

Gender analysis, and thinking and working politically – bridging the gap

By Chris Roche and Sam Gibson
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[Tackling inequalities](#) is a critically important part of reducing poverty and increasing prosperity. It is increasingly recognised that addressing inequality requires a recognition of the political and social processes by which this might be done. Addressing gender inequality is clearly a central element of the wider equality agenda. Gender equality movements in many countries have contributed to real reform including for example in relation to [violence against women](#), female genital mutilation and, of course, [women's right to vote](#). Almost by definition, those movements have successfully combined strategic gendered political analysis and action.

It is therefore striking that a recent survey of political economy analysis tools and reports undertaken by development agencies concluded that gender has been [systematically overlooked](#). Why is that the case? Is it due to the composition and experience of governance teams that tend to commission these reports? Is it because of the [gendered nature of the discipline of politics](#) itself? Is it because gender experts and governance experts don't talk to each other? Or is there a fundamentally [different understanding of power relations](#) between them?

At a meeting of the [Thinking and Working Politically community of practice](#) in Bangkok in 2015 it was recognised that if agencies want to improve their political analysis and practice in general then they have to address gender relations. This is because:

1. **it will sharpen political analysis:** gender relations are embedded in institutions, shape interests and ideas, and mediate structures, i.e., the meat and drink of politics.
2. **gender relations are power relations** which are fundamental to both public and private spheres and which shape, and are shaped by, broader societal norms, i.e., the forces which contribute to political ideologies.

But how is this done in practice? What does gender-informed, politically smart work look like in different contexts? How do development agencies design and implement programs, and undertake monitoring and evaluation that takes this into account?

These are some of the questions the [Developmental Leadership Program](#) are exploring as

part of a [research program](#) on how the practice gap between ‘thinking and working politically’ and gender can be bridged. The research and its dissemination are supported by a grant from DFAT’s [Gender Equality Fund](#).

This research will bring together a number of new research projects alongside a systematic analysis of other case studies based on key informant interviews and secondary/documentary data to understand whether and how, when and where adding a gender lens on the exercise of power and politically smart aid might affect development outcomes. As such we will be focusing on how both gender analysis and ‘thinking and working politically’ can be incorporated at the program level, and how external actors can better support this.

At the [2017 Australasian Aid Conference](#) this week, two panels on ‘**Bringing Thinking and Working Politically and Gender together**’ are exploring these questions, including *Tait Brimacombe* speaking on [gender and coalitions in the Pacific](#), *Alice Evans* on the [global garment industry](#), *Romitesh Kant* on [politics, gender and social media in Fiji](#), *Tanya McQueen and Hannah Derwent* on the [Empowering Indonesian Women for Poverty Reduction Program, also known as Maju Perempuan Indonesia untuk Penanggulangan Kemiskinan \(MAMPU\)](#), *Rebecca Maclaren and Peni Tawake* on the [Pacific Leadership Program’s support to coalitions](#), and *Tara Chetty* on the [We Rise initiative](#) in Fiji. We are delighted that DFAT colleagues will be contributing to the panels, contributing further insights and perspectives.

Do come along!

About the author/s

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Chris Roche is Director of the Institute for Human Security and Social Change, and Associate Professor at La Trobe University and a Senior Research Partner of the Developmental Leadership Program. Chris has worked for International NGOs for nearly 30 years, and has a particular interest in understanding the practice of social change and how it might be best catalysed and supported.

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