



TOPIC 1

Citizenship & rights - transformed by struggles for gender equality?

Introduction

Citizenship & Rights are considered core concepts by many development practitioners who work with promoting good governance and strengthening community based participation. The concept of citizenship and rights has been questioned and criticised by some for being western in origin and from a gendered perspective the critique is taken further because of the embedded precondition of the full, free and consenting individual. To give everybody the same rights, does not guarantee equality because women's position within social relations is different and subordinate to men.

The present conference will apply an understanding of citizenship as a way of defining personhood which links rights to agency. In this way: "Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents" (Lister 1998: 228.)

If one sees citizenship and civic participation in this premise it involves the direct ways in which citizens influence and exercise control in governance rather than the more traditional forms of indirect representation. It is also recognition of the fact that essentially citizen agency is about power and its exercise for securing rights and entitlements.

The conference will explore practises of citizenship and rights through a gender lens. It will look at the changing role of civil society groups, the strategies and tools they apply to facilitate women's voice and access to governance institutions in order to ensure responsiveness, accountability and increased access to rights for both women and men. The conference will focus on women's agency as citizens; civic education; the role of traditional versus modern concepts of leadership; the role of new elites; the use of the media and communication strategies for changing gender norms, the involvement of men, and the use of new information technology in governance work.

Questions

- How to discuss practices of citizenship and rights when the vast majority of women and men in developing countries mostly living outside the capital and don't have knowledge about their rights as citizens?
- How do traditional and modern forms of governance interact in new forms and what impact do they have on women's rights and agency as citizens?
- How can women state their claim as citizens and as individuals with rights in governance and how to support this agency?
- What are the barriers to women's agency as citizens and individuals with rights?
- Can new information technology strengthen women's citizenship agency and how?
- What is the role of civic education and how to integrate a gender perspective in the best possible way? - good and bad practices.
- How to hold governance structures accountable to women as citizens and individuals with rights?
- Do newly emerging elites have the potential to act as champions for change?