



RELIGIONS, DEVELOPMENT & GENDER

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GENDER & RELIGION ARE IGNORED IN DEVELOPMENT

Gender

- Women's unique roles and experiences in development were first considered in the 1970s with the emergence of the Women in Development (WID) approach. But WID focused on women in isolation and considered them mainly in economic terms.
- WID was replaced by Gender in Development (GAD) in 1995, recognizing the structural inequalities and relationships between women *and* men.
- BUT the complex GAD approach is rarely implemented in practice.
 Gender dynamics continue to be overlooked and misunderstood.

Religion

- Religions' diverse roles in development were not considered until the early 2000s.
- Development actors have recently started to recognize the roles religions and faith actors in development
- BUT development practice remains permeated by "Religionphobia".
- Feminists warn that focusing on mostly male religious leaders will embolden patriarchal views and hurt women.
- Decolonial discourses have pointed to the fact that Western development is itself deeply rooted in a colonial Christian worldview. These religious roots remain little acknowledge by large development actors.

GENDER & RELIGION ARE INSEPARABLE

- Gender issues and religion are intertwined in countries across the globe.
 - Religious actors have both advanced and hindered gender equality.
 - Patriarchal societies in high and low-income countries show similar gender norm patterns, regardless of religion.
 - In patriarchal societies, religion is often used to legitimize “traditional” gender roles and hierarchies.
 - The gender and religion intersection is particularly visible in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHRs) and violence against women and girls (VAWG).
 - Both, SRHRs and VAWG, are part of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5).
- ➡ SDG 5 cannot be achieved without considering the gender-religion intersection.

MULTILATERAL AGENCIES ENGAGING WITH RELIGION AND GENDER TO ACHIEVE THE SDG 5

The Spotlight Initiative

This is a global multi-year partnership between the European Union and the UN. It funds several projects that emphasize the important roles faith actors play in ending harmful practices and transforming social norms around VAWG.



UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women

The Fund supports initiatives that work towards eliminating VAWG. Funded activities include engaging with faith leaders to prevent violence.



CURRENT DEBATES

LGBTIQ+ rights

- “Religious freedom” laws legalize the discrimination of LGBTQ+ people in some countries in the Global North.
- Conservative Christian and Muslim groups unite to protect “family values” in some countries in the Global South.
- BUT many religious leaders across the globe also advocate for LGBTQ+ rights.

Sexual & reproductive health & rights (SRHRs)

- Conservative Christian voices have driven anti-abortion campaigns in the aftermath of 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women.
- US aid policies and funding have been heavily affected by these campaigns.
 - ➡ This has obstructed SRHRs projects and overshadowed more liberal religious standpoints on SRHRs.

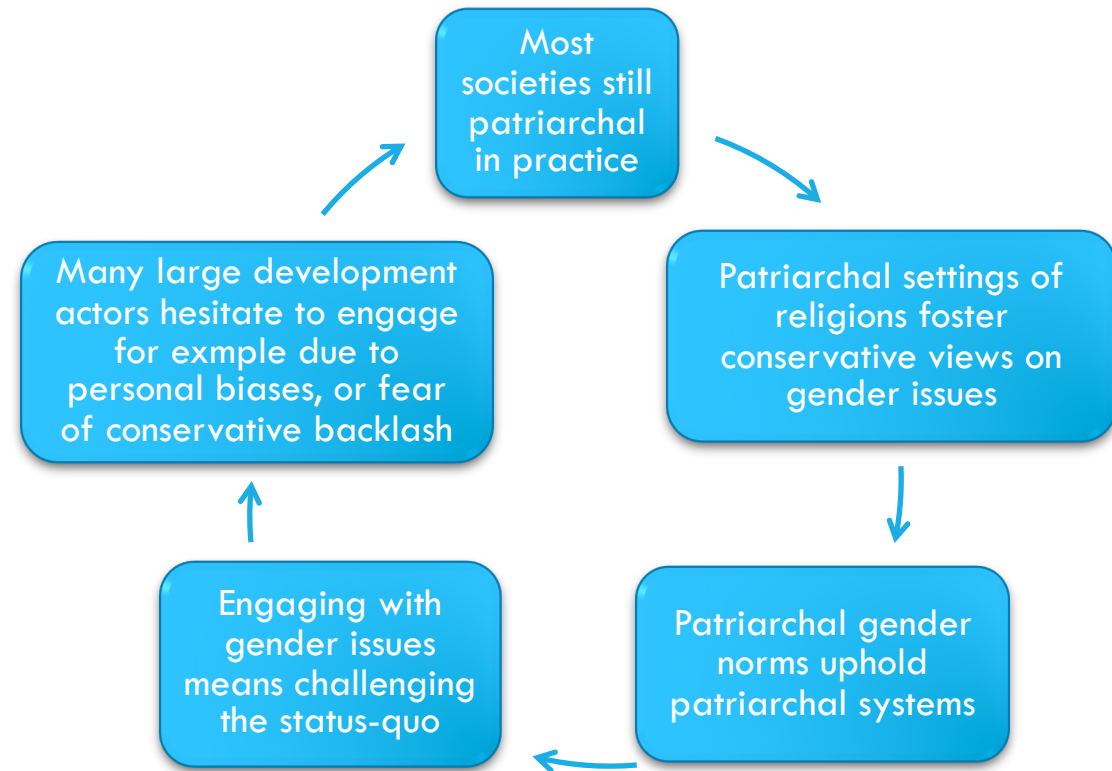
CURRENT DEBATES

Building religious literacy on

- the existence of diverse standpoints on gender issues in religious contexts.
- the difference between “cultural norms”, “patriarchal practices” or “religious rules”.
- the fact that many practices labeled “religious” in the Global South also exist in the Global North. They are rather a result of patriarchal norms than religion.

➡ This means, they are subject to change!

Why is engaging with religion & gender perceived as challenging?



CONCLUSION

- Gender is *not* a subsection of “religion & development” but an integral part of all its dimensions (e.g., religions & poverty, religions & healthcare, religions & climate, etc.).
 - The entanglement of religious politics and gender issues is *not* a unique feature of the Global South but span the entire globe.
 - Bilateral country relations, diplomacy, and personal attitudes are obstructing a meaningful engagement with gender and religion.
 - Western-centric notions still dominate the knowledge building around gender and religion.
 - Decolonial feminist discourses are calling for a change, incl. marginalized voices to become the center of development.
- ➡ This was a key promise of the Beijing conference 25 years ago.