direct result of bad governance and uneven, ill-suited, and corrupt development practices. Therefore, international intervention and development are offered as the primary means, to thwart and eventually help remove the cause(s) of violence in the medium and long-term. In conclusion, Mazurana argues that shifts by Western governments towards societal reconstruction and democratic transformation are not simply a response by technical systems of support and assistance, but are actually part of emerging systems of liberal global governance.

The regional papers also provide critical and context-specific reflections on the concept of democratic governance. Author Seema Kazi explores the limitations of normative definitions of democracy and governance and makes the central argument that normative understandings of both concepts must move beyond institutional and administrative aspects. Kazi explains that the term governance, in its normative and broad sense, refers to the manner in which particular national and international institutions and regimes manage a country's economic and social resources towards development. While normative understandings of governance focus on the managerial role of the state, and its institutions, towards the promotion of economic growth and social development. Kazi demonstrates that governance has grown in recognition, from being an exclusive function of state and inter-state institutions and agencies, to a process encompassing the state and citizens. Moreover, contemporary understandings of democracy and governance state that public accountability, transparency, economic growth, and poverty reduction are, in short, as important as social and distributive justice, and a democratic and egalitarian society.

³See the Universal Declaration on Democracy. 16 September 1997. Accessible at the Inter-Parliamentary Union: <http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/161-dem.htm>.

Democratic Governance and Women's Rights

In light of the Universal Declaration on Democracy, there has been renewed recognition by international and other agencies promoting governance processes of the need to support and protect human rights.⁴ These include political, civil, economic, social, and cultural rights and are laid out in United Nations' declarations and conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Thus, rights-based approaches are generally associated quite closely with issues relating to gender equality and equity. However, scholars often attribute this to the ambivalent character of the neo-liberal development policy agenda and the serious social consequences of this agenda for poor women in developing countries.⁵ Although some argue that the pursuit of women's rights is an attempt at putting a human face on neo-liberal preoccupations with individualism and property rights, deflecting attention from persistent poverty and increasing inequality, it is nevertheless an important arena for advancing gender equity. Bahdi's paper on the rule of law explores and presents critiques of rights-based approaches. She explains that "rights-talk" has the capacity to distort women's experiences by forcing them into preconceived categories of meaning, puts decision-making into a system which does not fully understand or acknowledge its own power dynamics, and deflects valuable resources away from other strategies such as political mobilization and lobbying.

Further, it is critical to stress that women are not a homogenous group. Certain groups of women are particularly vulnerable to marginalization from both political representation and full access to rights and citizenship within democracies, including developed democracies. These groups can include indigenous women, ethnic minorities, migrants, young women, disabled women, and women living with HIV/AIDS. As Sheila Meintjes' paper articulates, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual (GLBT) people's struggles for recognition and for equal rights within Eastern and Southern Africa have been extremely difficult. For instance, in South Africa, Uganda, and Kenya, GLBT people have tried to organise, but have been met with little support or sympathy, except, in some cases at the state level and from feminist activists in South Africa. She concludes that part of the explanation for this discrimination lies in the discursive construction of gay and lesbian rights and gender equality as "Western" and foreign ideas which are being imported into African society, where they have no place.

Amaney Jamal's paper on women's rights in the MENA region articulates that democracy and good governance are beneficial to women in several ways. She explains that democracies by default are thought to secure the interests of the entire population, including women, and they are more likely to underscore legal equality across gender groups. Jamal also argues that ideally, democracies are able to secure the public and political spheres as sites for female contestation and advancement.⁶ However, the author clearly articulates that democracies alone are not sufficient to secure the interests of women and that democracies have to be able to govern competently and enforce the rule of law, for the ability to enforce the rule of law affects a

⁴ Grugel, J and Piper, N. (2007), "Critical Perspectives on Global Governance: Rights And Regulation In Governing Regimes," Ripe Series in Global Political Economy.

⁵ Molyneux, M and Razavi, S. (eds.) (2002), *Gender Justice, Development, and Rights. Oxford Studies in Democratization* (London: Oxford University Press).

⁶ UNDP; IDEA; WORLD BANK; IDRC.

country's ability to guarantee women's rights. In reference to Eastern and Southern Africa, Meintjes' paper questions whether processes of „instrumental disorder“ in this region, where states themselves promote disorder as a means to maintain the political status quo and preserve elitist governance systems, constitute a brake on generating the kind of stable governance practices that would promote full equality and fulfill women's needs and interests.

It is critical that democratic governance be conceptualised as an inclusive process and practice, and as Kazi notes, this must involve women and men, and have gender equality as one of its core guiding principles. Moreover, the principle of gender equality is not simply an “addition;” rather, it is an essential condition for genuine transformative change, and for the creation of more inclusive, equitable, and democratic societies. In her paper, Bahdi also discusses the concept of equality and states that at times, women may need to be treated differently from men, in order to achieve substantive equality.

In the regional paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, authors Olinda Bareiro and Isabel Torres García state that democratic governance tends to be a complex, dynamic, and historical process that can be understood as the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage state issues at all levels. It refers to mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups frame their interests, exercise their rights, face their obligations, and express their differences. Recently, however, there has been a rethinking of democratic governance in the Latin American and Caribbean region, as issues such as the emergence of previously excluded political actors, the globalization of capitalism, and a tendency of power concentration have created a new political context.

In their paper, Bareiro and Torres García demonstrate that this new context has been favourable to women in different ways: the ratification of human rights conventions such as CEDAW by most states in the region; important social and political progress including the massive entry of women into schools and the work force; and their increasing participation in politics. However, women in Latin America and the Caribbean continue to face challenges, and thus have adopted new strategies, including knowledge production, in order to influence the presentation of bills, calls for action, and the implementation of equality measures. The authors conclude that when studying gender and democratic governance, the concepts of democracy and citizenship should be operationalized in a way that emphasizes how these concepts could be more responsive to women's needs and integration into politics.

As highlighted in Jamal's paper, democracies are important for women because such political systems encourage forms of tolerance, acceptance, and norms that are constructive for women's rights in general. Democracies reinforce the granting of rights to all citizens regardless of gender, race, family, ethnicity, etc, and in doing so can help to reinforce the values most important for the full incorporation of women as citizens of the state. For as Jamal asserts, democracies by default seek to secure the interests of the entire population, and are more likely to underscore legal equality across gender groups.

Challenges to Women's Rights and Gender Equality

The embedded nature of gender inequalities and challenges to women's rights is experienced globally, manifest in diverse ways across different regions. The following section presents specific challenges that arise in the five regions under study.

In her paper on women's rights during armed conflict and the role of democratic good governance, Mazurana states that there is a pressing need to use feminist perspectives and feminist-inspired research to analyze key issues occurring in the transition period following armed conflict. She explains that these issues have a profound effect on the resulting governance, government and democratic systems that follow and hence profoundly affect women's lives. These key issues include: women's participation in formal peace processes; women's participation in drafting and ratifying constitutions; motivations and demands of women in revolutionary armed groups and possible links with women's rights movements in transition periods; and lastly, women and transitional justice. Mazurana's paper clearly articulates the key ways in which women, and to a lesser extent, girls, men and boys, are affected by armed conflict, and states that such context-specific knowledge is required in order to conduct meaningful work for women's rights during periods of transition from armed conflict.

In the West Africa paper, author Rose Mensah-Kutin states that the fragility of the region, in terms of its history, religions, linguistic fragmentation along Anglophone and Francophone lines, and the endemic nature of coups d'état and conflicts have had significant implications for the nature of governance structures and systems and their implications for the promotion of women's rights. Mensah-Kutin notes that even countries with relatively stable democracies continue to face challenges with regard to women's rights. In Nigeria, for instance, the major challenges that undermine the promotion of women's rights in democratic governance are located in the ways in which the resources of the country continue to be controlled by elite groups, contributing to the feminization of poverty. This is compounded by the fact that women have limited access to financial resources, which is a critical asset for entering politics in Nigeria.

In West African countries experiencing conflict or emerging out of conflict, such as Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, the challenges of achieving democratic governance and gender equality are compounded by weak political institutions. Mensah-Kutin depicts West Africa as a region with a limited interest in the integration of women's rights into democratic processes, with varying degrees of intensity in individual countries. Further, even though there is a clear sense of activism among women in the region, as observed in the region's women's movements and organizations, it is clear that more integration of efforts is needed in order to move beyond boundaries and divisions and consolidate gains across the region.

Perceptions regarding women's status and gender equality can also negatively affect women's rights and the promotion of gender equality. Jamal details the specific challenges within the MENA region, where Arab societies are more likely to believe that men make better political leaders than women, and that when jobs are scarce, men should be entitled to them. These attitudes are, as Jamal demonstrates, directly linked to negative objective indicators on women. She further explains that countries in the Arab region with unfavourable attitudes towards gender equality are also the same countries that tend to perform more poorly on gender outcomes.

Women's Visibility and Representation

The eight background papers also explore mechanisms and avenues to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. One such mechanism is advancing women's visibility and representation in decision making positions. The following sections present a discussion on different forms of representation, and the potential these have for improving women's rights.

Electoral systems can play an important role in enhancing the participation and representation of women in politics, and therefore provide opportunities for improving women's rights and gender equality. In her paper, Marilyn Waring provides global data on women's political representation, which in 2008 reached the highest renewal rate on record, when women took 20.6% of the 12,879 seats up for renewal in 54 countries. Mensah-Kutin also states that the pivotal role of politics and power relations, and their complexities in state and civil society relationships in West Africa, requires a more inclusive gender-responsive participatory electoral system than the majoritarian electoral system of the winner-takes all, male-dominated system.

Jamal's paper also provides an overview of women's political participation globally. She notes that women in the Arab world enjoy the smallest share of parliamentary seats worldwide, as they occupy only 5.7% of all parliamentary seats in the region.⁷ This is compared to 15% in sub-Saharan Africa and 12.9% in Latin America and the Caribbean countries.

Jamal explores how some Arab countries have tried to increase the representation of women in key positions. Encouragingly, countries like Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan have recently adopted quotas that guarantee the representation of women. Furthermore, women's employment in key government offices is also on the rise in the Arab world. For example, women occupy prominent positions in the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) Ministry of Education, and the UAE Ministry of Planning reported that female employees exceed male employees in the more than 25 federal ministries.⁸ Jamal concludes that although these advancements are noteworthy, it is clear that systemic gender discrimination continues to define the political culture of the region.

In response to national and international pressure put on states in Eastern and Southern Africa in the 1990s, various governments in the region have since developed new institutions such as special Gender or Women's Commissions, Women's Ministries, or Special Offices on the Status of Women in order to promote gender equality. Some states have responded to the United Nations' prescriptions for eliminating gender discrimination and gender inequality in decision-making by designating special seats for women in their national parliaments or in local government. The impact of these institutions on ordinary women's lives has yet to be fully understood.

Kazi also notes the impacts of women's political representation in South Asia, where electoral democracy and a deepening public awareness of democracy and democratic rights co-exist with high levels of gender inequality. She states that the region presents a paradoxical picture in terms of women's engagement with politics and political parties; it has the largest number of female

⁷ Women in National Parliaments, Statistical Archive 2003. Accessible at: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif-arc.htm>.

⁸ According to the UAE Ministry of Planning, 2001.

heads of state in the world,⁹ in contrast to otherwise poor representation of women in formal politics. Kazi argues that the issue of under-representation of women in legislative bodies is a cross-cultural and cross-national concern, and that women's absence in politics and governance institutions is also culturally rooted. Kazi concludes by demonstrating that an equitable (re)distribution of power between men and women in decision-making bodies is integral to larger struggles for gender equality.

Mazurana's paper on women and conflict discusses another form of women's participation and representation, as she explores women's participation in official peace processes and in drafting and ratifying constitutions. She argues that at no time is women's representation more crucial, yet simultaneously more lacking, than in official negotiations that set the framework for re-organizing states and democracies. Obtaining a place at the table where civil and political discourses occur is no simple matter for women. While women's active presence in informal peace work may be thriving, their presence is nearly non-existent in official dialogues. Even when women are successful at gaining entry to negotiations, they continue to face obstacles due to patriarchal beliefs and structures that limit their ability to influence decisions. As a result, outcomes are often far from what women's rights supporters had hoped was possible. Mazurana stresses that women's representation in drafting and implementing new bills and constitutions is a key step in promoting women's rights and gender equality within transitional and post-conflict states.

Mensah-Kutin also discusses women's participation in peacebuilding in her regional paper on West Africa. She states that within the context of the region, women's role in peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts have been extremely significant. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, and Togo have all experienced conflicts which have led to the destruction of the social fabric, large-scale human rights abuses, and gender-based violence. In these situations, women have found themselves actively working to promote peace even as they have had to contend with the worst forms of atrocities unleashed on them as a result of their gender. For instance, in Cote d'Ivoire and the Casamance region of Senegal, women have contributed to household and community maintenance and survival, participated in peace negotiations and mediations within national, indigenous and regional networks, and struggled to transform political agendas.

Advancing Women's Rights and Gender Equality through the Rule of Law

Another mechanism which has impacts on women's rights and gender equality is the enactment of legal reforms, including both reforms at the national level and international conventions and declarations. The following section examines the impacts of reforms within specific regions of study, and also discusses the rule of law, and national legal reforms.

As explained in the South Asia paper, although progress has been made in the implementation of CEDAW obligations, the reluctance of states to dislodge institutionalized discrimination within the family, together with poor enforcement mechanisms, contributes to the persistence of gender

⁹Srimavo Bandaranaike and Chandrika Kumaratunga (Sri Lanka), Indira Gandhi (India), Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan), Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajed (Bangladesh) served as elected prime ministers.

inequality in family, society and state policy. Kazi explains that at the international level, the nature of the reservations entered by South Asia's three most populous states (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) to CEDAW symbolises the states' reluctance to abide by their commitments to international law. This also reflects official deference to cultural constructs of gender that legitimize discrimination against women. Kazi argues that despite modest success and gradual, albeit significant gains, all countries, and especially those in the developing South need to eliminate the structural, socio-cultural and political barriers that prevent the creation of gender-just and, by extension, truly democratic societies.

Bahdi explains that the concept of the rule of law is understood to broadly stand in opposition to arbitrary and biased decision-making. It guarantees an impartial and objective system of justice that treats all citizens equally without fear or favour. Yet, beyond this core concept, there is little agreement about the meaning or value of rule of law agendas.¹⁰ The rule of law and legal reforms, however, can be mechanisms through which women's dignity and equality can be expressed and pursued. As Bahdi notes, by speaking the language of rights, one's needs are translated from private interests to public claims, through words and concepts that the community, at all levels, has already validated. Bahdi explains that the law and legal reforms can offer a medium to confront injustices and unfairness that are built into other systems of political, social, and economic ordering, and that women's rights advocates have won significant victories through law and have generated important gains for women's dignity and equality.

However, the rule of law can also be a place where women's rights are not only silenced but where social, economic, and political power structures are replicated and work against women's rights. Therefore, as Bahdi argues, it is critical that rule of law programming focused on women's rights and democratic governance must begin with a clear definition of the rule of law, a careful analysis of the causes of women's inequality and the context in which this inequality is perpetuated and sustained, coupled with an ability and desire to harness law as an instrument of social change. This must be tempered by a sober understanding that law is unpredictable and complex in its results.

Feminist conceptions of the rule of law recognize that law is intertwined with social and economic power structures, and that harnessing women's emancipation to law is fraught with uncertainties and complications. In her background paper, Bahdi demonstrates that feminist theorizing around the rule of law recognizes the importance of using law to gain and utilize power, and to gain access to the sites in which social relations are defined and consolidated. Further, although feminists increasingly recognize the value of using law to promote women's dignity, different barriers to women's access to justice remain. Bahdi identifies social barriers, such as discrepancies between elite and marginalized women, as an area where non-governmental organizations can become engaged in supporting the realization of women's rights.

Jamal notes that the rule of law remains weak within the Middle East and North Africa region. She explains that although there are some laws that guarantee women's participation in the public sphere, they need to be further enforced. Jamal notes that the lack of legislation promoting women's presence in parliament also explains their continued marginalization. In addition, only

¹⁰See for example, RH Fallon Jr, (1997), "The Rule of Law as a Concept in Constitutional Discourse" 97 Columbia Law Review 1.

one in every two women in the Arab world is literate, and as a result this poses a challenge to their comprehension and awareness of laws and legal reforms.

Lastly, there have been powerful, though not always comfortable, alliances formed between women in decision-making positions, feminist researchers, women's organizations, and policy-makers to advance democratic governance and the rule of law. Bahdi explains that a good example of this is the development of legal norms and war crimes in the International Criminal Tribunal set up to try war crimes in Rwanda. In this case, Prosecutor Louise Arbour worked closely with women's rights organizations and feminist lawyers/researchers to help shape the law,¹¹ which for the first time resulted in rape being acknowledged as constituting an act of torture and genocide.¹²

Methodological Issues

Each of the background papers discusses various methodological challenges associated with conducting research in the field of democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality.

Mazurana argues that case studies are critical, and must be selected with an eye to canvassing as wide a geographic range as possible and based on the extensiveness of the analysis offered. These case studies would require that researchers gather information at the community level, and therefore research would need to be conducted over a longer-term period with sustained funding.

In terms of conducting comprehensive literature reviews on democratic governance and women's rights, Bahdi found that access to information was a methodological challenge of the research. She notes that women's experiences are less likely to be documented in written form, and research is often conducted exclusively in English, excluding diverse groups from participating in the research process.

Waring and Bahdi both drew on their own on-the-ground experiences in their papers, illustrating the value of employing methodologies such as the collection of life histories as a way to overcome the methodological challenges as described above. For instance, Bahdi explains that she drew from her experiences with rule of law programming in Palestine, in order to contribute to the data set for her paper; whereas Waring drew from her own experiences and observations as a former Member of Parliament in New Zealand.

These commissioned papers make a concrete contribution to the current research and literature on the field of democratic governance and women's rights. The papers extend beyond much of the current literature, which mentions women only tangentially and fails to explore the nuances of how women access rights within specific contexts and situations.

¹¹ See for example the letter from various women's human rights organizations urging that charges against Jean Paul Akayesu dated May 27, 1997 be amended to include rape and other sexual violence within the framework of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Letter available online at: http://www.womensrightscoalition.org/site/advocacyDossiers/rwanda/Akayesu/Akayesu_970527.pdf.

¹² The dossier of documents filed in the Prosecutor v. Akayesu can be found at http://www.womensrightscoalition.org/site/advocacyDossiers/rwanda/index_en.php#6.

Emerging Areas for Research

The eight background papers provide rich regional and global data on the topic of democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality. The papers also provide insights on potential future research topics, identified by the authors as either emerging areas for research, or recognized gaps in the current field. The following research topics may contribute to the potential shaping of IDRC's new global research initiative.

Mazurana argues that there is a need to produce research on the links between women's experiences and rights, armed conflict and transition periods, governance issues, and the international agenda of upholding women's rights. Moreover, she states that more research is needed where we see feminist-informed versions of democratic good governance coming out of situations of armed conflict. Interestingly, she also suggests that future research should investigate the overlap in demands by various women who are thinking and acting politically during periods of transition from conflict, and the ways in which they move forward their demands to intersect with governance systems.

Authors Bareiro and Torres García state that a new research agenda on gender and democratic governance in Latin America and the Caribbean could focus on the impacts of women's increased participation in traditionally male dominated fields, and the ways in which a gender perspective could be included more broadly into public institutions, and not only through institutions or ministries of women affairs. The authors argue that a special focus should be made on the impact of legislation on equality and its interrelation with democratic governance. Concerning women's integration into politics, Bareiro and Torres García also recommend that it would be interesting to look at how women in power exercise their leadership, and whether or not their presence really makes a difference with regard to equality and women's rights. Lastly, the authors state that examining internal processes of democratization within political parties and investigating the gender dimensions of regional integration processes would also be worth studying.

Similarly, Meintjes' paper on Eastern and Southern Africa points to the need to explore possibilities for transforming gender power relations in the context of the highly patriarchal political opportunity structure in the region. Further, she explains how the HIV/AIDS pandemic has unleashed a renewed backlash against the very idea of gender equality within societies themselves, and how this has had detrimental effects which have undermined many of the social and political gains that women have made in the last 25 years.

Mensah-Kutin's paper on West Africa explores a number of potential research areas where new research projects could become engaged. These topics include: a comparative analysis between Anglophone and Francophone countries; the methodological approaches of doing feminist research; militarisation; women's rights and governance; the impacts of the global financial crisis; and the relationship between histories, traditions, and religions, and how they impact women's lives at different levels in transitional democratic processes. To note, Mensah-Kutin also suggests future research to examine the role of decentralization and its impacts on women's rights in West Africa, an area of study that has previously been examined by WRC's multi-regional initiative on women's rights and decentralization.

The South Asia regional paper demonstrates the importance of recognizing and studying the role of women's movements in democratization, and the effects this can have on women's rights, and gender equality. In this paper, Kazi notes that the significance of civil society in democracy has special relevance in contexts such as South Asia, where the degeneration and discrediting of mainstream political parties and public disenchantment with non-responsive regimes have generated a variety of struggles and social movements for justice. Therefore, civil society-led struggles in the region embodied a collective, participatory space for citizens to re-engage with the state and demand civil and political rights. Looking forward, Kazi argues that civil society movements play an important role in promoting greater democratization, and yet the literature on democratization makes little mention of gender or women's political activism within civil society movements. Therefore, this is a critical avenue of investigation.

In reference to Eastern and Southern Africa, Meintjes discusses civil society and explains that the term has various meanings, as it can also be used to mean civil organization. In this sense, citizens are distinguished from the arena of civil organisation, and civil society is used to refer to the field of voluntary associations, such as women's groups, church groups or youth groups, which do not necessarily have direct political motivations.

All of the papers identify a need to support research that is relevant to women's lives, and will promote gender justice. This requires serious efforts in bridging the gaps between "academic" and "activist" research, an area where IDRC's new initiative can fill a critical niche. It is critical that any future areas of research address pertinent issues of concern for women within their respective regions, and that this research incorporates their experiences in the household, community, and in public life.

Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout the background papers, it is clear that any analysis of democratization that fails to incorporate a gendered perspective will be flawed. Therefore, it is critical that any future studies of democratic governance be improved by creating a framework for analysing the interplay between gender relations, women's rights, and democratization.

Gender equality and egalitarian relations between men and women are an essential component of an inclusive and representative democratic society. The participation of women and women's movements in political processes is instrumental in fostering democratization and gender sensitive modes of governance. Furthermore, as Kazi notes, gender equality and social justice must constitute one of the core pillars of democratic governance. If democratic governance is to be compatible with and advance women's rights, it should not only embody a greater presence of women in formal politics, but more fundamentally, it should acknowledge, be sensitive of and responsive to the social and economic disparities between men and women.

Moving forward, future research on the field of democratic governance and women's rights, including this IDRC initiative, should look towards achieving "gender-just governance," premised on the demand for gender equality, an agenda of transformative change, and the active

engagement of women, feminists, and social movements, in order to effect changes within institutions and processes of governance at local, national, and international levels. As the eight background papers demonstrate, such research will provide a basis for relevant national, regional, and international policies and strategies needed to promote women's rights as a central feature of democratic governance.

Appendix: Background Papers

Regional Papers

Bareiro, Olinda and Isabel Torres García:

Gobernabilidad democrática, derechos de las mujeres y género en América Latina y el Caribe

Jamal, Amaney:

Democratic Governance and Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa

Kazi, Seema:

Democratic Governance and Women's Rights in South Asia

Mensah-Kutin, Rose:

Democratic Governance and Women's Rights in West Africa

Meintjes, Sheila:

Gender, Governance and Democracy: Southern and Eastern Africa

Thematic Papers

Bahdi, Reem:

Women's Access to Justice: Texts and Contexts

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