

**RPC: Pathways of Women's Empowerment**  
**GLOBAL HUB: COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**  
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**1. Introduction**

This communication strategy aims to influence global development policy actors act to promote sustainable pathways of women's empowerment. The strategy is informed by a theoretical understanding of the role of power in effective communications.

The global hub of the RPC is concerned with the actors, norms, beliefs, ideas, networks and institutions associated with global policy processes that impact on women's empowerment. Its primary communication aim is to work with and support those feminists active in global arenas – in civil society networks, inside governments, in international development agencies, academia or in the media – with new ideas and knowledge for making more informed decisions as to where and how to invest their energies and thus through their actions be more fruitful in supporting the construction of pathways of women's empowerment. We want them to think more discursively, to act more politically and to influence others to design and implement policies that respond to the findings from the global hub research programme.

This paper describes the strategy's principles and means followed by an indicative action plan for the first two years of the programme.

**2. Power and change**

**The global hub environment**

This is a highly challenging environment. Some elements are very durable and extremely difficult to shift. An apparent major transformation in global policy for gender equality and women's empowerment, culminating in the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference, subsequently very rapidly lost its momentum. More established ways of thinking about development and societal change regained centre stage; Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Millennium Development Goals ignored the role of power, culture and history in shaping individual and societal destinies.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously conservative forces, notably the unholy alliance of religious fundamentalists already active at Beijing when the Vatican and Iran jointly resisted efforts to advance women's sexual rights, have been strengthened during the last

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<sup>1</sup> This note benefits considerably from a discussion of the global hub's communication strategy at the hub's advisory group meeting held in London on 16/17 November 2006.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Eyben (2006) The road not taken: international aid's choice of Copenhagen over Beijing' *Third World Quarterly* 27, 6

decade as a result of the rise of the evangelical religious right in the United States and elsewhere.

At the same time, it is a policy environment highly susceptible to wider trends in the global political economy so that policy actors' concerns, for example about globalising markets or security threats from terrorists can distort ways of thinking and priorities in relation to other issues such as promoting women's empowerment.

Finally, and more positively, looking back over the last hundred years, it is possible to discern a truly extraordinary transformation in global thinking about women and men in society and the nature of the relations between them. Thus, bearing in mind the challenges outlined above, the research question for the RPC global hub is how the policy and practice of international development can become more open to, engage with and help speed up these transformative processes. Our communication strategy is part of that research question. Through the specific research projects that the hub is sponsoring, we expect to identify opportunities (pathways) for influencing policy change. More widely, by framing our strategy within a theoretical perspective concerning the relations between power and knowledge we plan for our communications to contribute to accelerating these transformative processes.

### **Power/knowledge in the global development policy environment**

Why has so much research about women and gender relations over the last thirty years had so little impact on the way development is done? This is a fundamental question for the global hub and our communication strategy; to answer it requires communicating the proposition that power shapes what is acceptable evidence.

Feminist studies have challenged the idea of objective value-free knowledge, de-linked from power. Knowledge – how we understand and describe the world – is contingent on our time and place and the relations of power that shape our lives. Not only is knowledge power but power is knowledge. Power/knowledge works through discourses that frame what is thinkable and do-able. Discourses are the way that things are said or written, but also concrete activities associated with words - such the logical framework that is a requirement for this inception report - and that both reflect and seek to reinforce a certain way of thinking about change that is contrary to what the RPC seeks to do. .

Our communications strategy must recognise and address this *discursive dissonance* between the purpose of the RPC – to reveal hidden pathways

through the illumination offered by different explanatory lenses - and the orthodoxy of conventional development practice. That DFID is funding us demonstrates an open-ness to new ways of thinking and action (also present in other international aid agencies) that our strategy must exploit and build upon. Drawing on theories of regimes of truth production can help here.

Power shapes what is 'truth'. In the middle ages, if someone had said the earth moved round the sun it would have been a statement of a lunatic. But by the time Galileo said it that regime of truth production was crumbling and because the same statement had become more threatening it was treated as heresy. Less than one hundred years later Galileo's communication had become *the* way of thinking about this matter. <sup>3</sup>

We are currently in a Galileo moment of transition in terms of feminist and related epistemologies challenging conventional discourses of knowledge and therefore what can and should be communicated. At the moment, mainstream development thinking requires that for knowledge to be judged as evidence it must be presented in a certain way. At a recent workshop relating to the findings from another research programme, an adviser in DFID's Policy Division said "I need more concrete data if I am able to persuade senior people. I need amalgamation. There are lots of stories that are important and we never know whether they add up to anything. I am convinced that it adds up, but I cannot convince people in DFID that it adds up." <sup>4</sup>

In his work on power and organisational change, Clegg proposes three interlocking levels or circuits, of power<sup>5</sup>. The most visible is 'episodic power' in which one person exercises power over another, for example, when a senior manager in DFID requires that research findings be communicated in the form of statistics as the only acceptable form of evidence. Such an interaction is defined and shaped by the rules, relations and resources (structure or dispositional arrangements) that constitute the episodic power that is visible in the relation between the senior manager and the DFID adviser. These dispositional arrangements are in turn shaped by the more fundamental systemic forces, including discourses, that define the rules of the game. Each time A gets B to do what A wants, he is not only achieving a desired outcome but is also confirming the dispositional arrangements of the game that in turn reinforce and maintain the overall truth regime.

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<sup>3</sup> "What gives an utterance the status of a statement is that it meets with felicity within a regime of truth production" M. Haugaard (1997) *The Constitution of Power* Manchester UP: 169

<sup>4</sup> Statement made at a workshop held at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies on 4 July 2006 on the occasion of the launch of 'Building Effective States: Taking a Citizens' Perspective'.

<sup>5</sup> S. Clegg (1989) *Frameworks of Power* London: Sage

In its guidance notes on communication strategies for RPCs. DFID draws on the ODI RAPID work that makes a strong and at first glance sensible case for packaging information to suit organisations' cultural proclivities. However, if we were to communicate our findings within the frame of the current truth regime – one in which power insists on only certain kinds of evidence as being 'true' - we would be reinforcing that very thing we are seeking to change. Herein lays our challenge. How do we work with our primary audience of feminist activists in discovering and sharing pathways for changing global policy and practice while at the same time supporting them to communicate the RPC findings so that our and their credibility is sustained (and our financing continues) within the very regime we are trying to change?

Drawing on Clegg's framework, we can respond to this dilemma through what he terms 'outflanking manoeuvres' whereby alliances and networks mobilise to take advantage of crisis and instability in the dispositional and systemic circuits of power. We have this opportunity. A number of contradictory trends in the global policy environment indicate that such a moment of instability is currently present – also manifested by the very recent resurgence of concern and interest in gender equality strategies as indicated by a number of new action plans being developed in the international aid community.

One such trend, arising from the invasion of Iraq and other incidents, is the growing scepticism that evidence is the driver of political decisions. This provides opportunities for more innovative and diverse understandings of how policy happens that can contribute to communicating the significance of RPC findings.<sup>6</sup> Another trend that appears to contradict the first is the current emphasis, as manifested in the Paris Declaration, on technical managing for results that ignores political contexts and in which outcomes must be pre-determined, 'concrete and measurable'.<sup>7</sup> Yet, a further contradiction is the ever-increasing global policy interest in citizens' voice and participation – an interest that would appear to provide an environment for accepting a diversity of ways of knowing in which inclusive and deliberative dialogues are the basis for responsive and appropriate policy in a dynamic and often unpredictable political world.

These contradictions are signs of an unstable discursive environment that reduces policy actors' immunity (as frequently changing weather and temperatures causes a shock to the body's system) and points to a *viral*

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<sup>6</sup> See forthcoming RPC working paper on policy processes.

<sup>7</sup> See World Bank 2006 'Gender Equality as Smart Economics'.

*communication method* as the means of influencing for change (see section 4). To detail what this means in practice first requires defining the primary audience that we aim to catch and pass on 'the cold'.

### **3. Audiences**

#### **Our primary audience**

Bearing in mind the power/knowledge dilemmas discussed above, the global hub's primary audience is feminist activists already organised in diverse formal and informal networks and operating in global spaces and institutions. Networks already identified and with whom the hub has been actively communicating during the inception phase include:

- *Regional hubs* of the RPC are a key primary audience for findings from the global hub in terms of their understanding better how to engage with global policy actors in their own regions as well as participating in global policy spaces. The global hub convenor participated in the South Asia scoping workshop in July and two regional hub representatives came to the global hub advisory group meeting in November.
- *Civil society trans-national feminist and development networks* such as AWID (represented at the global hub scoping workshop), WEDO and WIEGO (participating in a consultation meeting organised at the Commission for the Status of Women in February 2006), DAWN and Women Living Under Moslem Law (represented at the advisory group meeting in November 2006).
- *United Nations inter-agency group*, facilitated by UNIFEM, a consortium member which included a meeting organised at the CSW.
- *UK development networks*: the Development Studies Association gender network and the Gender and Development Network (British development NGOs) including participation in a meeting held at Queen Elisabeth House, Oxford in October 2006. Members of these networks were also participants at a panel session on the international practice and gender equality organised by One World Action on behalf of the global hub at DFID Head Office in November 2006.
- *DAC Gendernet* with participation in its annual meeting in June 2006 and subsequently invited to speak at its special meeting on gender strategies in November 2006.
- *DFID advisers* have so far not been contacted directly as a whole group but the inception phase has been used for developing relations with the Gender and Rights advisor (who sits on the global hub advisory group) and the Head of Social Development Profession.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The regional hubs have independently established contact with SDAs working in their regions.

Other networks already identified but with whom direct links have not yet been made include the Commonwealth Ministers for Women; the global hub convenor is currently in discussion with the Commonwealth Secretariat concerning the possibility of running a one day workshop for the Ministers on the occasion of their tri-annual meeting in June 2007. Women parliamentarians with whom the British Council has been active are another potential audience yet to be reached. Feminist activists working for change in the global corporate sector and in the global media are also other potential primary audiences with whom only some initial contact has as yet been made.

Experience from the inception phase indicates that not all members of these various formal networks and groupings are feminist activists – in the sense of being actively and passionately committed to a transformational agenda – and therefore capable of transmitting the virus. This is particularly the case for those who are international or government civil servants who may be occupying their position for more humdrum reasons and may resist efforts to challenge prevailing power relations. There is also another category of people with the potential for activism but who currently feel disempowered and disenchanted; with this latter group, the communication efforts of the RPC could play a role in reinvigorating their commitment by helping them identify practical steps for changing the policy environment.

In addition to these formal networks are looser and less visible social networks based on friendship and trust, operating within and between these more formal organisational arrangements. It is the global hub convenor's own such informal network that she plans to draw upon in one of the hub's research projects involving a group of feminist activists in a process of co-enquiry into their struggles and experiences in promoting women's empowerment in international aid bureaucracies. One of the questions it is hoped this group will explore is "How does power discipline their autonomy in terms of their capacity for reflexive learning and their choices concerning the kinds of knowledge they use in internal advocacy?"

### **Secondary audiences**

These are defined as the audiences with whom our various categories of primary audience will be communicating. In many instances, our primary audience already has a very clear idea of what are effective communication strategies in relation to their stakeholders but where necessary we will help them identify the blockers, the agnostics and drivers to see who the players are, who to target and who to out-manoeuvre. We will encourage conscious awareness of the power of discourse, helping them stand back and examine the framing of issues relating to women's empowerment and gender equality

and challenging them in their own communications strategies as to whether by default they are reinforcing the very practices they are seeking to change.

Secondary audiences need to be defined by our primary audience but who these are and what could be done to influence them might include the following:

- For the regional hubs, this might include politicians and officials in developing countries who enter a global policy space such as a meeting of the Commission for the Status of Women with the primary motivation of securing some change there in order to support and reinforce change back home. A greater awareness of the politics of such spaces can enable them to be more effective in promoting their agendas.
- For members of the DAC Gendernet, this might include the staff in the ministries or aid agencies to which they belong. How can they use the RPC findings both through their own informal networks in their organizations as well as in communicating RPC research to the agnostics in senior management in a way that simultaneously represents them as credible players within the existing power arrangements yet at the same time provokes a process of transformational change?

#### **4. Communication pathways**

Our communication pathways will be based on the principal of viral communication. This requires (1) free products or services, (2) easy transmission, (3) taking advantage of shared motivation (4) using existing networks, and (5) using others' resources and infrastructure.<sup>9</sup> These are each discussed in turn in relation to both primary and secondary audiences.

##### **Free products**

Our primary audience will not have to pay for the core global hub research although it is hoped that one of the outcomes of the communication strategy will be a preparedness to identify and provide additional financing to expand the research programme. Evidence of effectiveness in communication efforts during the inception phase are reflected in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' verbal commitment to funding the work on Security Resolution 1325 and in the DAC Gendernet commissioning the global hub convenor to speak at its meeting in November 2006. Securing additional funding will also be an indicator of ease of transmission from primary to secondary audience as in most cases our primary stakeholders will need authorization from others whom they must convince.

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<sup>9</sup> Adapted from L. Porter (2006). 'A Comparison of Viral Advertising to Television Advertising' <http://list.msu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0601e&L=aejmc&T=0&P=2744> accessed 26 November 2006

### **Easy transmission**

During the inception phase, the communication effort has focused on face to face interaction rather than on the production of printed materials. Following this experience, a face to face strategy has been chosen as our principal means of communication between the global hub and primary audiences and we hope between them and their stakeholders. It is based on a recognition that our primary audience suffers from information over-load in terms of written products. While in response to this overload it is an audience for whom products such as short policy briefs have been developed, these tend to go directly into wastepaper baskets unless accompanied by face to face communication. However we may continue to produce some such briefs and other glossy documents; when prominently displayed in offices they symbolize an organizational commitment to an issue and thus can be used by activists to hold the organization accountable.<sup>10</sup>

Experience with reading weeks for DFID social development advisers has however demonstrated that our audience is ready and interested in studying and debating more academic products, provided this can be done as part of a specific capacity building programme. Based on this experience, in years three and four, the global hub will offer self-financing women's empowerment reading weeks for targeted sections of our primary audience.

One pathway to be explored is engaging with sympathetic elements in the media – discussions have already started with *Open Democracy* – as a means to more public airing of controversial issues arising from the global hub research. A film about pathways within the global hub may also be commissioned towards the end of the programme period if some sections of the primary audience are prepared to go public in this manner. Finally, formulae such as 'Question Time' with a group of panelists and opportunities for audience participation provide opportunities for airing controversies and looking at issues from different vantage points that more formal seminars often fail to do.

All publicly available material in terms of written and other media products will be placed on the global hub page of the Pathways website with hot links to sites representing the work of key sections of our primary audience, such as the DAC Gendernet and DAWN.

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<sup>10</sup> R. Eyben (2004) 'The battle over booklets: gender, myths and power in the British aid programme' *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 35 no.4

Overall in terms of transmission through to secondary audiences, the challenge is the extent to which primary stakeholders are able to change their behaviour sufficiently to make the virus easily transmissible and thus have an impact on our secondary audiences that would not otherwise have occurred. This is a research question for the co-enquiry project already mentioned.

### **Shared motivation**

Our primary audience is defined by shared motivation but to pass the virus onto the diverse secondary audiences requires a context specific examination of the shared motivation in relation to each set of actors. For reasons discussed earlier, this will be very challenging because of the risk of using motives and values that might be counter-productive to the RPC's transformative agenda – for example, the use by World Bank staff of the efficiency argument in which investment in women is seen as useful for economic growth rather than changing societal relations in favour of social justice for all. This risk has implications for where and how to publicise RPC work. For example, the impact of effective communication with one set of secondary audiences might alienate another primary or secondary audience. Thus an important issue for the implementation of the communication strategy is how to engage with each primary audience in such a way that they in turn can communicate effectively with their own audiences without the virus significantly transmuting to adapt to the world view of that secondary audience and in so doing becoming harmless - losing its potential to change ideas and behaviour.

### **Using existing networks**

As discussed in section 3, a relationships approach is the fundamental principle that drives this communication strategy. We will take every opportunity within the means available to us to link up with other networks involved in research and advocacy on women's empowerment and global policy processes.

Our focus on relationships draws on thinking from a wider body of current research and practice that looks at social and organisational change through the lens of complexity. Complexity theory posits that self-organising sets of relationships through networks rather than hierarchical structures are a key element in societal change. This challenges a bureaucratic ideology that ignores the dynamics of relations that shape people's behaviour and that sees the world in terms of bounded units of control, an ideology that it is argued here prevents the learning necessary to respond to the complex and dynamic environments in which global policy is shaped and contested.

Testing the explanatory utility of this theory will be one of the principal means by which we expect to monitor the communication strategy, paying particular attention to communication through informal social networks. However, experience to date with e-for a as a means of establishing and maintaining networks among globally dispersed policy actors has not been promising – possibly because they are already having to handle such a massive load of email material – and so unless we find a very strong demand for this, such an investment will not be undertaken,

### **Using others' resources and infrastructure**

We have learnt that trying to bring our diverse and very busy globe-hopping audience into a space we have created is not at all easy. Many of our A list of invitees to the global scoping workshop were not able to attend because of other commitments. That the majority of our audience are middle-aged women is a further constraint: caring responsibilities for children and elderly parents resulted in a number of last minute cancellations to the scoping workshop.

Undoubtedly, as the RPC gets better known, so it is likely that coming to a specially organized meeting might become more of a priority. The level of acceptance for the global hub advisory group meeting in November was higher than for the scoping workshop. This was also helped by taking advantage of the convening power of One World Action who organized the latter meeting.

However, convening special meetings should always be second to seeking opportunities for going to where members of our audience are already gathered for other purposes and carving out some space and time to engage their attention. Meetings of DAC Gendernet, AWID and the Commission of the Status of Women will be regular events for communicating with our primary audience through interactive workshops and debates

This principle of making use of others resources and infrastructure is one that we will explore with our primary audiences in helping them engage with their own stakeholders.

### **Monitoring**

The strategy will be principally monitored and adapted for its influence on the global hub's primary audience. This will be done through:

(a) the global advisory group composed of representatives from the various sections of our primary audience and that will meet annually and has regular review of the communication strategy within its terms of reference

(b) requesting feedback from those participating in events where RPC messages are being communicated

(c) tracking verbal and written utterances by our primary audience for evidence of having engaged with the RPC and having changed ideas and behaviour as a result of this.

If further resources become available to the global hub, a more extensive research effort will be undertaken using the services of an independent consultant to check with primary audiences on the relevance and utility of RPC communications compared with other sources of information they use for influencing the secondary audiences.

**Indicative Action Plan for Communications Strategy of Global Hub 2007-2008\***

Year	Regional hubs	Civil society global networks	UN inter agency group	UK development networks	DAC Gendernet	Politicians	Media	DFD advisors
2007	Advisory group	Web Exploratory Advisory group	Announcements	Advisory group	Advisory group		Article in Open Democracy	Advisory group
			Participation in co-enquiry group	Participation in co-enquiry group	Participation in co-enquiry group	Participation in co-enquiry group		Participation in co-enquiry group
		Workshop Commission for Women	at Status of	Hosting influencing meeting with DSA and GAD	Global hub convenor at annual meeting	Workshop for Commonwealth Ministers for Women		
	Dialogue on	Concepts of	Women's	Empowerment in	Global Policy	Spaces and Working	Paper	published
2008	Advisory group	Advisory group		Advisory group	Advisory group		Article in media	Advisory group
			Co-enquiry group	Co-enquiry group	Co-enquiry group	Co-enquiry group		Co-enquiry group
		Workshop Commission for Women	at Status of	Hub participates in GAD meetings	Global hub convenor at annual meeting			Reading week
	Conference in Ghana on	Mobilising	Resources and	report published				

\* This does not include the precise communication activities for the changing lives/changing markets proposal and the sexuality and development proposal as these are still being fully developed. However, it is expected that workshops will be organized with reference to both projects and briefs and reports produced.