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identifying routes to social justice

ESID Briefing Paper No. 7

Research Framing Paper No. 1

Researching the politics of gender: A new conceptual and methodological approach

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The approach:

- Goes beyond the question of whether women's descriptive representation in politics leads to substantive forms of representation, to examine the broader forms of politics that shape gender equality.
- Establishes a new analytical framework for exploring the gendered politics of securing inclusive development. This exploits the convergence between the political settlements framework and recent advances in the feminist literature on women in politics.
- Incorporates a focus on the importance of history, in terms of women's political role during critical moments of state formation, and the role of informal as well as formal institutions and spaces.
- Maps out how institutions and the interests, incentives and ideas of different actors shape the prospects for women's political inclusion and the promotion of gender equality within specific types of political settlement. This pushes the feminist political analysis beyond its usual focus on the limits of representative democracy and debates over whether increased political participation for women has been effective in securing actual gains.

Introduction

A significant gap exists between the political settlements literature and the mainstream feminist literature on women in politics. The political settlements literature is gender blind, failing to take into account how women, and those who represent women's interests, may shape current political settlements or how their representation and interests are shaped by such settlements. The feminist literature has tended to focus on the constraints that exist in formal political and institutional structures, the impact of women's representation and participation in formal politics and of women's movements on promoting gender equity. But until recently feminist political analysis has not engaged effectively with the insights offered by the new literature on political settlements, particularly regarding the extent to which the informal and clientelistic forms of politics that characterise most political settlements in developing countries closely shape the prospects for women's empowerment.

Combining these two bodies of literature is therefore significant for generating a deeper understanding of how politics shapes the possibilities for greater inclusion of women and promotion of gender equity in development policies, processes and outcomes in developing country contexts. This combination has become more feasible of late as feminist scholars have recently drawn attention to the significance of informal institutions in shaping prospects for gender equality (e.g. Waylen 2014). It highlights the importance of informal institutions, spaces and relations for gender equity concerns, and extends our focus beyond the instrumental question of whether women's political participation per se leads to an increased focus on gender equity policies. This approach also has relevance for understanding how other marginalised groups may propose alternative interpretations of inclusive development and how these are negotiated.

The framework

The Goetz and Hassim (2003) framework on women's political effectiveness is useful for exploring the gaps in women's inclusion in politics and their influence in formal arenas and institutions. However, there is a need to move beyond specific institutions and formal processes and analyse the underlying forms of politics and power relations in a manner that can incorporate the historical and contextual elements.

The first stage of the framework (see Figure 1 below) involves examining the gendered nature of state formation over time. Using historical analysis and focusing on critical junctures, the role played by women and their representatives is analysed. These critical moments of state formation usually involve the formation of new types of political settlement being established, which is the focus of the next level of analysis.
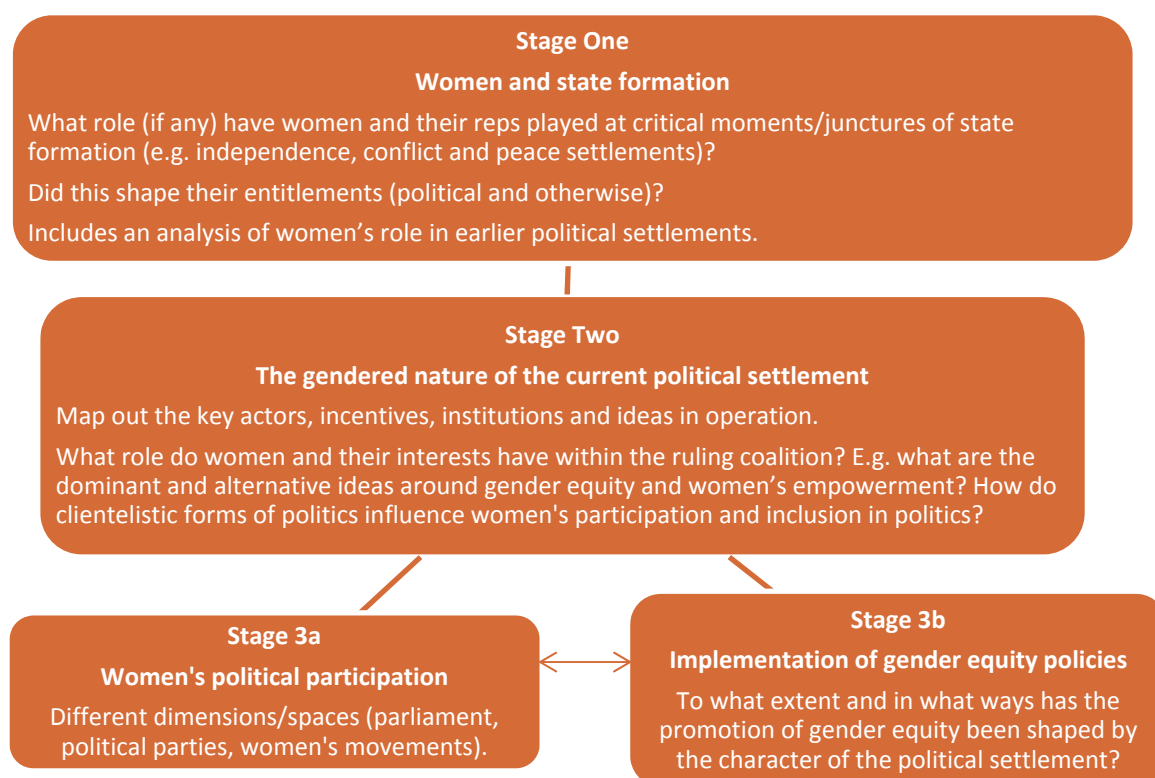
The second stage of the framework unpacks the gendered nature of current political settlements in selected countries. The role of women (in politics), and how their interests are interpreted and negotiated, needs to be explored. This requires an investigation of negotiations between dominant and alternative ideas on gender equity and women's empowerment. It also requires an investigation of how clientelist and patronage-based politics shape women's inclusion, presence and influence in politics and also their ability to promote gender equity concerns.

Stage three has two aspects. The first area focuses on exploring the both the quantity and the quality of women's inclusion and participation in politics in formal institutions (i.e. political parties, state bureaucracy, parliament, local government), informal spaces, and women's movements. This includes how these are shaped by the women's political entitlements explored in stage one and the current gendered political settlement investigated in stage two. The second area to be explored is how women's political entitlements and political settlements influence the development and implementation of gender equity policies in different sectors, e.g. education, health, social provisioning, labour, welfare, family law.

The framework thus indicates that whilst women's political inclusion may be a critical factor in relation to the successful promotion of women's interests and gender equity policies, whether or not this actually happens is contested in current research on the topic. While research shows that gender quotas and women's participation in politics have clear demonstrative effects, there are many factors that mediate whether women representatives actively promote gender equity. More broadly, research on the politics of gender equality needs to look beyond the role that women play in promoting gender equity policies. It needs to explore the broader range of political factors at work here, with a particular focus on how gender equity advocates, including male allies, are able to align their cause with and/or reshape the dominant interests and ideas within the political settlement (see Nazneen and Mahmud, 2013). This approach also helps to avoid instrumentalising women in politics, whose role therein should be seen as a right in itself, rather than purely as a function of other goals.

The hypothesis is that the character of the political settlement plays a key role in shaping both the nature of the relationship between women's inclusion and their influence, and the broader politics of achieving gender equality.

Figure 1. Gendered settlements framework

Stage One

Women and state formation

What role (if any) have women and their reps played at critical moments/junctures of state formation (e.g. independence, conflict and peace settlements)?

Did this shape their entitlements (political and otherwise)?

Includes an analysis of women's role in earlier political settlements.

Stage Two

The gendered nature of the current political settlement

Map out the key actors, incentives, institutions and ideas in operation.

What role do women and their interests have within the ruling coalition? E.g. what are the dominant and alternative ideas around gender equity and women's empowerment? How do clientelistic forms of politics influence women's participation and inclusion in politics?

Stage 3a

Women's political participation

Different dimensions/spaces (parliament, political parties, women's movements).

Stage 3b

Implementation of gender equity policies

To what extent and in what ways has the promotion of gender equity been shaped by the character of the political settlement?

Applying the framework

The framework may be explored deductively, in a top-down manner starting from stage one, or inductively, in a bottom-up way starting from stage three. A deductive approach may be preferable if the focus is on testing and building theory. It requires a grounded and context-specific knowledge of the nature of women's political participation in the selected countries and of the nature of gender equity policies and reforms being considered as cases. If there is a gap in knowledge and data in the latter two areas, then it may be more pragmatic to start inductively (with stage three) with sector-specific cases within comparative contexts.

The framework includes the proposed relationships between the different stages. For developing an analysis of gendered political settlements in selected countries, it would therefore be ideal for the whole framework to be applied in each of the cases to be investigated and compared. However, the framework can also be treated as a menu and certain key relationships may be identified for more in-depth investigation.

Suggestions for operationalising the framework

Stage 1: Map the critical moments in a country's history when balance of power was negotiated and identify how women were included (or not), their role at these critical junctures of history, and what kind of political entitlements were created for women at these junctures, e.g. independence; formulation of new constitution; transitions to democracy; post-conflict state building. How were the major shifts within and between political settlements gendered? What role (if any) did women and their interests have in these moments? Did these dynamics shape women's political inclusion and the promotion of gender equity reforms?

Stage 2: For the mapping of the current political settlement look at actors, institutions, interests and also ideas. Who are the key actors in the way power is currently organised in each country? What are their interests in promoting or obstructing women's inclusion in formal institutions and spaces? What are the key institutions through which power operates and to what extent are women present (or absent) in these institutions? How do women and gender equity interests feature within the informal institutions and the way power actually operates (i.e., clientelist politics)? This will include trying to identify the extent to which the particular *type* of political settlement in each country shapes the possibilities for women's inclusion and influence. Key questions may hinge around the relationships between women's movements and political parties, and how well women and women's organisations can navigate clientelist politics, but also about their ability to sidestep partisan politics and forge relationships with 'femocrats'.

Stages 3a and 3b: Trace the link between women's inclusion in the selected area of study (including the politics around that) and women's influence, investigating the negotiations between different actors and the outcomes of these negotiations. How have the power relations among the key actors in these areas (and ideas these actors have and the opportunity structure) influenced the outcome? Above all, why do the actors behave in the way they do?

Ideas and discourses on gender equity and the role of transnational actors would need to be explored at all three stages.

Key methodological elements to consider

Effective application of the framework requires:

- Careful selection of specific country, sector or policy reform cases; systematically tracing the processes and pathways that demonstrate the links between different stages; ensuring that there are sufficient resources and data; and adopting an interdisciplinary approach (institutional/organisational analysis, political science, anthropology, gender studies, history).
- Identifying *which* critical moment of a country's history to focus upon, as these would vary depending on the issue, sector or case selected for analysis.
- Selecting appropriate sectors and policy reforms that allow for tracing the processes and pathways of how women's inclusion in politics or women's movements leads to their influencing changes in these sectoral outcomes and policy reforms.

What does this mean for research on the politics of development?

- Comparative research conducted by ESID, which applies this framework in Uganda, Rwanda, Ghana and Bangladesh, will provide insights into the relationship between the politics of inclusion and the politics of influence by exploring policy processes relating to violence against women, and girls' basic education.
- Political settlements analysis stands to gain from including a gender lens, which clearly demonstrates the role played by ideas and transnational factors, moving political settlements beyond its rational-choice base and methodological nationalism.
- This gender perspective moves political settlements analysis beyond the constraints of rational-choice theory and methodological nationalism by demonstrating the critical role of ideas and transnational factors in the politics of inclusion.
- From a policy perspective, tracing the politics of influence through specific sectors is useful for unpacking the factors that facilitate a marginalised group's agency to influence policy and development outcomes, thus leading towards inclusive development.
- This approach therefore has relevance for understanding how other marginalised groups might negotiate the politics of inclusive development.

Further reading

- Goetz, A. M. and Hassim, S. (2003). *No Short Cuts to Power: African Women in Politics and Policy Making*. London: Zed Books.
- Nazneen, S. (forthcoming). 'Gendered politics of securing inclusive development: Framing ESID's research approach', research note.
- Nazneen, S. and Mahmud, S. (2012). 'Gendered politics of securing inclusive development', *ESID Working Paper No. 13*. Manchester: ESID.
- Waylen, G. (2014). 'Informal institutions, institutional change and gender equality', *Political Research Quarterly* 67(1): 212-223.

About this briefing

This briefing is part of a series of ESID framing papers outlining new conceptual and methodological approaches for researching the politics of development. The aim is to operationalise ESID's political settlements approach in specific domains – in this case gender – and provide a framework for doing so. The briefing was adapted by Kate Pruce from Sohela Nazneen and Simeen Mahmud's ESID Working Paper No. 13, and Sohela Nazneen's research note on 'The Gendered Politics of Inclusive Development (forthcoming).

The Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre

The Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre (ESID) aims to improve the use of governance research evidence in decision-making. Our key focus is on the role of state effectiveness and elite commitment in achieving inclusive development and social justice.

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