

## Research Proposal

Name of research project: Exploring global-local interfaces in mobilisation around sexual rights and women's empowerment

Submitted by (researcher(s) and hub): Susie Jolly, Global Hub

RPC theme: Changing Narratives of Sexuality

---

### Summary (100 words)

**This research project will look at a small number of cases of local, national or regional initiatives on sexual rights and women's empowerment, examining how these interact with international influences such as conservative religious revivals, international sexual rights mobilisation and the global development industry. The research will explore the following questions: How do global forces impact on these initiatives? How do these initiatives try, succeed, or fail to use the global forces to their advantage, and to influence the course of international events? Why do some local initiatives and not others succeed in impacting on global spaces? Who in the local has access to the global? What can be learned from the strategies deployed that is relevant to other organisations, both global and local?**

---

### Project Proposal (*no less than* 1000 words overall)

*Please complete all sections*

#### 1. Justification

##### 1.1 What change does the research seek to bring about?

*Use this section to describe what change the proposed research seeks to bring about, in whom and why [recognising that much research is aimed at contributing to knowledge-for-understanding rather than for action - so even if it feels intangible, it's good to think this through!]*

Lessons learned from the research should be convincingly communicated to global development agencies, to enable more effective and democratic support of sexual rights struggles locally and at other levels.

Knowledge gained from the research should be communicated to local sexual rights advocates to support wider and more democratic access to global forums of influence, and global development industry resources.

## 1.2 How is the research linked to this change?

*Use this section to describe how this research project will contribute to the change you'd like to see happen - what is it about what you'll do that will make this contribution?*

Today's resurgence of religious fundamentalisms, whether Christian, Muslim, or Hindu, makes work on sexual rights more difficult. In many contexts sexual rights struggles are condemned as western or foreign to local cultures. Ironically, some western influences such as the US conditionalities on HIV/AIDS funding explicitly seek to suppress rights around sexuality.

At the same time, mobilisation around sexual rights is strong, as can be seen at the World Social Forums and AWID conferences. Landmark agreements on human rights have been reached in the United Nations in Vienna, Cairo, and Beijing in the 1990s related to sexuality and women's power over their own bodies, and work on these issues continues in some UN bodies. For the first time, there are explicit funding lines for sexuality related work in various development agencies.

How do such international forces influence local, national and regional initiatives seeking to empower women through sexual rights? How do these initiatives try, succeed or fail to negotiate these conflicting international trends? How do they influence debate and action internationally, when they do so at all? Who from the local has access to the global? And when local agendas are pursued, how representative is this of local demands and needs?

- How do international forces influence local, national and regional initiatives on sexual rights and women's empowerment?
- How do local, national and regional initiatives seeking to empower women through sexual rights, try, succeed or fail to negotiate conflicting international trends?
- How do they influence debate and action internationally when they do so at all? Who from the local has access to the global? And when local agendas are pursued, how representative is this of local demands and needs?
- What can be learned from the strategies they deploy that is relevant to other organisations, both global and local, seeking to empower women through sexual rights struggles in the context of conflicting international pressures around sexual rights?

This research will explore these questions. Where lessons can be learned and knowledge gained, these will be communicated to global development industry actors and local sexual rights advocates with the aim of bringing about changes as described in 1.1.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 How will you carry out your research?

*Use this section to tell us about the methods you intend to use and the process you intend to pursue in order to address section 1 - i.e. carrying out a survey and holding a workshop to bring together key actors to debate its findings, holding a workshop to identify key issues and then following up with interviews etc.*

Literature review building on existing review by Susie and other BRIDGE team members for BRIDGE Cutting Edge Pack on Gender and Sexuality.

Identify between one and three initiatives to research. Discuss (on email and subsequently in person) research methodologies with a small number of key activists/organisers/stakeholders in the initiative. Research these initiatives through: reading available documentation, interviews, focus groups and discussions with those involved.

## 2.2 Who will you do your research with?

*Use this section to tell us about who will be participating in your research, i.e. what kinds of women and men (by class, age, locality), and how you will select them.*

Possible initiatives to work together with AND research could be:

- An initiative in which another RPC member is involved which is negotiating global pressures and seeking to influence global discourses. I am in discussion with Firdous Azim in the South Asia hub about working with her partners in the region, possibly in Pakistan.
- The thriving network of sexual rights NGOs in Delhi or India more broadly, and their engagement both with Western influences coming in, and their own influence in the South Asian region and beyond, as well as with Hindu and Muslim fundamentalisms, which are often a mix of local and global. While many such NGOs have posed themselves as secular movements in direct opposition to religious fundamentalisms, there has also been some cooption of women's struggles against sexual violence by Hindu nationalist rhetoric on protecting the purity of Hindu women (Kapur, R., 2005, *Erotic Justice: Law and the New Politics of Postcolonialism*, London: Glasshouse Press).
- A Chinese sexual rights initiative (eg. Women's Federation engagement with family planning policies, or the burgeoning lesbian movement, or the Sexuality and Gender Institutes at People's University, or Zhongshan University) which attempt to tactically deploy pressure by international human rights movements, interest by western media, and funding opportunities from international donors, without alienating official structures in China. They also increasingly participate in international fora and influence perceptions of China and discourses on women's sexual rights at an international level.
- African organisations affected by US conditionalities around abstinence promotion, abortion, and sex work are influencing work on gender and HIV/AIDS. This could link into the proposed IDS research project with Jerker Edstrom on effects of donor conditionalities on HIV/AIDS funding. It could also link into the many other pieces of research being done on the effects of US conditionalities on HIV/AIDS funding in African countries. According to my investigations so far, none of these initiatives focus on gender, women or empowerment, so this research would complement and build on their efforts.

### **2.3 Who will be involved in doing the research?**

*Use this section to tell us about who will be part of the research team and about any collaborative links you would like to pursue with other hubs i.e. by inviting someone from another hub to attend a workshop or conduct interviews with you at a particular stage in the process etc.*

Firdous Azim may be on the research team. RPC Sexuality theme members will be invited to contribute advice, will receive the briefing produced and invited to the workshop/exchange organised.

## **3. Communications**

### **3.1 Who are your key audiences?**

*Use this section to identify your key audiences, using our categorisation of audiences in the communications strategy*

Key audiences are: Those involved in sexuality related interventions, particularly around HIV/AIDS, or sexual and reproductive health and rights. This will include governments, development industry, NGOs, and activists.

### **3.2 How do you plan to reach them?**

*Use this section to tell us of what you'd do to reach each of these audiences and how you'll engage them with the research process itself (i.e. inviting them to a workshop rather than waiting to give them the final findings, sharing drafts with them for comment rather than sending the final version, getting the media interested in the research itself etc.)*

With advice from IDS Communications Department, I will write a press release and seek to stimulate media interest in the research results, both in the UK, and in the country of research.

### **3.3 How will you know if you've managed to succeed in this?**

*Use this section to tell us how the impact of your research communications can be assessed - how would you know if you'd managed to change how people think about women's empowerment issues?*

I will include a questionnaire with the briefing. I will carry out e-mail exchanges/phone or face to face discussions with at least 5 members of key audiences, to seek their feedback on research results and how to communicate these results and maximise impact. The workshop/exchange will also provide an opportunity for feedback.

### **3.4 Outputs**

*Use this section to list expected outputs from the research: publications, briefings, workshops etc. and approximately when you expect them to be completed.*

Communications will include an accessible briefing (possibly in the form of an IDS policy briefing), possibly a workshop for key stakeholders, or other meeting/exchange to communicate findings.

## **4. Capacity Building**

### **4.1 What capacity will be built through the research**

*Use this section to tell us about how the research will contribute to building your own capacity and those who work with you, as well as any specific capacity building activities you will undertake as part of the research (i.e. training researchers who work with you, involving students etc.)*

The research will build capacity among activists, and in the development industry to work more effectively on sexuality and women's empowerment and share strategies to deal with the current backlash. The research should also have the effect of building capacity of myself and other RPC partners involved in understanding how to deal with challenges of the current context in advancing work on women's sexual rights.

#### **4.2 What support will you need to do this?**

*Tell us about any support you feel you'll need from the theme convenors, hub convenors or the RPC in general - i.e. access to (including translation) literature, skills you'll need to acquire etc.*

Advice from Charmaine Pereira and others in the Sexuality theme group.

### **5. Collaboration**

#### **5.1 What other RPC members will you collaborate with?**

*Use this to tell us about any ideas you've developed for collaboration with people from other hubs (whether or not this involves visiting each other i.e. you might collaborate by exchanging materials and using email to discuss plans so they evolve in similar directions)*

I am in discussion with Firdous Azim in the South Asia hub about working with her partners in the region, possibly in Pakistan. Further discussion is needed with other RPC members to see if any are interested in collaborating on this project.

### **6. Project Milestones**

*Use this section to itemise project milestones (i.e. timing of key events, when you will start the research and when you plan to finish it, including any visits you plan to make excluding thematic workshop events)*

August – September 2007 Literature review and research plan (total 5 days)

October 2007 – February 2008 Researching interventions and write up (total 20 days)

March – June 2008 Writing up policy/programme briefing (5 days), setting up and organising workshop/exchange with target audiences (5 days)

Total: 35 days