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# Poverty and Sexuality: What are the connections?

Overview and Literature Review

September 2010



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# Executive Summary

Few studies and reports examine the relationship between poverty and the denial of sexual rights. However, an emerging literature by researchers, activists and organisations shows that in many cases, poor people are more vulnerable to abuses of sexual rights, and that such abuses can entrench poverty. Much of this literature is by Southern authors, and much consists of grey literature, organisational reports, and occasional considerations of the connections in pieces of writing for which poverty sexuality interconnections are not the main focus. Nowhere is the evidence drawn together in systematic fashion. This paper brings this evidence together.

This overview and literature review illustrates the necessity for economic policies and poverty reduction efforts to take account of sexuality. If they don't, they risk exacerbating exclusions and inequalities, and becoming less effective. It is hoped that this paper will support the work of donors, policy makers and activists in the areas of economic policy and poverty reduction, as well as in struggles for sexual and economic justice more broadly.

The key messages emerging from the evidence are outlined below.

*Denial of sexual rights can contribute to poverty.* People with non-conforming sexualities may be excluded from social and economic participation, or included on adverse terms. People who do not fit gender stereotypes, people living with HIV/AIDS, divorcees, single women, sex workers, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT), and others may face family pressure, bullying in schools, discrimination by health services, rejection by employers, and stigma from communities on which they depend to take part in informal economies. People with conforming sexualities may also pay a price in material terms, such as girls who undergo genital mutilation, women who marry into unequal relationships, or men who marry into relationships where they are expected to be the breadwinner.

*Poverty can make people more vulnerable to abuse of sexual rights.* Under Sharia law in Northern Nigeria, poor people are more likely to be charged with and convicted of sodomy and illicit sex, as well as other crimes, than more middle class people. Reports from the Philippines, Zimbabwe and Cote D'Ivoire show that where family members have non-conforming gender expressions or sexual relationships, their families are more likely to reject them if they are not bringing in an income.

*However, this is not always the case.* Some richer people are more constrained in terms of expressing their sexuality for fear of jeopardising their inheritance or reputation. And some people who break rules around sexuality may gain in material terms – for example a girl who

stays in school instead of marrying young, or a man who takes care of his health instead of demonstrating his masculinity through risky sexual behaviour. Some Kothis (a feminine male identity in South Asia) report that their gender identity can have a positive impact on their economic status due to opportunities to sell sex.

*Either way, sexuality and economy are interconnected. Most economic systems are heteronormative – i.e. structured around a particular model of heterosexual relationships<sup>1</sup>. Exchanges in the informal economy depend on relationships of trust – and people with non-conforming sexualities may not be trusted by the wider community. They may instead have to rely on each other, forming economic subcultures in survivalist mode. Reports from Latin America, China, Philippines, and South Africa, show how people have to present themselves as attractive according to gender stereotypes in order to work in particular sectors such as service industries and sales. Some employment de facto requires their employees to be supported by a partner (usually wife) who takes care of the domestic and reproductive labour. Rights and benefits such as health insurance may be available to married partners, but not other kinds of partners.*

*International development programming can reinforce these heteronormative structures, such as the World Bank supported ‘Family Strengthening and Social Capital Promotion Project in Argentina’ (2001–2006), which assumed a heterosexual nuclear family providing unpaid family labour as a solution to poverty. Some aspects of this programme were progressive, such as encouraging women’s participation in the labour market, and men’s participation in domestic labour. However, this kind of programme premised on family strengthening increases pressure on people to marry and/or stay within heterosexual family set ups – something which might make life more difficult for women facing domestic violence, or LGBT, or anyone who is not happily married.*

*Ways forward:*

- *More research into the interconnections between sexuality and poverty.* Understanding of these linkages remains limited. More research is needed, including action research by poor people with stigmatised sexualities themselves.
- *Sexual rights struggles engaging with economic realities.* Much sexual rights work by organisations in the South is already engaging with the economic challenges faced by their members – such as ‘Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe’ providing emergency shelter, and running income generation and skills training. Such initiatives can help, however, skills training will not change the homophobia of employers, customers and lenders, or the heteronormative structures of the economy. Thus struggles for justice and rights more broadly must continue, and sexual rights activists need to be supported with capacity building such as in economic literacy and participatory budgeting skills to enable them to analyse economic policies and budgets, and identify and challenge economic injustices.

<sup>1</sup> Heteronormativity is the institutionalisation of the idea that only heterosexuality is normal, and only particular kinds of heterosexual relations are normal, eg. within a gender unequal marriage between people of the same class and ethnic group etc.

- *Poverty reduction efforts and economic policies engaging with sexual rights.* Poverty reduction programmes and economic policies need to be analysed for heteronormativity, to make visible the underlying assumptions about relationships and family forms, and to examine if they are excluding certain groups, or reinforcing unequal and oppressive relationships. Poverty reduction efforts must address the needs of people with stigmatised sexualities, including targeting specific initiatives to these groups. International donors need to examine their own policies and practices from these angles, and to start a dialogue with partners on these issues.

# 1 Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Some... believe that sexuality is a privileged topic, important only to affluent groups, so to talk of it betrays bad manners and bad politics on the part of sexual betters towards the deprived, who reputedly are only interested in issues that are concrete, material, and life-saving, as if sexuality were not all of these.

(Vance 1984:7)

...there continues to be little explicit attention to diverse sexualities in either mainstream economic development thought or alternative frameworks which draw inspiration from feminist, anti-poverty and ecological movements.

(Bergeron 2010:54)

Sexual rights are an important issue for Sida, and poverty reduction is a core goal. What are the links between the two? The Sida Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Action Plan for 2007–2009 identifies some links between sexuality and poverty: ‘As a result of being marginalised and socially excluded, and as a consequence of the stigma that is culturally imposed, LGBT persons are prevented from participating in society on equal terms, for example by having limited opportunities for earning a livelihood and providing for themselves. This has led to a situation of widespread poverty among LGBT persons in many countries’ (p2). The links between poverty and sexual rights abuses (for heterosexuals as well as LGBTs) are also made strongly in the Sida concept paper ‘Sexuality: A missing dimension in development’ (Runeborg 2008).

The economy is structured in ways which exclude and adversely include people according to their sexual and gender identities and relationships. Most economic systems are heteronormative – i.e. structured around a particular model of heterosexual relationships. Exchanges in the informal economy depend on relationships of trust – and people with non-conforming sexualities may not be trusted by the wider community. They may instead have to rely on each other, forming economic subcultures in survivalist mode<sup>3</sup>. Reports from Latin America, China, Philippines, and South Africa, show how people have to present themselves as attractive according to gender stereotypes in order to work in particular sectors such as service industries and sales (Edmonds 2007, Ferreyra 2008, Liu 2008, Lim 2009, Human Rights Watch/IGLHRC 2003). Some employment de facto requires their employees

<sup>2</sup> With huge thanks to Birgitta Jansson, Brigitte Junker, Ulrika Holmström, Anna Runeborg, Akshay Khanna, Carolyn Williams, Marzia Fontana, Naila Kabeer, Naomi Hossain, Patta Scott-Villiers and Alex Shankland for commenting on drafts of the paper

<sup>3</sup> From discussion with Dawn Cavanagh, Coalition of African Lesbians

to be supported by a partner (usually wife), who takes care of the domestic and reproductive labour. Rights and benefits such as health insurance may be available to married partners, but not other kinds of partners.

This overview and literature review illustrates the necessity for economic policies and poverty reduction efforts to become more inclusive and effective around sexuality, and for more attention to class and economic dimensions in sexual rights struggles. It is hoped that this paper will support Sida's work in the areas of gender, sexual and reproductive health and rights, LGBT, and poverty reduction, as well as struggles for sexual and economic justice more broadly.

The next section (2) outlines which areas of literature will be addressed, and which not. Section 3 explains what is meant by sexuality and poverty. Section 4 outlines how Sida's policy framework provides the basis for recognition of sexuality-poverty inter-linkages. Section 5 describes how sexual expression can have material impacts, and economic status can affect possibilities for sexual expression. Sexuality norms (as well as other factors) underlie these interactions. What shapes these norms? What role do global economic forces and international development organisations play in shaping them? These questions are discussed. The subsequent sections (6–9) consider how sexuality-poverty dynamics play out in some key sectors integral to well-being: health, work and livelihoods, education, housing, home, and family. Section 10 concludes with reflections on how to maximize the synergies between economic and sexual justice for greater effectiveness in both poverty reduction and sexual rights efforts. Section 11 summarises a number of key texts. Section 12 provides a bibliography.

## 2 Areas of literature covered

The literature on sexuality-poverty connections is broad, and some areas are more developed than others. This paper focuses on the areas which have been more sparsely documented.

Few studies and reports examine the relationship between poverty and denial of sexual rights. However, an emerging literature by researchers, activists and organisations shows that in many cases, poor people are more vulnerable to oppression around sexuality, and that denial of sexual rights entrenches poverty. Much of this literature is by Southern authors, and much consists of grey literature, organisational reports, and occasional considerations of the connections in pieces of writing for which poverty sexuality interconnections are not the main focus. Nowhere is the evidence drawn together in systematic fashion. This paper brings this evidence together.

A growing body of work examines how economic systems and policies assume certain kinds of relationships, desires and consumptions – both sexual and material – and the effects of these assumptions on social exclusion and inequality (Badgett 2003, Bedford 2008, Folbre 2009, Rofel 2007). Such analyses are key to understanding how economic systems exclude or adversely include people because of their sexuality and relationships. This paper brings in this understanding of the economy as heteronormative.

This paper focuses less on those areas that have been more substantially researched. There has been much exploration of household models, intra household bargaining, and relative poverty of Female Headed Households. These discussions can help illuminate some of the implications of marriage and heterosexual relationships for resource access and distribution. However, in this literature, even in feminist economists' versions, the household models have been largely assumed to be heterosexual. And female headed households are often seen as failed efforts to maintain heterosexual relationships, and compared to households with a heterosexual adult couple, rather than being compared to households headed by single men (Bergeron 2010, Chant 2004). There has also been substantial exploration of the links between poverty, risky behaviour, and HIV/AIDS, and between poverty and sexual exchange. These areas are not the focus of this paper.

There has been much critique of neo-Malthusian representations of the poor, particularly poor Africans, as having too much sex (see Tamale, cited in Williams 2007 p21). Such representations appear in development discourse which portrays third world sexuality as a problem to be contained in relation to population control, disease or violence (Jolly 2007b). While in the North sexuality is seen to be about love, in the South it is seen as in danger of entrenching material miseries (Gosine 2006). Ironically, at the same time, there has been little examination of the links between sexuality and social exclusion or adverse

inclusion in the North or South. While this paper focuses on the relationship between sexuality and material realities in southern contexts, it in no way intends to reduce the rich dimensions of sexual relationships to this one aspect. The dimensions of love, joy, emotion, desire, and pleasure are being documented in many other initiatives which could form the basis for another literature review (Cole and Thomas 2009, ICW/IPPF 2004, and the forthcoming collection of erotic stories by African writers from Cassava Press, Nigeria).

# 3 Understandings of Sexuality and Poverty

The links between sexuality, social marginalisation and poverty have not been much explored. The fact that sexuality and poverty are themselves intimately connected is not seen, which stems in part from a lack of understanding of both sexuality and poverty. A broader and more grounded understanding of what each entails starts to elucidate the connections:

*Rights based approaches must maintain the principle of the integrality and indivisibility of human rights, and recognise the interdependence of sexual rights with rights to health, housing, food and employment. And if poverty is understood to be not just material, but to also be about exclusion, ill-being, and restrictions on capacities and freedom, then the lack of sexual rights in itself constitutes poverty. (Henry Armas, 2007, p3)*

## AN UNDERSTANDING OF SEXUALITY

The World Health Organisation (WHO) convened an international panel of experts, who arrived at the following definition of sexuality in 2004:

*Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.<sup>4</sup>*

This definition makes clear that sexuality is not just about sexual relations but is influenced by a whole host of broader factors. Cornwall, Correa and Jolly (2008, p 5–6) argue:

*... sexuality is about a lot more than having sex. It is also about the social rules, economic structures, political battles and religious ideologies that surround physical expressions of sexuality. It has as much to do with being able to move freely outside the home and walk the streets without fear of sexual harassment or abuse as it has to do with who people have sex with. It is as much concerned with how the body is clothed, from women feeling forced to cover their bodies to avoid unwanted sexual attention to the use of particular colours to mark the gender of infants and begin the process of socialisation of boys and girls as different, as what people do when their clothes are off. And, where society and the state collude in policing gender and sex orders, it can be about the very right to exist, let alone to enjoy sexual relations.*

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/gender\\_rights/sexual\\_health/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/gender_rights/sexual_health/en/index.html)

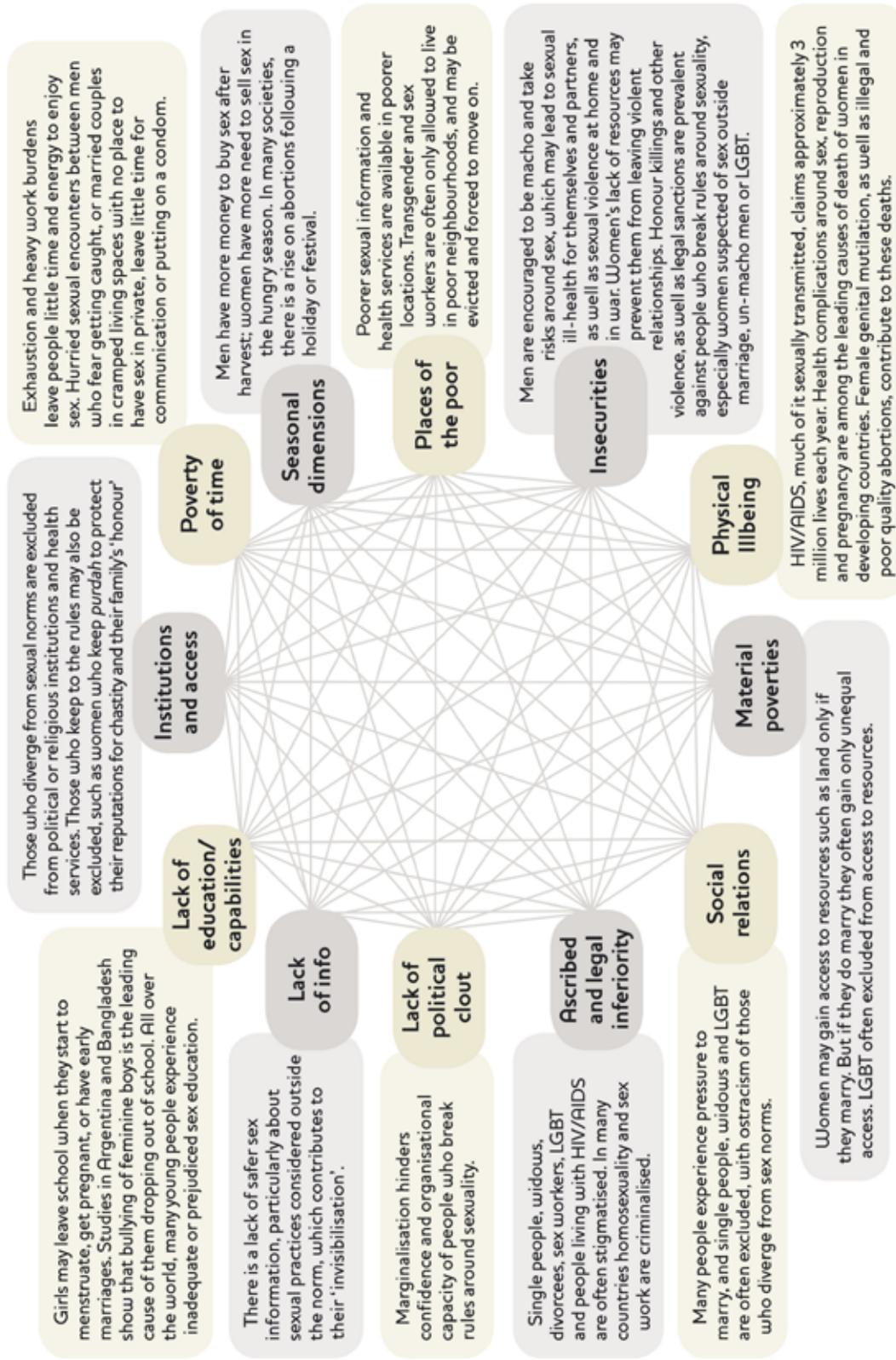
Once the broader implications of sexuality are understood, the connections with the core business of development – rights, justice, survival, the economy and so on – become more visible.

## AN UNDERSTANDING OF POVERTY

Breakthroughs in thinking about poverty that occurred in the 1990s have opened up new opportunities to draw the connections between sexuality, gender and poverty (Cornwall and Jolly 2010). Poverty is understood to be much broader than material deprivation, as for poor people, other kinds of exclusion can be just as important as economic exclusion. One of the most inspiring contributions has been that of Robert Chambers (2005), whose account of the multiple dimensions of poverty helps to highlight the significance of aspects of poverty that otherwise fell outside the narrowly economic frames of mainstream development policy. Chambers proposed that poverty can encompass many interacting dimensions such as: material poverties, physical ill-being, insecurities, poverty of time, institutions and access, lack of information and political clout, legal and social inferiority, impacts on social relations etc. Exploring some of these dimensions shows how norms around sexuality and gender affect well-being, and in return, poverty and disadvantage have an impact on possibilities to seek the relationships or pursue the desires of one's choosing.

Chambers' model of a 'Web of Poverty's Disadvantages' has been adapted to illustrate sexuality-poverty intersections, reproduced below (Jolly 2006b, p2). Peruvian transgender activist and philosopher Giuseppe Campuzano has also adapted this model specifically in relation to exclusion of transgender in Peru (2008:16) and Devi Leiper in relation to sex workers in Uganda (2009).

**Web of poverty's disadvantages – with examples related to sexuality**



## 4 Recognition of the linkages in the Sida policy framework

Sida's current policy frameworks do provide an initial recognition of sexuality-poverty intersections. This section draws heavily on the outline of this recognition in the Sida concept paper 'Sexuality: A missing dimension in development' (Runeborg 2008). Sida understands poverty to be multi-dimensional, and resulting from unequal power relations in society: 'The roots of poverty can often be traced to unequal power relations' (Perspectives on Poverty, 2002, p35) and Sida's poverty reduction strategies include tackling these power relations with 'efforts aimed at improving the situation of discriminated or underprivileged groups, such as disabled persons or ethnic minorities' (p34).

Sexuality and power relations around sexuality are identified explicitly in several key Swedish policy documents:

- *The Stockholm call to Action* (2005) cites 'Complications during pregnancy and childbirth are among the leading causes of death and illness for women in developing countries, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic takes approximately 3 million lives each year' and calls for increased investment in reproductive health and rights as essential to achieving the MDGs.
- *Investing for future generations: Sweden's international response to HIV/AIDS* (Sida 1999) identifies 'gender inequality', 'lack of dialogue on sexuality' and 'lack of education about sex and sexuality' as among the underlying causes of HIV transmission (p22).
- *Perspectives on Poverty* (Sida 2002) relates gender to sexual and reproductive rights: 'Gender based inequalities deprive women of their basic rights (including sexual and reproductive rights), disempower them and constrain their access to resources, opportunities and security' (p32), and sees poverty as increasing women's vulnerability to sexual harassment and exploitation (p19 and 44).
- *Sida at Work* (Sida 2005) identifies gender and human rights as central elements for poverty reduction, and as among minimum requirements for assessment of poverty focus in Sida supported projects and programmes.
- SRHR is one of the priorities of the special gender equality initiative in the development cooperation field (Together towards 2015: Sweden's report on the Millennium Development Goals 2006, Regeringskansliet, p34).
- *Sida LGBT Action Plan for 2007–2009* identifies some links between sexuality and poverty, as previously mentioned: 'As a result of being marginalised and socially excluded, and as a consequence of the stigma that is culturally imposed, LGBT persons are prevented from participating in society on equal terms, for example by having limited opportunities for earning a livelihood and providing for themselves. This has led to a situation of widespread poverty among LGBT persons in many countries' (p2).

## 5 What are the connections?

Sexual rights violations create hunger (discrimination leads to fewer salaries, underpaid and risky jobs), insecurity (physical aggression against LGBT people, genital mutilation of women), lack of power (police abuse of sex workers), limitations in access to health (discrimination in hospitals on the basis of sexual orientation, or marital status in access to health insurance) and limitations in access to education (bullying in schools, limited access to sexuality education).

(Armas 2007, p40)

There is now widespread recognition of the threat that sexual ill-health poses to the economy, security and human well-being. For example, The Maputo Plan of Action, unanimously adopted by Ministers of Health and delegates from 48 African countries in September 2006, states that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) cannot be achieved without more work on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and that ‘Addressing poverty and addressing SRHR are mutually reinforcing’.

But there is less acknowledgement of the role that pressure to conform to norms around sexuality plays in influencing well-being. Yet it is clear that such norms do have an impact.

*Sociocultural norms dictate what women should or should not do with their bodies...when, where and how far they can venture out of their homes and what constitutes a legitimate reason to do so; what parts of their bodies they have to cover and how; how they have to carry themselves when in the gaze of ‘undesirable others’ ranging from brothers-in-law to the general public; when they can have sexual relations and with whom; whether they can insist on sexual pleasure for themselves or not; when and how often they can complain of ill-health; whether they can seek health care, and where, when and from whom, and so on... (Shireen Huq 2008 p181)*

Some norms around sexuality may be widespread – for example, marriage normativity and heteronormativity – the social expectation, and economic and other pressures, that everyone should get married, and everyone should only have sexual relations with the ‘opposite’ sex, and open attempts to diverge being met with discrimination, marginalisation and even violence. However, norms around sexuality are different in every context. In some parts of Madagascar for example, women are expected to stay chaste before marriage. In other parts, an unmarried woman who already has one or two children is considered a more attractive marriage prospect, and the family constructs a separate hut for teenage daughters to provide them a space to meet with boyfriends. And norms change over time. For example, in Brazil twenty 30 years ago women who admitted to enjoying sex and looking for sex were con-

sidered ‘whores’. Today in contrast women are expected to be sex experts, and if they are not eager for sex or do not achieve orgasm they may be stigmatised as having something wrong with them and may not dare to speak about it (Correa 2010).

The following sections will consider the role of sexuality norms in the intersections between sexuality and poverty.

## SEXUALITY NORMS CAN HAVE MATERIAL IMPACTS

Diverging or conforming to norms of sexual behaviour can have material impacts. Those who are marginalised by dominant norms around sexuality – such as, depending on the context – LGBT and intersex people, sex workers, single women, women who have sex outside of marriage, and non-macho men – may face not only pressure to conform, but stigma, discrimination and violence if they do not.

Over 20 thousand poor people took part in a participatory research project for the World Bank study, *Voices of the Poor*. As part of this exercise, they identified types of people excluded from opportunities and resources. In some regions, poor people identified certain groups diverging from sexuality or relationship norms. The results are reproduced below, with those related to sexuality highlighted in bold.

### ‘The Types of People Excluded’

Region	Types
South Asia	Ragpickers, the hated poor, landless people, low castes, women
East Asia	Ethnic minorities, migrant communities, drug addicts, poor, women, migrants
Africa	The very poor, physically disabled, demon possessed, mentally ill, <b>adulterers</b> , thieves, <b>prostitutes</b> , elderly, women, witches, lower-caste clans, internally displaced people, <b>unmarried and childless men</b>
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	Very poor people, beggars, state pensioners, state enterprise workers, homeless, ethnic minorities, women, migrant communities
Latin America and the Caribbean	<b>HIV sufferers</b> , thieves, <b>homosexuals</b> , elderly, black communities, unemployed, people living in a particular locality or area known for high rates of crime and violence

(Narayan et al 2001 p135)

Where divergence from sexual and gender norms is more visible, for example among transgender people, masculine women and feminine men, violence and exclusion from work, health care and housing, may be particularly harsh. Much of the research available which specifically addresses the effects of discrimination around sexuality on poverty is about transgender people and people with non-conforming gender

identities or expressions (ADEIM-Simbiosis et al 2006, Bondyopadhyay et al 2005, Ferreyra 2008).

*One of the central issues that have arisen from Naz Foundation International research [in South Asia] and understanding is that often it is effeminacy and not the factual knowledge of male-to-male sexual behaviour that leads to harassment and violence. This harassment and sexual violence results from the fact that many kothis [feminine men] do not live up to the expected normative standards of masculine behaviour. (Bondyopadhyay et al 2004, p6)*

Studies on lesbians and workplace discrimination also concluded that gender expression was as much the trigger for discrimination as sexual orientation. Butch or masculine looking women are particularly targeted for harassment and workplace discrimination (ADEIM-Simbiosis et al 2006, IGLHRC et al 2003).

For those whose transgressions of sexuality or gender norms are not so visible, there can be, depending on context, a huge pressure to hide which can result in isolation and other kinds of suffering, as described by David Kuria, Manager of the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya:

*The forced isolated life means that a person is always worried about his or her sexuality remaining a secret and, in the long run, this necessity for secrecy requires that person to spend all his or her time and attention on it. As a result, gays perform extremely badly, both economically and socially, as individuals and as community members. For many that find it difficult to cope with the daily struggle of life, on top of the pressure that inevitably comes along with an isolated life, it is easy to give up; this explains the high addiction statistics and other forms of self neglect amongst them. (Kuria 2008, p135)*

PUCL reports similar issues in India for sexual minorities in the workplace:

*Most sexuality minorities dare not be open about their sexuality at their work space for fear of ostracism at best and termination of employment at worst. Thus what is normal heterosexual social interaction (talking about husbands and wives, women and men one finds attractive, etc.) becomes impossible as sexuality minorities try and disguise the 'he' for the 'she' and vice versa. (PUCL 2001, p25)*

Not only LGBT, but also sex workers, people living with HIV/AIDS and other stigmatised groups, may feel pressure to hide their profession/status/identity, which can pose material and emotional challenges as described above. However, the difference between hiding and coming out/being open is not always so absolute. People may be open in some ways and not in others. For example in South Asia there are many spaces in which it is possible for men to seek same sex relationships very openly at the same time as laws and social disapproval censure homosexuality (Boyce 2006).

Those who are integrated into dominant norms of sexuality may also pay a price – for example girls and intersex children undergoing genital mutilation, young men engaging in risky sexual behaviour to prove their masculinity, people involved in unequal or unsatisfying heterosexual relationships. Conforming to norms could also mean staying out of school during menstruation, or dropping out once pregnant or married.

At the same time, conforming to certain norms can win social inclusion and economic opportunities – such as marrying a rich man, or accepting a big dowry, or simply playing by the rules, meaning people will consider you a good family or community member and therefore help you out. And breaking rules around sexuality can also at times bring such benefits. Selling sex may generate income. Where men are expected to be family breadwinners, refusing to marry and take on economic dependents may bring material benefits. Where women are expected to give up jobs upon marriage, refusing to marry may enable them to have greater income and greater control of their income. In some parts of South Asia hijras (a transgender identity) can traditionally earn money at wedding parties and birth celebrations by dancing and teasing the hosts, as well as more contemporary opportunities such as collecting tax debts due to their attention being considered embarrassing. HIV/AIDS programmes which train and pay peer educators among groups such as sex workers or men who have sex with men can create opportunities for economic gain associated with particular identities (Khanna 2009).

## ECONOMIC STATUS CAN AFFECT SEXUAL EXPRESSION

Economic status affects how people negotiate sexuality norms. Poverty can constrain sexual expression. Poverty is one of the structures which regulates people's sexual practices, setting constraints on space, social status, sex to be had, confidence and self-esteem, which in turn will affect leeway for negotiating other structures.

*Poorer people in all countries are disproportionately constrained in their ability to determine their sexual life. They are also particularly affected by policies criminalising sexuality. This reality must inform all consideration of the rules governing state practice on sex. (Miller 2009, p45)*

In the Zamfara State in northern Nigeria, Sharia legal codes were passed in 1999 instating the crime of 'zina' or illicit sexual intercourse. Sex outside of marriage is treated as zina, and even if a woman is raped, she can be charged with zina. Between 2000–2003, BAOBAB, a non-governmental women's human rights organisation in Nigeria, supported several women who were charged with zina and threatened with stoning (to death), whipping and imprisonment. BAOBAB offered legal support, specifically making arguments based on Muslim laws. BAOBAB also supports those charged with thieving and at risk of amputation, who are largely young men. Most of those charged under these laws are poor, usually rural, but also urban poor, illiterate women, men and children, with women more often convicted of fornication and adultery, and men more often convicted of alcohol consumption, theft and sodomy (Baobab 2003).

Earning money can win forgiveness from friends and family for diverging from sexuality norms (PUCL 2004). Nguyen (2005) tells the story of Kouame in Abidjan in the Côte D'Ivoire, a successful restaurant owner who was an active HIV/AIDS activist and fairly open about his relationships with men. Several cousins from the village, and two nephews all came to live with him while they were sent to school and

while none seemed to be interested in men, they enjoyed going out with Kouame to bars and clearly worshipped him. Family objections to choices around sex and relationships were dropped or at least quietened with the acceptance of economic support. Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe also reports that training in income generation skills can win their members family approval as well as give them more options to live independently from their families if they wish (GALZ 2007).

While poverty can make people more vulnerable to abuses of sexual rights, higher economic status may present its own constraints. The Coalition on Violence Against Women in Nairobi reports that about 80 per cent of women seeking support in the face of violence come from the slums, because they are more willing to speak out. Only 20 per cent come from the more middle or upper class areas, and these women come only in cases of more extreme violence, or abuse involving their children, indicating that they are more reticent about coming forward, perhaps feeling they have more to lose in terms of reputation (Jolly 2007a).

#### Joya's story – how class influenced her sexual and gender identities

Joya Sikder, a Bangladeshi transgender and sex worker leader and activist, analysed the interactions between class, sexual and gender identity. She told me how, born into a poor rural family in Bangladesh, although born with a male body, she always felt she was a girl. And from an early age she was attracted to men not women. As a teenager she moved to Dhaka, joined a hijra community and started selling sex. Initially her family refused to accept her, but they forgave her after she started earning money as a sex worker and sending funds home to pay for the tuition of her younger siblings. Joya said that given her economic status, becoming a hijra was the path she took, and which was ultimately accepted by her family due to the associated income. However, had she been born to a middle class family in Dhaka, she would have been reluctant to be open about her sexual orientation for fear of jeopardising her inheritance. Instead, she would have kept her inclinations private, and speaking good English and having internet access as middle class people do, she would instead have discreetly found boyfriends on the internet. She did not identify either of these paths as more appealing than the other, she simply noted the effects of class and income in influencing sexual practices, and expressions of sexual and gender identity.

(As described in an interview I undertook with Joya Sikder in Dhaka 2004)

There has been significant anthropological work on how sexual identities are constructed in diverse contexts, including by class and political economy, and what the effects of these constructions are (Boyce 2006, Cohen 2005, Gunkel 2009, Hall 2005, Hemmings 2007, Lambevski 1999, Osella 2000, Reddy 2005). The diversity of sexual identities needs to be understood, and assumptions challenged that western identities such as 'LGBT' or 'sex worker' mean the same thing in western and non-western contexts, especially when working with people living in poverty (Correa and Jolly 2006, Manalansan 1995, Samelius and Wagberg 2005).

## WHAT SHAPES SEXUALITY NORMS? THE ROLE OF GLOBALISING ECONOMIES, NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRY

Sexuality norms and economic structures set the larger context for how sexual expression and economic status interact on an individual level. Sexuality norms can be shifting, contradictory, and influenced by many factors. Parents and others inculcate norms into children from an early age, and each individual plays a role in reproducing, negotiating and shaping social norms. Social, cultural and religious movements often explicitly seek to shift social attitudes around gender and sexuality. I do not here explore these negotiations however, but instead look specifically at factors more closely related to the focus of this paper: globalising economies, national governments and economic policies, and the international development industry.

### **Globalising economies**

Globalising economic forces have in some cases expanded choice around sexuality. For example, while not disputing the sometimes terrible conditions and sexual harassment faced by women working in export industries, Kabeer's research shows how working in the textile for export industry can also increase their life choices including in regard to if, when and who to marry (2007). The opposite can be the case however, with globalising economic forces limiting or channelling people's choices. The international pharmaceutical industry has had an impact, limiting availability of drugs to treat HIV/AIDS, sometimes with collusion of national governments such as the Bush administration (Petchesky 2008). And sales of Viagra in both the North and South are profoundly influencing the expectations of many men and women around what constitutes a 'normal' sexuality. Men report that they take Viagra on an ongoing basis in order to achieve erection, penetration and ejaculation on demand, sometimes without telling their partners, who imagine that this is their everyday sexuality (Petra Boynton 2004).

### **National Governments and Economic Policies**

National law regulates sexuality in a myriad of ways. For example, laws outlawing 'sodomy', used to persecute homosexuals, introduced by the British government in colonial times, remain on the books in many former British colonies. Governments may scapegoat sexual minorities particularly in times of instability, such as when economic reform weakens state power (Bedford and Jakobsen 2008). Tamale argues that the current 'Anti-homosexuality bill' under discussion in Uganda is 'a ploy by the government meant to distract the attention of Ugandans from the real issues that harm us and truly threaten African families – above all, the economic crisis, lack of jobs, food insecurity, and domestic violence and child sexual abuse' (2009). And the same has been observed about Mugabe's attack on gays and lesbians in Zimbabwe (Luirink 2008).

### International Development Agencies

Development agencies also influence sexuality norms. SIDA, DFID, UNFPA, WHO and several other bilateral and international organisations have explicit briefs to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights. Yet at the same time, many development interventions have constrained rights and possibilities around sexuality.

International development has generally treated sexuality as a problem – to do with population control, disease and violence. The emphasis on population control has resulted in top-down delivery of reproductive health services primarily aimed at meeting family planning targets rather than supporting people in making choices about if or when to have children (Harcourt 2009). The US PEPFAR programme, launched by George Bush in 2003, promoted a conservative agenda, of abstinence only education, limiting condom promotion, and cutting funding to any organisation which provided information on abortion, or refused to sign a pledge opposing ‘prostitution’.

In the context of South Asia Qadeer identifies the problems with the shift to more market led health systems, and how international funding agencies collude in this process:

*Maternity services are one of the most privatized and highly profitable services...the rising trend of Caesarian sections and sex determination tests is well recognised... Micronutrient prescriptions, vaccines, contraceptives and pregnancy diagnostic kits create a flourishing market for the medical industry... We need to identify these links with the market and the conceptual distortions of public health used to justify them, with the larger political economy of the region... The Bretton Woods institutions and other international funding agencies, while transforming the South Asian governments into stewards for the private sectors, also push them into becoming buyers through imposition of WTO conditionalities. These mechanisms may be necessary for the promotion of global markets and multinational interests, but certainly not for the people of the region. (Qadeer 2005 p122)*

Some development programming based on strengthening family resilience as a poverty reduction strategy can create more pressure on people to marry and/or stay within heterosexual family set ups – something which might make life more difficult for women facing domestic violence, or LGBT who already face pressure to suppress their sexual desires and gender identities, and to conform to heterosexual relationship norms (Bedford 2008, Bergeron 2010, Drucker 2009).

One example is the World Bank’s ‘Family Strengthening and Social Capital Promotion Project in Argentina’ (2001–2006), described below.

### The World Bank supported 'Family Strengthening and Social Capital Promotion Project in Argentina' (2001–2006)

This loan scheme aimed to strengthen the family and improve networks within poor communities, with the goal of reducing their vulnerability to poverty. One of the aims of the loan was to help people cope with poverty through increasing women's role in the labour market and men's role in household chores and childcare. Increasing opportunities for women, and shifting the division of labour in the household can be a good thing. However, this kind of programme premised on family strengthening increases pressure on people to marry and/or stay within heterosexual family set ups – something which might make life more difficult for women facing domestic violence, or LGBT, or anyone who is not happily married. And the programme reinforced a trend towards privatised, unpaid family labour as a solution to poverty, and gave considerable clout to religious institutions which endorsed more traditional gender roles.

(Bedford 2008)

Another example comes from a piece of research from Middlesex University (UK) and the Centro de Información y Servicios de Accesoria en Salud (Nicaragua) which explores the extent to which social protection programmes such as conditional cash transfers (CCTs) benefit poor people, particularly women. The authors used the Nicaraguan Red de Protección Social (RPS) as a case study. They found that the RPS drew on and reinforced the idea of 'traditional' family values, including women's assumed altruism towards their families. Such approaches limit the benefits women accrue from CCTs (Bradshaw and Viquez 2008).

The subsequent sections (6 – 10) consider the role of sexuality norms in a few key sectors integral to well-being; health, work and livelihoods, education, housing and home and family.

## 6 Access to Health Services

Just as economic structures do, sexuality norms influence access to health information and services, resulting in exclusion or poor treatment of particular groups.

*Women and Men* – In many countries, particularly in some parts of Asia, North Africa and Arab states, SRH service providers may assume that non-married women are not or should not be having sex, especially if they are teenage or widowed. Service providers may also assume that if they are having sex, it should only be with one partner, who will necessarily be a man. Research in Bangladesh found married garment workers often buy contraceptives in bulk to give to their unmarried sexually active friends since single women do not have legitimate access to contraceptives (Siddiqi 2010).

Unmarried pregnant women may suffer discrimination. Young married women may face pressure from mothers in law and partners to get pregnant, and contrasting pressures from family planning and sexuality education programmes to delay births. Little space is created for discussion of young women's own desires around sexuality or motherhood. A refreshing exception is the International Planned Parenthood Federation's initiative: 'Girls Decide: Stand up for choice on sex and pregnancy'.<sup>5</sup>

Men may also face particular obstacles in accessing health care (White and Witty 2009). In some contexts SRH services focus on maternal health and women's reproductive health care, meaning men's SRH needs remain unmet. Men may also be embarrassed to discuss many of their concerns, for fear of admitting vulnerability and appearing unmanly, so services which are not specifically sensitised to their needs may let them down.

### A study on gender and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) in Bangladesh

A mapping of health seeking behaviour in Bangladesh found that most women and men rely on the informal sector for treatment for SRH. There is a vacuum in formal services for men, and for women the focus of SRH care is maternal health and family planning, thus leaving a gap for the informal markets to fill.

### A study on gender and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) in Bangladesh

Men experience many concerns about their SRH ranging from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) to psychosexual anxieties, with a particularly strong emphasis on psychosexual concerns (performance, size, ability to provide pleasure to partner), rather than just biomedical concerns. They generally seek services and follow up treatment from informal providers such as village doctors or 'quacks' and often spend considerable amounts of money on these providers with varying outcomes. Poor men are increasing their impoverishment by spending a large share of their income on treatment for SRH concerns.

Many women seek care for discharge, menstrual irregularities, STIs and more stigmatized conditions (prolapse, fistula, anxieties about sexual relationships) from village doctors and local healers. In general it is not clear the benefit or quality of care available with many of the poor complaining of unsatisfactory outcomes from both formal and informal sector (Research by BRAC University School of Public Health, Bangladesh, contact: Sabina Faiz Rashid).

*People living with HIV/AIDS* – Many health care service providers are themselves HIV positive. In spite of this, or perhaps to hide their status, service providers can be rude and stigmatising to HIV positive patients, as well as breaching their confidentiality. This makes appropriate health care more difficult to obtain for people who know or fear they are HIV positive. It also discourages testing, and may discourage women more generally from seeking ante-natal care. In many countries an HIV test is standard procedure in ante-natal health care. Some pregnant women, whether or not they know their status, are avoiding ante-natal care or travelling further to avoid a local clinics, for fear of being found HIV positive and facing stigma. People living with HIV/AIDS often face a lack of support in making their own decisions around whether or not to have babies, and in being able to do so safely, and sometimes even undergo forced sterilisation. The wave of criminalisation of HIV transmission further hinders access to SRH care and makes it even more difficult to find fulfilling and safe relationships (information from the Salamander trust<sup>6</sup>).

*Sex workers* – Sex workers are often labelled as the vectors of HIV and their health needs are seen only in relation to HIV. As a result the evidence base on how to realise sex workers' sexual and reproductive rights, desires and needs is very limited. Yet sex workers in developing countries are disproportionately affected by illnesses and conditions caused by social exclusion, poverty and gender based violence. The Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers have found that sex workers are often vulnerable to misinformation, unethical medical practices, counterfeit goods and lack of access to commodities and services (Overs 2008). A recent randomized control trial carried out by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical medicine in Pakistan found that health interventions are more likely to be effective if these are tied to efforts to reduce discrimination, exploitation and violence (LSHTM 2009). The

6 [http://www.salamandertrust.net/index.php/Projects/The\\_HIV,\\_Women\\_and\\_Motherhood\\_Audio\\_Project/](http://www.salamandertrust.net/index.php/Projects/The_HIV,_Women_and_Motherhood_Audio_Project/)

Paulo Longo Research Initiative reports that health outcomes are better where structural interventions, community mobilisation and empowerment enable sex workers to assert greater control over their working environments, and where clients, boyfriends and other partners are targeted as well as sex workers themselves<sup>7</sup>.

*LGBT and intersex* – LGBT may face forced psychological and drug treatment to try to ‘cure’ them of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and be treated with scorn by health care providers more generally (Samelius and Wagberg 2005). People having same sex sexual relationships may not be able to be open about their sexual practices with providers of sexual health services unless they are assured of confidentiality and respect. Where homosexuality is criminalised, admitting to such relationships is tantamount to admitting breaking the law. Transgender people may be particularly inhibited from seeking any kind of sexual and reproductive health care or information if their bodies do not correspond to the gender they present themselves in. LGBT may have specific health needs, such as high levels of alcohol and drug abuse and depression due to social stigma and alienation. Reproductive health service providers may be hostile to LGBT seeking to have children. Intersex children may face genital mutilation, operations and treatments not for health reasons but in order to fix their gender to conform to society’s expectations. Ideas of good practice are now shifting to waiting until the child is older so they can decide for their self if and how they want to treat their intersex condition.

# 7 Work and livelihoods

Substantial research has been undertaken into the links between the economic independence of women and their possibilities for choice around sexual and romantic relationships – both negotiating power within these relationships, and ability to leave if they so desire. And the economic as well as emotional costs of sexual harassment of women in the workplace has been well documented. Areas that have received less attention are discrimination around sexuality and gender expression especially in developing countries.

## **Discrimination against sexual minorities**

South Africa has one of the most progressive legal frameworks in the world in terms of promoting legal, social and economic equity regardless of sexual orientation, and protecting LGBT persons against any form of state discrimination. However, implementing these protections remains a challenge including in the labour market. Over one third of the population are unemployed, 90% of whom are of African descent. Being LGBT, especially visibly so, can add another obstacle. Some report not facing discrimination, depending on sector, race and employer. However, others report this as the factor that prevents them from getting jobs.

Patty, an African lesbian reports:

*I completed my matric in 1996 and have been looking for a job, any job. Most people look at me and think I am a lesbian, maybe because of how I dress, that I dress like guys, or because of how I talk...I have no job (Human Rights Watch/IGLHRC 2003, p210).*

Carolyn Williams finds this dynamic to be replicated in the informal sector, in her research on same sex desiring women living in urban slums in Peru. If the women were at all open about their desires, they risked jeopardising the community relationships on which they depended to take part in the informal economy (2009).

## **Demands of gender conformity**

While women may have gained greater access to the labour market in many countries, gender stereotyping remains rampant. A Human Rights Watch and International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) report attests to the extent of workplace discrimination and exclusion from employment experienced by those who do not conform to gender as well as sexual norms (2003). This is an area that can affect transgender people, but also many men and women, and both LGB people and heterosexuals – anyone who does not fit the gender conventions of their context.

Liu's study of women working in sales in Nanjing in China describes how they had to tread a fine line, presenting themselves as attractive

according to conventional gender stereotypes, but not too loose or available ‘pretty but not sexy’ (2008, p88). Research in Brazil has also shown that people have to be beautiful in gender conventional terms to work in the service industry. Plastic surgery is sometimes undertaken in part to become more employable, with the state in some cases subsidising plastic surgery for poorer people (Edmonds 2007).

LGBT can face particular challenges dealing with expectations around gender conformity. Pat, a coloured lesbian in South Africa, said of ex-girlfriend:

*Employers would hire her [thinking she was] a man [Even though she could do the jobs fine] ...as soon as they found out she had a pair of breasts, they would say ‘no we want a man, we thought you were a man’ (Human Rights Watch/IGLHRC 2003, p211)*

This is echoed in work on Latin America where again it has been found that it is not simply sexual orientation but gender expression that can be the basis for stigma, prejudice and discrimination in the workplace, making the working lives of women and men who do not conform with gender and sexual norms insecure and difficult (ADEIM-Simbiosis 2006).

The LGBT NGO Galang reports butch women in the Philippines facing similar obstacles, and that among urban poor lesbian couples, if the couple consists of a more masculine and more feminine woman, the femme woman is more likely to bring in an income to support them both, as she is better able to find work.

*Jobs in shopping malls and retail outlets often require sales ladies to dress in mini-skirts, high heels and make up and butch lesbians find it difficult to conform to these expectations...so either they don’t apply for these positions or are rejected outright by potential employers. Similarly, when they apply for traditionally male positions such as grocery baggers, utility persons and drivers they are often not hired because employers prefer men... (Lim 2009 p5).*

Discrimination against people who do not conform to gender stereotypes is one reason for the high levels of sex work among transgender women and feminine men. Another reason is the demand for and interest in transgender sex workers from clients, particularly male to female transsexuals and feminised men. A study of 147 travestis in Argentina showed over 90% sold sexual services (IGLHRC 2001). Studies of kothis in India and Bangladesh cited that 75% worked in the sex industry (see below). In the UK male to female transsexuals and transvestites have higher levels of participation in sex work than cisgenders (i.e. non-trans people) (Monro 2005).

### Economic status of kothis (a feminine male identity) in India and Bangladesh

Of 240 kothis completing questionnaires:

- 70% of the respondents say that the fact that they have sex with other males have had some form of impact on their economic prospects, often negative. Those that report a positive impact on their economic standing are all in sex work.
- 75% of interviewees reported being in sex work.
- 76% of the respondents felt that because of being a kothi, they do not get similar income opportunities as others.
- 64% of the respondents have a monthly income in the lowest bracket of 1000–3000 [Rupees/Taka] i.e. less than US\$ 70.

(Khan, Bondyopadhyay and Mulji 2005)

### Sex and Exchange

Many people use their sexual assets as a commodity of exchange, a source of income, and a livelihood, whether through marrying into a richer family, dowry payments, accepting gifts from lovers, or selling sex. Many studies consider how poverty provides an incentive for people to sell sex. However, less research considers the role of selling sex in income generation, and if or under what conditions it provides a route out of poverty (Greenall 2008). Sometimes the role of sex in economic exchange is clear-cut. In other instances, love and money are so entwined that to talk in terms of ‘transactional sex’ is to deny the other dimensions of those relationships (Cornwall 2002, Nyanzi et al 2004). What is clear although not quantified is the importance of such exchanges to many people’s livelihoods.

*Everybody assumes that you engage in a same-sex relationships in a conservative society like mine [Sudan] only because you are poor: that there is no element of choice, no element of sexual orientation. In fact, there are many issues at stake, including security, livelihoods, and social acceptability. A young boy studying in university who can’t afford his fees is perhaps being funded by an older man who he’s having sex with – a powerful man with a big public image and a wife – and the young boy has a girlfriend or a wife as well. Also, we have seen women who are engaging in multiple sexual relationships in order to overcome their poverty: they have an intimate partner for security reasons, a sugar daddy for their livelihood, and a husband for social acceptability (Nafisa Bedri, cited in Lynch 2008 p17).*

Nafisa Bedri’s quote illustrates the multiple kinds of exchanges which may be made for relationships: livelihoods, tuition fees, social acceptability, security. These can be motivated in part by poverty, they may or may not entrench power differentials and dependence, and at the same time may constitute ways out of poverty.

## 8 Education

Norms around sexuality may lead to girls losing educational opportunities. Pinar Ilkkaracan, the co-ordinator of the Turkish organisation Women for Women's Human Rights and the Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies comments:

*...look at girl children in Turkey. There are still hundreds and thousands of girls who are not sent to school because there is a fear that they will choose their own husbands, and not accept marriages arranged by their parents – thus costing the family both honour and the bride price. Sexuality is a crosscutting issue that lies at the heart of disempowerment of women. (cited in Jolly 2006a, p78)*

In many contexts girls stay out of school during menstruation, or leave school altogether when they start menstruation. This is due both to taboos around menstruation and lack of appropriate sanitary facilities. Sexual harassment of girls in school is also widespread.

Transgender people also report having faced very high levels of bullying and harassment in school, and give this as an important cause of leaving school early, in Bangladesh and India (see below), Latin America (Ferreya 2008, Cabral et al 2010) and Nepal (NESsT 2008). And Amnesty International reports that children who express or are suspected of same sex desires can also face bullying.

### In the study of 240 kothis in India and Bangladesh

50% of the respondents stated that fellow students or teachers had harassed them in school or college because they were effeminate. They reveal that often they have not been able to carry on with their education due to this harassment, and this has impacted on their employability at a later date. Those that reach higher levels of education report a greater degree of harassment than at primary levels. This is found to be because at a higher levels the manifestation of femininity is more pronounced and the stereotypes that allow abuse and violence are more firmly established in the minds of peers.

(Khan, Bondyopadhyay and Mulji 2005)

Poor people are less likely to have access to sexuality education, and more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour (Dodoo, Zulu and Ezeh 2007) and have unwanted pregnancies (Fine and McClelland 2006) in contexts as varied as Kenya and USA. A review of 83 studies on the impact of sexuality education initiatives in developed and developing countries showed that they can reduce sexual risk taking, and increase condom use and contraceptive use, all of which can have a positive impact on poverty levels through improved health and a reduction in unwanted pregnancies (Family Health International 2005). However, the impact of sexuality education depends both on content, and on par-

ticipation of target audiences in determining what kind of information is shared and how. Sexuality education is often focused on transmitting messages about the need to conform to heteronormative conventions rather than starting from the needs and desires of the participants themselves and supporting them in making healthy choices. Fine and McClelland report in a US context ‘When we asked, “What do you need in the way of sexuality education?” young people were clear: “More conversations like this, where we’re asked what we think, what we want to know”’ (2006, p326).

## 9 Family, home and housing

Family support can be vital for survival, however that support can be dependent on certain sexuality related behaviours. The UN Special Rapporteur on housing Miloon Kothari reported for example, that women in Tonga's access to marital property is subject to giving birth to a son, and widows' right to such property is subject to living in celibacy (Kothari 2006).

A desire to escape family and community pressures to conform to sexuality norms can motivate migration, to escape pressures to marry, to move to urban communities with LGBT cultures and communities and far away from family scrutiny, or to escape abusive relationships. Migration may also be motivated by family reunion or in some contexts, such as rural China, women customarily move to their husband's family upon marriage (Jolly with Reeves 2005).

Often heterosexuality is a condition for remaining in the family. Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe report that young men and women with same sex sexual orientations cannot dare to seek relationships or to be open for fear of being thrown out by their families (GALZ 2007). In a study of 124 Kothis in Bangladesh, 25 respondents stated that some members of their direct family knew that they had sex with other males. Of the 25 respondents whose near relatives were aware, only 6 said that they had accepted it. The rest stated that their family had reacted negatively with beatings, forced marriage, disinheritance, by throwing the person out of the house, taking them to doctors to cure them of homosexuality, and so on (Bondyopadhyay and Khan 2004 p20).

In contrast, in the Philippines, according to one study, families will accept their LGBT children, but on condition they care for their family:

*As one activist in the Philippines described it, the financial support that queer people give to their families acts as a type of “currency to buy acceptance.” The expectation is that queer people will support their families so long as they remain unmarried – something which often makes parents and siblings less likely to push for them to get married at all. Accordingly, informants reported that they felt intense pressure to provide for their families while still hoping find employment that they considered ‘appropriate’ for bakla, tomboy, or LGBT workers – goals that were not always compatible, given the low wages of most stereotypically ‘queer’ professions. (Thoreson 2010, p8)*

For people with non-conforming sexualities, housing may be hard to find outside family structures. In some parts of Latin America, travesti women are so stigmatised that even if they have enough money to rent a property, they will be refused by landlords. As a result, they are forced to pay more for cramped and insecure accommodation (Cabral et al 2010). Hijras (a south Asian transgender identity) face similar challenges in India (PUCL 2001). In India, landlords may also refuse to rent housing to single women.

# 10 Ways forward

## MORE RESEARCH AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE INTERSECTIONS

The interconnections between sexuality and the economy have been under-researched (Altman 2001). Research on sexuality has focussed more on ethics, a debate over how far people are exploited or have agency, and the HIV/AIDS or SRH impacts. Yet as shown in this paper, sexuality and the economy are interconnected. The relationship between sex and money is broad and deep. Economic structures are heteronormative. The majority of internet traffic is related to pornography. And global capitalism uses the promise of pleasure (sexual and otherwise) to market products. The political economy of sexuality must be addressed as well as the social, emotional and ethical dimensions. And the sexual and gendered nature of the market must be uncovered.

And indeed there is an emerging interest in sexuality-economy connections. Nancy Folbre, a former President of the International Association for Feminist Economics, has examined the history of economic thought in relation to material greed and sexual lust (2009). Lisa Rofel takes a similar turn, arguing that in post-economic reform China the idea of the socialist citizen has been replaced with a conception of the neo-liberal subject 'the desiring subject...who operates through sexual, material and affective self-interest' (2007). In 2007, Barnard College in New York hosted a symposium on 'Sexual and Economic Justice' which brought together key thinkers and actors from North and South, and sought to find synergies between the two areas of struggle (Bedford and Jakobsen 2008). And another International Symposium 'Desiring Just Economies/Just Economies of Desire' is being held this June 2010 in the Berlin Institute of Cultural Enquiry.

A collaboration between the Institute of Development Studies and Pink Space Sexuality Research Centre Beijing, explored these questions at a more grassroots level with individuals from several groups with whom Pink Space had been working over the previous two years – women living with HIV/AIDS, female sex workers, lesbian and bisexual women, women married to gay men and transgender people. Individuals from these different groups took part in a participatory workshop in China in July 2010 to collectively explore and analyse trajectories of economic and sexual lives and how these relate to each other, discussing such questions as: How have the participants experienced intersections between their economic and sexual lives? Have their sexual and romantic relationships affected their standards of living? Are there trade-offs between following sexual and economic desires? Has economic reform changed their possibilities for expression and organi-

sation around particular sexual identities? Has economic hardship impacted on these possibilities? (Jolly 2011).

It is particularly important to support action research with genuine participation by poor people with marginalised sexualities. This is both to build their capacity and also because they understand their situation best and are likely to already have established relationships with people in similar situations, so their participation is likely to generate the best quality research (Chambers 1997).

## SEXUAL RIGHTS WORK ENGAGING WITH ECONOMIC REALITIES

*...newly emergent grassroots movements of People with AIDS...sex workers, LGBT youth, transvestites and intersexed people represent economically as well as culturally marginalised populations. For this reason they tend to practice a politics of intersectionality as a matter of survival, not academic or legal theory (Petchesky 2005:307)*

To date, exchanges and alliances between sexual rights advocates and those working to advance economic justice have been limited (Bedford and Jakobsen 2008). However, many sexual rights organisations do deal with the realities of poverty-sexuality interconnections which I have discussed in this chapter. Many are making efforts to tackle poverty as well as other challenges faced.

Many efforts to respond to HIV/AIDS combine economic and health aspects. The Population Council's "Siyakha Nentsha" (isiZulu for "building with young people"), project teaches young people in schools about HIV and reproductive health, as well as their rights to material and economic benefits from the government if affected by HIV or poverty.

In Peru, two Spanish schools taught by single mothers ('Fairplay' and 'Second Chance') seek to destigmatise single parenthood and provide single parents an income at the same time.

The Netherlands Nonprofit Enterprise and Self-sustainability Team has documented LGBT businesses globally, some set up to exploit market niches, others to create income-generating opportunities for marginalized constituents. 'Some LGBT organizations are launching social enterprises for the express purpose of creating employment or other economic benefits to marginalized LGBT people themselves, e.g., transitional or full-time employment, job skills and training, supplemental income' (2008, p100). For example, the 'Cutie Beauty' hair salon run by LGBT people in Nepal.

The Arcus Foundation makes the case for international funding of both LGBT rights work and poverty alleviation among LGBT in the North and the South (Galst 2010). Many sexual rights organisations take on income generation activities and tackle discrimination in the labour market, education, health care, and society, all of which challenge the factors contributing to impoverishment. The Galang lesbian organisation in Philippines works to support LGBT organising in poor communities in Quezon city as well as supporting lesbians starting their own businesses. Rays of the Rainbow in Burma, a group of LGBT migrant workers, runs fashion shows and drag performances

to raise money for individual members as well as fund community development.

Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) is another example. They provide sponsorship to their members to take part in vocational training courses, such as business studies, accountancy, driving lessons, dressmaking and hairdressing, aiming to increase their chances of finding employment or promotion. By 2007, 60 people had been trained with more than 50% finding work upon completion of the course, an impressive figure in a country with over 80% unemployment. GALZ has also created the 'GALZ safety net' to provide temporary emergency relief to members in times of crisis. GALZ explains their philosophy:

*One might ask why a human rights organisation focusing on normalising the position of LGBTI people in society concerns itself with humanitarian issues. In the mind of GALZ, there is no hierarchy when it comes to comparing rights relating, for example, to freedom of expression and assembly with the rights to work, shelter and freedom from poverty. GALZ also exists amidst a nation in crisis and LGBTI people face the same potential problems in their day-to-day lives as any other Zimbabwean, this compounded by the fact that LGBTI face additional stigma because of their sexual orientation (GALZ 2007 p2).*

The work of GALZ is particularly impressive in that the organisation was initially dominated by white middle class men, but has been transformed into an organisation much more reflective of Zimbabwe's population. This is a transformation that some other sexual rights organisations have yet to make.

Some sexual rights initiatives remain elitist, excluding the poor, or failing to address economic barriers. Sarda notes that the social and racial inequalities pervasive in Latin American society are also reflected in the LGBTI movement, whose leadership is largely white, urban, middle/upper class and male. She calls for a challenge to inequalities within the movement to ensure they 'contribute to a genuine radical democracy where gender, racial and economic hierarchies are dismantled' (2010, p202). Sexual rights initiatives do indeed need to consider the political economy dimensions – including poverty – to be effective and inclusive.

While many sexual rights initiatives are working on economic dimensions, these efforts often remain small scale. Lim from Galang in the Philippines identifies some of the challenges of scaling up when many organisations have no core funding and rely on volunteers.

*There is no dearth of promising practices in LGBT activism in the region as well as in other parts of the world. The challenge is to find the resources to scale up our respective operations to effectively counter the wave of conservatism that is enveloping society. In this kind of work, we believe that it is most important to invest in human resources. Scaling up operations in LGBT activism will only be possible if activists no longer have to constantly juggle several jobs at the same time to keep their own families out of poverty (2009, p4).*

Income generating activities alone will not change the stigmatising attitudes of employers, lenders and consumers. Social enterprise and income generation is just one strategy to tackle economic exclusion, and a strategy which needs to go hand in hand with broader rights strug-

gles. Activists also need to be supported with capacity building in areas such as economic literacy and participatory budgeting skills to enable them to analyse economic policies and budgets, and identify and challenge the ways they are excluded.

## POVERTY REDUCTION EFFORTS ENGAGING WITH SEXUALITY

Poverty reduction efforts need in turn to recognise the connections with sexuality. Currently, poverty reduction initiatives' failure to recognise sexuality means they may have unintended effects on people's sexuality exacerbating exclusion of those who do not conform to expected norms, and thus at the same time failing to meet poverty reduction goals (Drucker 2009, Bedford 2008).

The recent 'Evaluation of Sida's Action Plan on Sexual Orientation and Gender

Identity in Swedish Development Cooperation 2007–2009' identifies as a problem that among Sida staff 'LGBT rights are seen as narrow issue, affecting only a small group of people. The understanding of LGBT as an essential part of the human rights and poverty agenda is limited among staff.' The Evaluation calls for a widening of the analysis of poverty to include LGBT, and an understanding of LGBT as related to poverty as well as human rights, gender equality and democracy (Nilsson, Holmberg, and Ljungros 2010).

Poverty reduction programmes and policies need to be analysed for heteronormativity, to make visible the underlying assumptions about relationships and family forms, and to examine if they are excluding certain groups, or reinforcing unequal and oppressive relationships. Poverty reduction efforts need to ensure they are addressing the needs of those with stigmatised sexualities, and may need to target specific initiatives to these groups.

Economically vulnerable people, which includes those with non-conforming sexualities, are bearing the brunt of the economic crises. A response must be to ground macroeconomic policies in human rights perspectives which include sexual justice. Balakrishnan and Elson are promoting a new initiative on 'auditing economic policies for compliance with human rights obligations' which may be a promising opening in this area (2008).

# 11 Summaries of key texts

**Runeborg, Anna (2008)** *Sexuality: A missing dimension in development*,  
**Stockholm: Swedish International Development Agency**

available on

[http://www.sida.se/Svenska/Om-oss/Publikationer/Visa-publikation/?iframesrc=http://www2.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp%3Fd=118%26a=40003&language=en\\_US&searchWords=sexuality:%20a%20missing%20dimension](http://www.sida.se/Svenska/Om-oss/Publikationer/Visa-publikation/?iframesrc=http://www2.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp%3Fd=118%26a=40003&language=en_US&searchWords=sexuality:%20a%20missing%20dimension)

Sweden is well-placed to play a leading role in championing gender equality, sexuality and sexual rights. Swedish initiatives have often broken new ground, opening up new possibilities for confronting discrimination in its efforts to contribute to a fairer, more tolerant world. Sweden's current international policy on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) 2006 is considered by many to be the most progressive of any government in regards to certain sexuality related issues. However, much of Sida's work has been related to the more problematic and negative aspects of sexuality and, as such, has been confined to the health field or to work on gender equality. Rarely has development work in these areas, as well as in other sectors, taken on the more comprehensive and positive dimensions of sexuality. And even within SRHR work, the emphasis has been on reproductive health, and less on sexual health and rights. Yet issues concerning sexuality are about power and desire, and as such arise in almost every area of development work. These areas include education, employment, credit, agriculture, transport, human rights, good governance and political and economic participation. From the perspective of people living in poverty, sexuality matters because for those who lack money and connections, the effects of societal and legal discrimination – such as sexual harassment and abuse or homophobic violence – may be much more difficult to mitigate than for those who are wealthier and well connected. A lack of sexual rights is in itself a dimension of poverty, producing a whole host of poverty-related outcomes, from social exclusion and physical insecurity to greater vulnerability to disease, hunger and death.

**Armas, Henry (2007) 'Whose Sexualities Count: Poverty Participation and Sexual Rights', *IDS Working Paper 294*, Brighton: IDS**

available on

<http://www.ntd.co.uk/idsbookshop/details.asp?id=939>

This paper asks: what do sexuality, sexual rights and sexual pleasure have to do with citizenship, participation and rights? It makes the case that, far from being secondary to the important matters of housing, education, employment, political participation and so on, sexual rights are an important battlefield in our fight against poverty and are fundamentally interdependent with rights to health, housing, food and

employment. Sexual rights are also a precondition for gender equality. Social and gender norms around sexuality have a huge impact on poverty and inequality. Feminine boys and pregnant girls are more likely to drop out of school due to bullying, social pressure and lack of support, and employers and colleagues discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people at work. Moreover, if poverty is understood to be not just material, but to also be about exclusion, ill-being, and restrictions on capacities and freedom, then the lack of sexual rights in itself constitutes poverty. The paper calls for development agencies to pay greater attention to sexuality. Drawing on the experience of the non-governmental organisation GRUPAL in Peru, the paper shows how participatory approaches can be a useful strategy for bringing sexual rights into mainstream development agendas. GRUPAL runs democracy and participation workshops which include reflection on sexuality: Are you democratic with your sexual partner? Do you listen to your own desire? Are you respected when you say 'no'? Do you dialogue about pleasure? This can be a good entry point for getting people to think about democracy – especially for young people who are sometimes more interested in talking about sex than politics! Taking sexuality into account calls for a commitment to a 'democracy of sexuality', one that can make real the promise of participation, citizenship and rights for all.

**Bedford, Kate, and Jakobsen, Janet (2008) 'Towards a Vision of Sexual and Economic Justice', *New Feminist Solutions*, 4 (11)**

available on

<http://www.barnard.edu/bcrw/newfeministsolutions/index.htm>

Sexual and economic injustices are inextricably linked, but the movements and theoretical frameworks that address each of these issues so often treat them as discrete. Contemporary movements for global economic justice tend to shy away from sexuality issues, while campaigns for sexual rights rarely foreground economic concerns. In some spheres, however, the gap is beginning to close. Barnard Center for Research on Women highlights these potential intersections with its project entitled *Towards a Vision of Sexual and Economic Justice*. The project has several components, the first of which was a public lecture featuring renowned feminist scholar and activist Josephine Ho and award-winning, world renowned journalist, syndicated columnist and internationally best-selling author Naomi Klein. A one-day colloquium followed the public lecture and brought together these two leaders alongside a distinguished group of scholars and activists working on the mutual configuration of sexual and economic justice. The project concludes with a series of publications, including the fourth report in the New Feminists Solutions series, summarizing the outcome of these discussions and disseminating them to academic and activist circles in order to further develop the debates around sexual and economic justice.

**Ferreira, Marcelo Ernesto 'Gender Identity and Extreme Poverty', in Dubel, Ireen and Hielkema, André ed. (2008), *Urgency Required: Gay and Lesbian Rights are Human Rights*, available on**

<http://www.hivos.net/Hivos-Knowledge-Programme/Themes/Urgency-Required/Chapters/Chapter-5-Latin-America>

The report highlights many issues transgender people confront, such as: violence and arbitrary detention by state and non-state actors; violations of the rights to life and security of the person; and being thrown out of their families at an early age, resulting in no access to formal education and extremely limited employment in fields other than sex work. Difficulties in exercising the right to housing, accessing appropriate health care, and moving freely within and between countries are other factors reported to keep transgender people in a situation of extreme poverty.

**ADEIM-Simbiosis, Artemisa, Cattrachas, Criola, IGLHRC, Red Nosotras LBT (2006)**, *“Unnatural”, “Unsuitable”, Unemployed! Lesbians and Workplace Discrimination in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Honduras and Mexico*

available on

[http://www.siyanda.org/docs/various\\_lesbians\\_workplace.pdf](http://www.siyanda.org/docs/various_lesbians_workplace.pdf)

This report analyses discrimination against lesbians in the job market, based on statistics, law and testimonials from Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Honduras. It seeks to make explicit the links between discrimination in the workplace and the ability of lesbian women to secure the basic elements of survival – food, housing, education and medical care – for themselves and their families. Discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation permeates the lives of lesbians and significantly undermines their economic security. It exacerbates the sexism that lesbians already experience as women, and the racism faced by people of indigenous or African descent or members of other racially – or ethnically – marginalised groups. Even worse, it compromises their ability to obtain support from those to whom most people turn first when in financial need: their families and communities.

**Bondyopadhyay, Aditya, Khan, Shivananda, Mulji, Kim (2005)**, *From the front line: A report of a study into the impact of social, legal and judicial impediments to sexual health promotion, care and support for males who have sex with males in Bangladesh and India*, **Naz Foundation International**

This study presents research into the lives of Kothis (a South Asian identity of feminine men) in India and Bangladesh. The study used both quantitative and qualitative tools, including questionnaires (240 respondents), and focus group discussions (12), in – depth interviews (72) following pretesting in each of six cities. Interviewees reported their gender and sexual identities had significant impact on their economic status. Of 240 kothis interviewed/completing questionnaires 70% of the respondents say that the fact that they have sex with other males have had some form of impact on their economic prospects, often negative. Those that report a positive impact on their economic standing are all in sex work. 75% of interviewees reported being in sex work. 45% of the respondents stated that the fact that they were effeminate had affected them at their workplace.

**Human Rights Watch/IGLHRC (2003), *More than a name: State-sponsored homophobia and its consequences in Southern Africa*, IGLHRC New York city**

Many leaders in southern Africa have singled out lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as scapegoats for their countries' problems, Human Rights Watch and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) state in this report. This 298-page report documents pervasive harassment and violence against sexual minorities in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The report documents verbal attacks, police harassment, official crackdowns, and community violence aimed at lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Victims have been assaulted, imprisoned, expelled from schools, fired from jobs, denied access to medical care, evicted from their homes, and driven into exile or, in some cases, to suicide.

**Greenall, Matt (2008), *Sex Work and Economics – A rapid annotated bibliography*, Paulo Longo Research Initiative**

<http://www.plri.org/resource/>

[sex-work-and-economics-%E2%80%93-rapid-annotated-bibliography](http://www.plri.org/resource/sex-work-and-economics-%E2%80%93-rapid-annotated-bibliography)

This annotated bibliography explores the literature on sex work and economics addressing the following issues: “Explanations” of sex work as a market; links between sex work and poverty, inequality and growth; entry into sex work; contributions of the sex industry to development and the economy; economics within the sex industry; “Economic empowerment”/“Income generation” for sex workers. The review includes a range of materials: theoretical, analytical, debate, primary research, secondary research, review.

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Sida works according to directives of the Swedish Parliament and Government to reduce poverty in the world, a task that requires cooperation and persistence. Through development cooperation, Sweden assists countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Each country is responsible for its own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge, skills and expertise. This increases the world's prosperity.

Poverty and Sexuality: What are the connections?

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