

IN FOCUS: GENDER JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTMAKING: AN INTRODUCTION

Contributed by Shalini Nataraj, Vice President, Programs, Global Fund for Women
with Jane Barry, Gender Expert and Consultant, LinksBridge
Human Rights Funding News, IHRFG e-Newsletter, June 3, 2010

As human rights funders, it is critical to understand social constructions of gender roles. The different social positions and experiences of men/boys and women/girls -- many of them profoundly discriminatory and unjust -- lend each gender different skills, opportunities, access to resources, and expressions of power. Understanding this can help funders increase their awareness of how their funding programs can affect men/boys and women/girls differently, intentionally or unintentionally. A gender lens applied to human rights grantmaking could lead, for example, to juvenile justice programs that factor in child care for female parolees; HIV prevention programs that target married women as well as single men; and environmental programs that incorporate LGBT rights into conservation efforts. The ultimate goal of incorporating a gender justice focus into grantmaking is to positively transform systems of power that oppress certain human beings solely because of their gender.¹



So what exactly is "gender justice"? What does it mean to apply a gender perspective to human rights grantmaking? What specific strategies can funders implement?

Answers to these important questions will be discussed in IHRFG's ***Gender Justice and Human Rights Grantmaking Institute***, co-sponsored with Grantmakers Without Borders, July 11-12 in New York City. In the meantime, here are some introductory thoughts:

1. What is Gender Justice?

Gender justice, along with gender liberation, is among the highest aspirations on the continuum of addressing gender inequalities that profoundly affect the lives of men, women, boys, girls and people of all gender expressions and identities.

It is a framework that allows us, as human rights grantmakers, to build on the stepping stones of gender equity, equality and empowerment and – to go further – to seek societal transformation. Celestine Nyamu-Musembi, a fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, sums up this concept of gender justice:

¹ GrantCraft (2004), "Grantmaking with a Gender Lens,"
<http://www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=1328>

“Gender justice is about more than simply questioning the relationship between men and women. It involves crafting strategies for corrective action toward transforming society as a whole to make it more just and equal (Touré 2002); and it means 'a place in which women and men can be treated as fully human' (Mama 2002). Moreover, it implies moving away from arbitrary to well-reasoned, justifiable and balanced—that is, fair—social relations.”²

Key Elements of Gender Justice

- Fair treatment of women and men, where fairness is evaluated on the basis of substantive outcomes and not on the basis of a notion of formal equality that uses an implied 'sameness' standard. This means that in some cases, different treatment may be what is needed for a just outcome (Gouws 1999; McEwan 2001).
- Fairness should be at the level of interpersonal relations and at the level of institutions that mediate these relations and offer redress for wrongs (WLSA Zambia 2001:7).
- Acknowledgement that given a long history of gender hierarchy that has disadvantaged women, gender justice inevitably implies realigning the scales in women's favour (Tamale 2002).
- Questioning the arbitrariness that characterizes the social construction of gender (Touré 2002).

Nyamu-Musembi (2007)

2. What does it mean to apply a gender perspective to human rights grantmaking?

The human rights framework is not gender-neutral. It is constantly evolving and deepening as human rights practitioners and activists work to make it relevant to *all* forms of human rights violations.

Some of their successes in engendering this framework include, among others:

- The adoption of CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination Against All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979)
- The creation of The Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (2006)
- The adoption of the groundbreaking UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security – followed by subsequent resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009).

These, and many other successes, have had “a profound impact on the human rights framework,”³ giving us more effective, practical tools to protect human rights for women *and* men around the world.

² Nyamu-Musembi, Celestine (2007) “Addressing Formal and Substantive Citizenship: Gender Justice in Sub-Saharan Africa” in Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay and Navsharan Singh, ed. *Gender Justice, Citizenship and Development*, Zubaan, New Delhi and International Development Research Centre, Ottawa. <http://www.idrc.ca/openebooks/339-3/>

³ Kadiyoti, D. (2010) “Soft law’ and hard choices: a conversation with Gita Sahgal”, *Open Democracy*

Similarly, applying a gender perspective to human rights grantmaking ensures that our work is more effective and resonates with the truest meaning and values of this human rights framework. It makes the core concepts of non-discrimination and universality come alive, and imbues them with practical application. By applying a gender perspective, grantmakers can move beyond the shorthand of gender as “women and girls” and use gender as a tool to address inequality and oppression of people of all genders, gender expressions and identities.

As such, a gender perspective on human rights grantmaking goes beyond advocacy for engendering and strengthening legal instruments and policy. It helps us to look at how this framework is practically used throughout the world, and how to support our human rights partners in standing up for the rights of all genders.

3. What types of strategies will we discuss in IHRFG’s Gender Justice and Human Rights Grantmaking Institute (July 11-12, New York City)?

In this institute, participants will bring in their own priority challenges and develop strategies to address them. Some of the questions that may arise include how to:

- Address the tension between “cultural relativism” and human rights standards?
- Move beyond the shorthand of gender as “women and girls” and use gender as a tool to address inequality and oppression of people of all genders, gender expressions and identities?
- Honestly work with grantees as partners on understanding and integrating gender perspectives into their work?
- Counter resistance to integrate gender perspectives within my organization, or with my board members?
- Consider the effects of backlash and violence against partners in the field working for gender justice, and to integrate measures for protection?

Resources for Funders:

1. **IHRFG’s Institute on Gender Justice and Human Rights Grantmaking, June 11-12, 2010, New York City**

Co- sponsored with Grantmakers Without Borders. Through case studies, small group work, and role-plays, funders will interactively dissect the gender landscape and gain insights and practical ideas for moving forward. Register by June 25, 2010: www.ihrfg.org

2. Publication from GrantCraft, “Grantmaking with a Gender Lens”
<http://www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=1328>

3. “Addressing Formal and Substantive Citizenship: Gender Justice in Sub-Saharan Africa,”
Celestine Nyamu-Musembi, Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex
<http://www.idrc.ca/openebooks/339-3/>