Whose feminism counts? Gender(ed) Knowledge and Professionalisation in Development

Abstract

Gender and development has become a transnational discourse and has, as a result, generated its own elite elements. This elitism has tended to be attributed to a Northern hegemony in how feminism has been articulated and then subsequently professionalized and bureaucratized. What has received less attention, and what this paper highlights empirically, is how Southern-based feminisms might themselves be sites of discursive exclusion. This paper interrogates these concerns through an analysis of how professionalisation is evidenced in feminist engagement amongst civil society organisations working on gender in New Delhi, India. The analysis suggests that efforts to create spaces for subaltern voices are constrained not only by the disciplining effects of neoliberal frameworks, but also – and in tandem – by Southern elite feminist priorities. The implications of these findings are significant: processes of professionalisation and the elitism they engender may have the effect of potentially precluding the engagement of those people on the margins whose voices are so sought after as part of efforts to facilitate inclusive development.

Keywords: gender and feminism; neoliberalization; participation and power; professionalisation; civil society

Introduction

Gender and development (GAD), initially a subversive response to the gender-blindness of mainstream development, has itself become a transnational discourse and has, as a result, generated its own elite elements.[1] Concerns around the professionalisation of development discourse and the concomitant bureaucratization of GAD that its uptake in practice has entailed, continue to be debated.[2] Within this, there is a need to reflect on the nature of current GAD discourse and practice, and its relative inclusivity/exclusivity to different individuals/groups occupying diverse discursive and/or geographical locations. The literature concurs that the professionalisation of GAD discourse is at least partly evidenced by an alignment with neoliberal development imperatives.[3] This has the effect of precluding the engagement of those people on the margins who most often suffer the starkest material

consequences of (gender-blind) development shortcomings.[4] What has received less attention, and the concern this paper highlights empirically, is the extent to which the discursive spaces of Southern feminisms – understood as distinct sets of feminist ideas that derive from their own indigenous/local/regional historical contexts – might themselves be sites of exclusion. This paper interrogates these concerns through a theoretical and empirical analysis of how the professionalisation of ideas – interrogated here in relation to how dominant ideas emerge and are subsequently and variously framed, articulated and shared – is evidenced in feminist engagement amongst civil society organisations working in the area of GAD in New Delhi, India. The analysis suggests that efforts to create spaces for subaltern voices are constrained due to the disciplining effects of professionalised global/neoliberal as well as Southern, local (in this case Indian) elite feminist priorities for gender and/or feminist development discourse and practice.

The analysis begins by unpacking dominant 'ways of knowing' wherein the neoliberal hegemony of donors and IFIs are implicated as part a continually contested, but nonetheless dominant development knowledge system. The paper then moves on to consider the extent to which neoliberal development paradigms discipline what once was considered a subaltern, subversive gender/feminist narrative that challenged the gender-blindness of mainstream development. The analysis moves on to consider historical and contemporary charges of elitism within the Indian women's movement. The empirical evidence interrogates the resultant professionalisation amongst a diversity of women's NGOs in New Delhi, India. The conclusion suggests that efforts designed to privilege subaltern ideas occur in spaces already circumscribed by elite, discursive priorities. More worrying, these processes of professionalisation and the elitism they engender may have the effect of potentially precluding the engagement of those people on the margins whose voices are so sought after as part of efforts to facilitate inclusive development.

The professionalisation of development discourse

In order to understand the nature and pervasiveness of the professionalisation of ideas within development discourse, we can reflect briefly on how the ascendance of, and response to, dominant development 'narratives' has been disciplined by the discursive power of development itself. Building on Foucault's[5] definitive insights into the mutuality of the relationship between power and knowledge, Abrahamsen argues that the ascendance of particular narratives is 'not natural or inevitable, but historically contingent and dependent on power relations that have already rendered a particular topic a legitimate object of investigation'.[6] How then do we apply these insights into understanding the power relations that constitute development discourse? This power to determine the shape and focus of development discourse has been the subject of much debate. Some argue that international organisations (IOs) such as the World Bank, given their control over financial

resources, [7] 'are often the actors empowered to decide if there is a problem at all, what kind of problem it is, and whose responsibility it is to solve it'.[8]

Others suggest that global-level discourses represent a contested rather than unified ideational terrain, where global discourses 'regarding the content of global policy' are in fact being continually negotiated through interactions between different states, IOs and academic disciplines.[9] Escobar, elaborating on the origins of 'development discourse', persuasively argues that IOs power to 'frame' (however oppositional) may not be understood in isolation from the system.[10] It is not one economic institution or social programme or idea that defines development, but rather 'a set of relations among these elements',[11] which Arce suggests is part of a discursive rubric that he terms 'the language of development'.[12] This language, McEwan argues, establishes a hierarchy whereby 'certain forms of knowledge are dominant and others are excluded … [the] texts of development contain silences. It is important to ask, therefore, who is silenced, and why'.[13] Attempts to engage with the subaltern are invariably undertaken to reveal these silences, a concern the analysis revisits in the next section.

With a 'discursive formation laid down in the period 1945-1955', Escobar contends that development represents a particularised body of knowledge, a certain 'way of knowing'[14] The dominance of this 'way of knowing' has been enabled by processes of professionalisation embodied in notions of 'expertise' that, as Kothari suggests, have underpinned the expansion of narrowly focused, neoliberal economic development paradigms.[15] This professionalisation means that only those 'suitably qualified' may participate,[16] establishing subtle and variable forms of discursive inclusion and exclusion predicated on the creation of an 'inner circle' of experts with a knowledge of the 'new vocabularies' and 'master buzzwords'.[17] In this space, and despite efforts to engage with viewpoints and stakeholders drawing from a diversity of Northern and Southern discursive locations, particular narratives of what, or how, development 'should' be are "rendered legitimate" by those with power, a self-selecting group who are likely to share certain characteristics that act as prerequisites to participation, such as access to the Internet and a command of the English language. Kakande (2004: 92), writing from her standpoint as a senior bureaucrat in Uganda's Ministry for Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED), suggests that it is 'common knowledge' that participation by civil society organisations in Southern elite networks is limited to those with the discursive capacity to engage in the 'common language' of the 'inner circle' of IFI and finance ministry officials.[18]

One key response to addressing the dominance of (neoliberal) development narratives has been to privilege local, indigenous or Southern knowledge, acting as a counterpoint to the international scope of dominant Western knowledge systems.[19] Whilst attempts to seek out so-called subaltern narratives to challenge the hegemony of dominant development discourses represent an important recognition that the North does not have a monopoly on

useful, credible or relevant knowledge, there are also a number of dangers in this response that help to explain how, rather contradictorily, 'IK [indigenous knowledge] has evolved as a means of legitimizing as well as resisting mainstream development'.[20] For the purposes of this analysis, two key issues arise, and concerns around professionalisation emerge in both. These highlight the impact that dominant ways of knowing have on attempts to engage with the resultant Southern or indigenous narratives that emerge which, as the subsequent analysis attests, has important implications for how we understand, and engage with, 'Southern feminisms'.

First, whilst a growing number of academics and practitioners are pursuing local knowledge as one method of subverting hegemonic or dominant discourses, knowledge, indigenous or otherwise, is not a static entity to be captured, but rather 'is embedded in social cultural processes imbued with aspects of power, authority and legitimation'.[21] Briggs argues that 'indigenous knowledge tends not to be problematized, but is seen as a "given", almost a benign and consensual knowledge simply waiting to be tapped into'.[22] This conceptualisation is at odds with the understanding of indigenous, or indeed any, knowledge as part of iterative, contested, dynamic and continually evolving knowledge creation processes

The second concern emerging out of this is that these processes of co-option and contestation, to which all forms of knowledge are subject, occur within the dominant discursive spaces of development, with profound consequences for how indigenous knowledge itself is understood. Mosse questions the power held by 'outsiders' attempting to capture 'local' or 'indigenous' knowledge, suggesting that the knowledge that the outsider gathers is likely to be 'that which already exists in a codified form, as explicit "indigenous theories"'.[23] That indigenous knowledge is that which is already codified is as likely to result from 'the idea that local indigenous knowledge must first be professionalised (ordered and systematised) so that it can be circulated and shared'.[24] Professionalising indigenous knowledge, Laurie et al. argue, 'is intimately bound up in transnational development discourses and networks', which creates an artificial entity called 'indigenous knowledge' that is circumscribed by the very knowledge system it is invoked to supersede.[25]

More problematically, 'established geographies of knowledge production ... draw a sharp distinction between (local) indigenous knowledge and the construction of an international knowledge system'.[26] Yet in reality, development 'rationalities' are so entrenched,[27] and given the relative power of the overarching development discourse, some critics have argued that for many individuals, communities and groups, it would be 'almost impossible ... to envisage futures that are not bound up in some form of development imaginary'.[28] As Fernando reiterates, so-called 'indigenous knowledge' is subject to an ever-encroaching globalisation, with the result that 'there will be fewer and fewer areas where the term indigenous knowledge is applicable in any meaningful way'.[29] We also need to consider the

existence of power imbalances at the so-called local level[30] from where more inclusive, representative and grounded 'indigenous' knowledge is itself meant to emerge. Taken together, these concerns around the nature and function of indigenous knowledge have profound implications for those stakeholders or movements attempting to create spaces for the inclusion of so-called subaltern voices to challenge dominant narratives.

Gender and development: a subversive development narrative?

The challenge posed by this critical interrogation of the nature of 'indigenous knowledge' has particular implications for GAD discourse and practice. Feminist movements in development have been centrally concerned with the creation of spaces to engage the voices of the 'subaltern'.[31] Before we consider the implications for attempts to reach the 'subaltern' of power imbalances within so-called 'indigenous' articulations of knowledge, we need first to consider the emergence of GAD discourse and practice, wherein women's NGOs emerge as key interlocutors.

Ground-breaking work by both Western and Third World feminist academic/activists has sought variously to recognise women's paid and unpaid labour, alongside generating new understandings of women not just as victims but also as development agents in their own right.[32] The Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) held in Beijing in 1995 drew on the strength of this scholarship to establish global commitments to gender equality, which have continued as a central feature of the Millennium Declaration and the 2015 negotiations around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The uptake of gender inequality as an overarching concern within development discourse and practice has been an incredible victory for feminist campaigners. But the literature suggests that the uptake of feminist discourses into the mainstream has come at a price.

Achieving Southern feminist engagement has necessitated an element of professionalisation in how feminist movements engage in the mainstream, and the cost is often articulated in terms of a disconnection. Alvarez identified this 'disconnect' in the Latin American context in the run-up to Beijing. She cites some who 'argued that feminist NGOs' and networks' increased focus on national and international policy arenas has distanced them from the grassroots, from the needs and concerns of local women'.[33] Nor has this 'disconnect' resolved itself in the post-Beijing period. Research undertaken amongst women's NGOs in a diversity of countries in the intervening period concur that a 'disconnect' persists. For Jad, despite the raised profiles of many Palestinian women's NGOs, 'this international recognition is not translated into recognition or legitimacy at local and national levels'.[34] Nabacwa has observed in the Ugandan context that the efforts

undertaken by women's NGOs to advocate for policy change at the national level 'have been detached from the districts and have more often been interpreted as elitist women's issues'.[35] The implications for Ghodsee of the 'disconnect between the lives of women in Bulgaria and the kinds of advocacy projects being pursued by the women's NGOs in Sofia' is that 'women's NGOs not only disregard the fundamental problems, but many [may] actively obscure them'.[36] The persistence of this 'disconnect', coupled with the critiques of indigenous knowledge in the previous section, raise important questions around representation and legitimacy in relation to how women's NGOs act as interlocutors with subaltern women.

So what is the cause of this disconnect? One manifestation of the professionalisation that at least partially explains this disconnect is evidenced in a well-established literature that critiques the bureaucratisation and depoliticisation of GAD discourse and practice. In the Latin American context, Alvarez cites 'the absorption' by dominant institutions 'of some of the more **culturally acceptable** items of the feminist agenda', which lead to the 'increased specialization and professionalization of growing numbers of feminist NGOs dedicated to intervening in national and international policy processes'.[37] This synergy between professionalisation and the adoption of the more 'palatable' ideas emerging from feminist activism is achieved through processes of depoliticisation, bureaucratisation and instrumentalisation to facilitate their uptake and co-option into mainstream development discourse.[38] Goetz suggests that bureaucratising feminist knowledge in development is rooted in the 'dominant economic paradigm' in which only certain articulations of information are validated, which in turn 'impose[s] a particular discipline on information about women' that 'has the effect of stripping away its political content'.[39] In her discussion of the co-option of women's empowerment discourses into neoliberal development paradigms as a key outcome in state-led women's empowerment programmes in India, Sharma extends this concern to further suggest an intrinsic relationship between bureaucratisation and professionalisation that is embodied in notions of expertise and measurability.[40] Nagar and Raju similarly identify the challenge of 'doing' empowerment 'at a time when "Southern" women's nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are becoming increasingly professionalized and globalized'.[41]

Another compelling, explanatory factor is rooted in the transnational discourse, which has become circumscribed by the dominant, neoliberal agendas that delimit the nature and scope of what constitutes knowledge in GAD practice to those concerns that correlate with economic development objectives. Nagar identifies the growth of a 'gender hegemony' to accompany the 'expansion of globalized capitalism since 1989' where, she argues, a consensus on the priority areas for feminist action in development exclude alternative approaches to the development concerns of marginalised women in particular. Nagar suggests that '[g]ender mainstreaming' and approaches to addressing 'poor women's empowerment' have necessarily responded to the

funding agencies' popularization of 'gender' (instead of 'women'), of a focus on violence against women and HIV/AIDS (instead of infant mortality or price inflation of basic foods), and of microcredit programs (instead of women's unions or land reforms). [42]

An important element of this neoliberal disciplining consists of facilitating social development (of which support for gender issues and women's empowerment is key) in ways that Cammack calls a 'blueprint' for 'the sustainable reproduction of capitalism'[43] that necessitates a move 'beyond simple macro-economics to [consider] the social and cultural dimensions of economic success'.[44] This narrow articulation of social development simply as a means through which to more sustainably reproduce and proliferate capitalism further reflects concerns around the 'smart economics'[45] and the hype surrounding the 'girl effect'[46] championed by the donors, IGOs/IFIs and even large corporations that instrumentalise the role of women and girls as conduits to achieving broader economic development objectives.

The implications of this alignment for how women's NGOs engage with GAD discourse and practice are significant. Whilst this global attention has politicised a range of important gender issues, Nagar echoes Alvarez in her assertion that these efforts have lost their more 'radical' edge; instead she suggests that 'the interventions made by powerful NGOs have often ended up serving the interests of global capital'.[47] In her comparative analysis of two grassroots initiatives to empower women in the Indian context, Raju raises questions about whether 'the circumstances, the domains (for example, livelihood issues) and the specific manner in which empowering efforts have been targeted … can be completely delinked from neo-liberal processes'.[48] This literature confirms the relative hegemony of neoliberal approaches as one dominant 'way of knowing' even within GAD discourse and practice. But what is also important to note for the purposes of this analysis is that the key referent in these critiques is the power imbalances embodied in the North-South divide. But is this divide the only relevant referent?

It is certainly articulated as the most pervasive. As I have problematised elsewhere,[49] there is a tendency in development discourse and practice to represent the Global South as universally marginalised. Within this, the Southern woman is reified; by virtue of her geographical location, she is both herself a source, as well as a representative, of alternative and subversive development paradigms and ideas. In the scholarship in which concerns around feminist professionalisation have been highlighted, the suggestion tends to be that Southern-based elite feminists are co-opted into transnational, Northern or mainstream development narratives, with their engagement occurring at the expense of local, indigenous and/or Southern feminisms or Southern feminist priorities. Monasterios, for instance, cites the evolution of a 'gender technocracy' rooted in this co-option that is the source of the above-noted disconnect. It is a term she suggests was coined by autonomous Latin American feminists to distinguish between an elite, liberal and hegemonic 'northern-hemisphere feminism' being exported by global institutions such as the UN, as compared

with 'authentic' grassroots feminist movements and consciousness, with which the now globalized, exported discourse of 'gender and development' has remained largely disconnected.[50] Baillie Smith and Jenkins, drawing on Jenkins' research with women health promoters in Peru, eloquently describe the exclusion of these women from mainstream development spaces owing to the professionalisation of 'transnational' discursive spaces that require an engagement with the 'appropriate buzzwords and expert knowledge'.[51] Amadiume is perhaps the most explicit in articulating this dichotomy with her notion of the 'Europeanised African woman' who maintains a desire to reproduce European cultures, beliefs and practices, as contrasted with what she perceives as the spirit of African 'daughters of the Goddess'.[52]

But if we extend the concerns of both the professionalisation of ideas and the power imbalances intrinsic to indigenous or local knowledge systems articulated in the previous section, are there sites of exclusion for subaltern women operating within the Global South? In addition to silences created by a Northern, neoliberal framing of GAD priorities, what I argue is lacking in this literature is a more nuanced, in-depth analysis of the ways in which the expression of Southern feminisms themselves might be disciplined by Southern elite feminisms and feminist practices. These are ideas and/or traditions that emerge, not only through sustained engagement with, or co-option by, Northern feminism, but rather Southern elite feminist priorities that can be traced to local or indigenous historical trajectories that may also be precluding the inclusion of marginalised voices. The empirical analysis here suggests that this historically/locally derived Southern elite feminism elides with Northern feminist development paradigms to circumscribe and effectively invisibilise the concerns of women discursively marginalised from both transnational and indigenous elite spaces. In this context, the study undertaken here in New Delhi, India offers empirical insights into a particularised Southern elite feminist positionality that challenges notions of a universally marginalised 'Southern' woman's voice. Moreover, through their role as gatekeepers and mediators between marginalised women and the transnational feminist spaces wherein GAD discourse and practice are proliferated, these Southern elite feminisms may effectively obscure any meaningful engagement with the so-called subaltern voices so sought after by progressive Northern (feminist) stakeholders. As this next section highlights, the existing literature on feminism in India has long documented concerns around the exclusive tendencies of elite Indian feminism.

Southern elite feminisms: India

Whilst there is effectively a silence on the nature of indigenous elite feminisms within GAD discourse and practice more broadly, that is not to suggest that a robust scholarship does not exist to document historical and on-going concerns around elite capture of feminist ideas. Indian feminist movements have a long and historically well-established trajectory

characterised by internal divisions fuelled primarily by class and caste divides. With the entrance of women en masse into the nationalist movement, women's societies were established including the All India Women's Conference (AIWC), which lobbied for reforms to women's education.[53] The membership of these organisations tended to be drawn from the upper classes who were not keen to grant equal voice to their working class counterparts.[54] They felt that, as 'only a few educated women of the land can speak, on behalf of our sex' they were qualified to represent 'Indian womanhood'.[55] Mazumdar suggests that class-based hierarchies fuelled misperceptions of the needs of 'the masses of Indian women', whereby 'much of what agitated the reformers, hardly touched them. Except for child marriage the other problems taken up by the reform movement meant nothing to them', going on to note that

> [t]he greatest failure of the reform movement lay in its inability to expose the nature of
>
> the oppression that affected women in different layers of our society … the movement
>
> for women's emancipation in India remained confined to its urban middle-class roots.[56]

As Subramaniam notes, 'the ideology of the women's organizations was too Hindu, too middle class, and too urban to appeal to or adequately represent all Indian women'.[57] Instead, it became the norm that the 'movement' came to represent the concerns of upper class/caste women as the universal concerns of Indian women.[58]

Echoing the persistent 'disconnect' between elite feminists and the grassroots outlined in the previous section, and reflecting in particular how class (and caste) inequalities historically have circumscribed the articulation of the issues facing 'Indian women', Stephen suggests in the current context that mainstream Indian feminists 'have for long given step-motherly treatment to [marginalised women's] ... issues'.[59] She further argues that many of the issues that urban, middle-class women's NGOs address – including 'legal reform for domestic violence, property rights, workplace rights [and] sexual rights' – and for which legal and regulatory support that appears to challenge 'traditional norms and taboos' is frequently forthcoming – are still those that are of relevance only to urban, middle and upper class women. She goes on to suggest that 'elite activists' are rarely found campaigning on issues such as the 'poor quality of primary education, health and a non-existent public distribution system, transport, and drinking water shortages', issues that are intrinsically and historically tied to low and variable levels of, and access to, (women's) employment.[60]

Stephen's list of elite Indian feminist priorities, notably in relation to violence and sexual rights[61] mirrors some global level GAD priorities, but deviates on others. The Sangtin Writers, seven lower class and caste women who work for a large NGO in a North Indian state at the grassroots on women's empowerment and consciousness-raising, echo both Nagar's and Stephen's concerns, offering unique insights into how the multiple exclusions

created by the convergence of **both** global-level and elite Indian feminist priorities shape their own engagement with development.[62] Echoing Foucault's notion of 'prohibition' in which one has 'the privileged or exclusive right to speak of a particular subject',[63] these women argue that it is the practice of discursive exclusion that 'forecloses spaces for grassroots workers to connect processes of rural underdevelopment and impoverishment with the marginalization and disempowerment of poor women'.[64] The Sangtin Writers suggest a tendency for NGOs to be single-issue focussed and staffed and dominated by Hindu and upper-caste grassroots workers', whose discussions of 'grassroots women's issues' including 'casteism, communalism, and untouchability' exclude grassroots women themselves in ways that resonate with Foucault's assertion that one must be 'qualified' to speak on a particular subject.[65]

They further suggest that the professionalisation of development discourse, in both its transnational and indigenous varieties, excludes them from engaging in theoretical debates that consider the political, economic and social complexities of feminism and development that most often have the starkest material consequences for people like them living at the margins of society. Attempts to challenge this status quo are further curbed by what Baillie Smith and Jenkins suggest is a 'universality', deployed 'in the name of technical expediency' wherein 'voices of dissent and contestation are increasingly few'.[66] These critiques thus raise critical questions about claims to represent and/or facilitate the inclusion of subaltern women.

Whilst the literature articulated here raises a number of important concerns, the effects of this professionalisation are explored in this analysis empirically by interrogating the extent to which the disciplining effects of neoliberal development discourses embodied in Nagar's 'gender hegemony' elide with Indian elite feminist priorities in the issue areas identified as crucial for Indian women by stakeholders in the field site. The empirical analysis reveals that rather than neoliberal paradigms supplanting Indian feminist concerns as we might expect given the dominance of development knowledge systems, these ideas in fact operate alongside one another, effectively invisibilising the marginalised or subaltern women even further from the dialogues wherein feminisms in development are meant to emerge.

Methodology

The empirical analysis draws on data collected for a larger study investigating the knowledge practices of a network of women/GAD NGOs. The study was a qualitative, multi-site ethnography,[67] consisting of interviews, (participant) observation and extensive documentary analysis. Evidencing processes of professionalisation demands a focus on locating, analysing and contextualising information itself. This must be done with

consideration for the world systems implicated in production and dissemination of this information and how these processes in turn interact with other stakeholders in the system in which the information is continually constituted. Quantitative analysis is not foregrounded as a principal methodology because it is at present primarily quantitative measures, such as numbers of participants, training courses run or reports disseminated, that are used as proxy measures of successful grassroots engagement, but provide little insight on the sustainability of particular programmes or the relative inclusion of marginalised groups[68]. The research has been framed precisely to move away from this purely quantitative picture to understand the 'story behind the numbers' – what is actually happening with respect to how ideas are framed, articulated and then communicated? What do the statistics reveal, as well as hide, with regards to the ways in which the professionalisation of ideas circumscribe the inclusion of marginalised women? These substantive questions demand a more nuanced, qualitative interrogation.

The empirical analysis therefore set out to examine the changing nature of information as it moved between one gender information intermediary based in the North — the Gender and Development Knowledge Service (GDKS) (a pseudonym) — to a number of intermediaries and user groups based in the South, in this case, in the city of New Delhi in India that are on GDKS' mailing list. Amongst a range of data collected, including 47 interviews, an in-depth, collective case study of the knowledge work of 17 women's organisations (hereafter known as the collective case study organisations or CCSOs), including NGOs, research centres and units within large, mainstream Indian development NGOs on GDKS' mailing list in New Delhi was undertaken. The empirical analysis here draws on data collected on the key ideas that underpin the work of these organisations. As 'Southern women's NGOs', understood as a category of development stakeholder, these organisations operate at the interface of inclusion and exclusion. Owing to their geographical and therefore presumed discursive location, these organisations are understood to be better placed to seek out and engage with subaltern, alternative and/or marginalized groups, a questionable assumption I have problematised elsewhere.[69]

Issues related to gender equality and women's human rights featured widely in their work, including NGOs engaged in women's political rights, employment and economic rights, women's sexual and reproductive health, women's empowerment, consciousness-raising, education and literacy, social policy and women's rights, governance, democracy and participation. All 17 mission statements articulate commitments to develop, promote and disseminate increased volumes of information to support activities such as education, awareness-raising, advocacy, conscientisation, training and capacity building to promote the exercise of 'knowledge as power' amongst groups, notably women, perceived to be marginalized from mainstream development discourse and practice. The organisations ranged from small NGOs housed in a two-bedroomed flat, through to mid-size NGOs occupying an entire house, to large, internationally recognized research centres providing

research and consultancy services on women/GAD in India, with around 10 of them also offering various library-style services. In order to amplify the 'story behind the numbers', and in addition to collating data on the work these organisations undertake through a detailed analysis of websites, annual reports and other grey literature, respondents based in these organisations were asked about how either they or their organisation engaged with the marginalized women they all claimed to both serve and represent. How were needs assessed, priorities determined or feedback loops established? The picture that emerges from analyzing the answers provided by respondents to these questions is of a seemingly diverse set of ideas that in fact are underpinned by a narrow, almost repetitive set of priorities aligned with both transnational and elite Indian feminist discourses.

An empirical analysis of the professionalisation of ideas

How do we evidence the professionalisation of ideas in the work of these New Delhi-based organisations? Perhaps we might reasonably expect their work to reflect the diversity of issues affecting the status of women and gender relations as these intersect with other axes of difference including class, caste, sexual orientation, religion, marital status and age, all of which are particularly divisive and often volatile differences in the Indian context. And in fact, as Table 1 emphasises, there appears at first glance to be a diversity of issue areas represented in the work of the CCSOs:

Table 1: Issue areas covered by collective case study organisations

Issue	CCSO 1	CCSO 2	CCSO 3	CCSO 4	CCSO 5	CCSO 6	CCSO 7	CCSO 8	CCSO 9	CCSO 10	CCSO 11	CCSO 12	CCSO 13	CCSO 14	CCSO 15	CCSO 16	CCSO 17
Democracy and representation																	
Governance	X	X		X						X						X	X
Panchayati Raj Institutions		X		X										X	X	X	X
Women's movement							X		X				X				
Women's representation, democracy and voting	X			X													X
Economic participation																	
Informal economy		X					X										
Economic empowerment	X		X	X				X	X					X	X		X
Microcredit and microfinance	X			X				X	X	X					X		
Women's work	X	X	X	X				X	X								
Education																	
Adolescent education				X				X	X	X				X	X		
Women's education and literacy	X			X			X	X	X					X	X		X
Legal literacy				X			X	X	X								

Issue	CCSO 1	CCSO 2	CCSO 3	CCSO 4	CCSO 5	CCSO 6	CCSO 7	CCSO 8	CCSO 9	CCSO 10	CCSO 11	CCSO 12	CCSO 13	CCSO 14	CCSO 15	CCSO 16	CCSO 17
Health																	
Adolescent health and support services						X	X	X	X	X			X				
Children's health	X							X							X		
HIV/AIDS	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Maternal health								X		X	X				X		
Nutrition	X								X	X							
Reproductive health		X			X	X			X	X	X	X		X			
Women's health	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X				X	X			
Rights																	
Children's rights									X						X		X
Human rights		X			X						X	X	X	X			
Sexual rights						X	X	X			X	X	X				
Women's (human) rights			X	X			X	X	X		X			X			
Youth sexual rights						X		X	X								
Reproductive rights						X		X	X		X						
Violence Against Women and Children																	
Dowry	X			X			X		X	X					X		
Sex selection			X	X											X		

Issue	CCSO 1	CCSO 2	CCSO 3	CCSO 4	CCSO 5	CCSO 6	CCSO 7	CCSO 8	CCSO 9	CCSO 10	CCSO 11	CCSO 12	CCSO 13	CCSO 14	CCSO 15	CCSO 16	CCSO 17
and female infanticide																	
Sexual harassment				X			X		X						X	X	
Trafficking in women and children				X			X								X		
Violence against women	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Women's Empowerment																	
Gender mainstreaming				X				X						X	X	X	
Empower women	X			X			X	X	X		X		X	X	X		X
Self-help groups (research)			X											X	X		
Helping oneself, self-reliance	X			X					X		X						
Social justice	X	X		X			X		X		X						
Women's leadership	X		X	X			X		X		X		X				
Women's participation	X		X	X				X	X								X

When drawn together, and as the table highlights, the work of the collective case study organisations falls into seven broad categories: democracy and representation, economic participation, education, health, rights, violence against women and children and women's empowerment. The table appears at first glance to represent a fulsome and varied programme of work areas. Arguably advocacy, outreach, programme implementation or interest group representation undertaken in a way that is inclusive of the wide range of concerns that align with one or more of these categories would undoubtedly create space for a diversity of voices and concerns from so-called 'local', 'grassroots' or marginalised women to emerge.

Yet a more detailed analysis of how each of these categories is framed and substantiated suggests instead some rather familiar, almost repetitive forms. Within these broad categories, certain issues emerge as priority areas. Echoing Nagar's observed ascendance of a 'gender hegemony'[70], HIV/AIDS and violence against women emerge as the most important issues for the collective case study organisations, with all but one engaged in research, advocacy or training in each of these areas. In response to MDG 6 'Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases', HIV/AIDS in particular has captured a great deal of attention and associated funding from a range of private, bilateral and INGOs in the last few years. Yet temporal studies of funding patterns[71] confirm the critical concerns of Nagar and others that despite increases in overall development funding for health over the last 20 or so years, funding for health has disproportionately been diverted to support for HIV/AIDS-related programmes and interventions. The focus on violence against women resonates both with Nagar's 'gender hegemony and, as Stephen reiterates, has historically been central to the Indian women's movement and, given that it is the one issue that unifies women of all caste, class, ethnic and religious backgrounds, this is not altogether surprising.

Next in importance according to the table are women's health and empowerment, followed by reproductive health, women's education and literacy and economic empowerment. Looking at the top seven priority issues for these NGOs and women's units, six of them are aligned more explicitly with historically Indian priorities for women's welfare, including delivering women's education and literacy. Again echoing Stephen's critique above, it is important to note that these engagements with education and health do not include campaigning for improvements in the delivery of universal primary education or healthcare. They instead mimic historically Indian approaches to women's welfare,[72] with a narrow focus on educating women about reproductive (and more recently sexual) health as well as nutrition and sanitation to address children's basic health concerns. The seventh, the emphasis on economic empowerment, is also worth noting given on-going concerns emerging in the literature and noted above around the instrumental inclusion of women and girls to achieve broader economic development objectives, particularly in relation to the grassroots work undertaken by these organisations. Work with slum and resettlement

colonies, as well as a significant proportion of the action research, has an economic empowerment focus.

A more detailed reflection on how some of these organisations are engaging with notions of 'sexual rights' provides a telling insight into the juxtaposition of transnational and elite Indian feminism. Sexual rights in particular is one area where some of the newer NGOs are moving away from dominant elite Indian feminist discourses and engaging, by their own admission, with Western feminist paradigms (e.g., Co-Founder, Southern NGO – CCSO 13). This emphasis on the language of sexual rights coincides with a growing transnational emphasis on women's sexuality issues.[73]

Evidencing the 'disconnect' cited above, we can observe a dissonance in the delivery of 'sexuality training' to rural women's groups. One respondent, a retired Professor of Geography, recalled in our interview an experience of speaking to rural women's groups who had received this type of training from what they called 'Delhi feminists'. She was concerned about a lack of focus on 'genuine issues', suggesting that information on sexuality discourses that is not rooted in the material realities of deprivation and caste/class inequality will continue to speak primarily to elite groups.

As importantly, her insights suggested a 'disconnect between what the feminists in Delhi, they envisioned [for the local NGO] and the people on the ground'. This is not simply about a co-option of Indian feminists into Northern feminist discourses on sexuality, but also represented an internal, Indian North-South divide:[74]

> ... [there is] a sense of superiority when they come down to a lower level, different
> states, away from Delhi. I mean, I have this very strong feeling about the Delhi feminists
> who have, really, you know, helped, you could say, to define the sort of feminism,
> because they are there in these various Women's Studies Associations and all … at
> various times we feel there is a definite North-South divide within India itself … so that
> raises issues about what this material that comes from the 'real' North and is routed
> through 'our' North, through the eyes and the words of 'our' feminists, how relevant
> would it be to other parts of India? … is [GDKS] talking to this group and expecting the
> 'trickle-down' effect?

Whilst sexuality here has clearly been interpreted as part of elite and/or dominant development discourses, perhaps a more dialogic and context-sensitive approach might have mitigated this reaction. Instead the focus might have been on creating an opportunity to generate a shared meaning and value to the importance of discussing sexuality in this Indian context, avoiding the professionalised notion of 'training' and the one-sided expertise it connotes. In practice, however, the disciplining effects of neoliberal development

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paradigms proliferate and sustain notions of expertise through dominant modes of engagement such as 'training'. Nor, as the quotation emphasises, does this discursive space become necessarily more inclusive within the purview of Indian feminism. Indeed, a Research Fellow based in CCSO3 suggested in our interview that the articulation of Indian feminism is deliberately moving towards even greater inaccessibility:

> I mean, you know, the language of the academic community is in fact totally divorced from the mass of people … I would say the analysis of the movement by women's studies scholars is all in a language which they don't understand, which the mass of women won't understand. And trends in language or trends in academics are such that they're making it more and more dense, more and more abstract ...

The professionalisation of these discursive spaces, echoing the concerns of the Sangtin writers, in essence precludes the participation and inclusion of some groups of women and their knowledges over others.

One respondent's (Director, Southern NGO – CCSO 1) overview of how they address 'grassroots poverty' provides a real insight into how the 'gender hegemony' elides with Indian elite feminist approaches in the delivery of development programmes:

> I have to remember that working with the marginalised is a tough job. Going into the slums in terms of cleanliness … it's tough work, you have to repeat and explain, you have to undo their habits of sanitation … of course I have now such an extraordinary relation, we can get them to even stand on their head now because the thing is that we have been working with them without seeking anything in return just their welfare is our return, their well-being is our return ... More than anything else, it's the commitment to the marginalised in the country and how to pull them up to become like us and so on ... In terms of the four programs on functional literacy, on health and nutrition, literacy and ... micro-credit, micro-enterprise, all of them find that this is a good package. So that's what -- these are the four legs of our grassroots poverty programme.

Implied in her response to my question about her organisations' work in New Delhi slums is the convergence of the key concerns that have emerged in relation to the professionalisation of ideas throughout this analysis. First, the 'four legs' of this organisation's 'grassroots poverty programme' lends empirical weight to Nagar's observations of a 'gender hegemony'. The (instrumental) promotion of women's economic empowerment is juxtaposed with an emphasis on the written word, whether in relation to literacy, health or microfinance. Secondly, her views tie into historically elite Indian feminist

tendencies to 'define' the 'problems' of Indian women through the lens of the middle and upper classes, viewing the poor as uncivilised and lacking in 'basic' information, who need to be taught how to be 'like us' through charitable welfare measures such as the delivery of literacy, health and nutrition education. Finally, her efforts to 'repeat', 'explain' and 'undo' connote the one-sided tendencies of professionalisation revealed to underpin the persistent 'disconnect' cited above. In this articulation, it would seem there is little room afforded by this 'grassroots poverty programme' for dialogue that might promote the inclusion of subaltern groups in a way that might challenge, or even simply diversify, this narrow articulation of both GAD and elite Indian feminist 'expertise'.

Conclusion

The foregoing theoretical and empirical analysis forcefully highlights the concomitant uptake of both global/neoliberal and elite Southern feminist ideas in ways that risk effectively obscuring and/or invisibilising the voices of subaltern groups. Looking more closely at the empirical context, in line with India's entry into a global marketplace and the concomitant movement of Indian feminists into the arena of transnational development discourse, the professionalisation of ideas amongst women's NGOs in New Delhi is evidenced here in relation to how dominant/elite ideas are both framed and articulated. The work of the NGOs under scrutiny here features a combination of more recent GAD priorities, including sexual rights and HIV/AIDS, whilst still retaining some essential features of historically Indian non-profit work with women, including health programmes and literacy training. And some problems and solutions, such as the emphasis on HIV/AIDS and economic empowerment, given the globalisation of the discourses around (instrumentalising) approaches to women's empowerment, also fit into a broader national and international consensus on what the issues 'are' in terms of GAD discourse and practice. Echoing the discussion around the 'fluidity' of the 'development imaginary' and shifting terrains of 'development rationality',[75] there is no clearly delineated 'indigeneity', nor is it the case that only global-level GAD priorities feature. Rather, the work of these organisations represents a more fluid, and at times selective, set of organisational priorities that align variously with historical Indian feminist concerns coupled with transnational, neoliberal development priorities, wherein a broader 'disconnect' between elite and so-called subaltern ideas clearly persists.

The implications of these findings are significant. Efforts to engage with subaltern narratives through association with individuals or organisations presumed to be the most geographically and discursively proximate obscure concerns highlighted here around how processes of professionalisation underpin the power imbalances inherent in global and indigenous discourse and practice that reinforce the marginality of subaltern groups. This finding has the effect of intrinsically narrowing the nature and scope of how we might forge an alternative (to) development. At issue here, it must be noted, is not about criticising

intent i.e., that perpetuating exclusion through professionalisation is deliberate on the part of the stakeholders implicated in this analysis. Whilst it is no doubt true that dominant interests seek in various ways and through diverse mechanisms to maintain their elite status, this does not in itself explain why professionalisation persists. The simplest explanation is perhaps that, as well-intentioned as many of these efforts tend to be, the nature of the exclusions are historically embedded and operating alongside dominant global narratives, systemic concerns that are not so easily undone nor readily addressed. There are also the more complex variables underpinning institutional and/or organizational survival – Indian and indeed Southern NGOs more broadly, in most instances, would simply cease to exist if they did not engage in a certain degree of collusion with dominant frameworks. Nonetheless, the challenges inherent to working in this discursive space, as highlighted by this analysis, raise broader concerns about the relative inclusiveness and representativeness of so-called 'indigenous' or Southern-originated discourses. They further raise critical questions about dominant articulations of the structural and contextual constraints underpinning gender inequality and how these are conceptualized in this elite, transnational space. Finally, we must ask whose interests and objectives are ultimately served through initiatives to tackle gender inequality as part of global efforts to promote inclusive development.

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[1] See for example, Alvarez, 'Latin American Feminisms'; Amadiume, Daughters of the goddess; Monasterios, 'Bolivian Women's Organizations'.

[2] See for example Goetz and Sandler, 'SWApping gender'; Mukhopadhyay, 'Mainstreaming Gender or "Streaming" Gender Away'; Mukhopadhyay, 'Mainstreaming Gender or Reconstituting the Mainstream?'.

[3] Nagar, 'Postscript'.

[4] Sangtin Writers, Playing with Fire.

[5] Foucault, Discipline and Punish.

[6] Abrahamsen, Disciplining Democracy,14.

[7] See for example Edwards and Hulme, 'Too Close for Comfort?'; Tvedt, NGOs and Foreign Aid; Petras, 'NGOs: In the Service of Imperialism'; Mawdsley, et al., Knowledge, Power and Development Agendas; Ebrahim, 'Accountability in Practice'.

[8] Barnett and Finnemore, Rules for the World, 6-7.

[9] Deacon, Global social policy & governance, 16.

[10] Escobar, Encountering Development, 39.

[11] Ibid., 40.

[12] Arce, 'Creating or regulating development', 33.

[13] McEwan, 'Postcolonialism, feminism and development', 103.

[14] Escobar, Encountering Development, 42.

[15] Kothari, 'Authority and Expertise'.

[16] See Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and Sangtin Writers, Playing with Fire.

[17] Cornwall and Brock, 'Buzzwords', 1052.

[18] Kakande, 'Donor-Government-Citizen Frame', 92.

[19] Fernando, 'NGOs and Production of Indigenous Knowledge', 56.

20 Ibid., 55.

21 Pottier, 'Negotiating Local Knowledge', 2-3.

22 Briggs, 'The Use of Indigenous Knowledge', 107.

23 Mosse, 'Authority, Gender and Knowledge', 519.

24 Laurie et al., 'Ethnodevelopment', 484.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 485.

27 Olwig, 'Beyond translation'.

28 Laurie et al., 'Ethnodevelopment', 470, citing Escobar, 1995.

29 Fernando, 'NGOs and Production of Indigenous Knowledge', 58.

30 See Dempsey, 'NGOs, communicative labour'.

31 See Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?'; Mohanty, 'Cartographies of struggle'; Sen and Grown, Development, Crises and Alternative Visions.

32 See for example Boserup, Woman's role in economic development; Elson and Pearson, 'Nimble Fingers Make Cheap Workers'; Molyneux, 'Mobilization without Emancipation?'; Sen and Grown, Development, Crises and Alternative Visions; Moser, Gender Planning and Development; and Kabeer, Reversed Realities, to name only a very few.

33 Alvarez, 'Latin American Feminisms', 315.

34 Jad, 'The NGO-ization of Arab Women's Movements', 186.

35 Nabacwa, Sisterhood?, 26.

36 Ghodsee, 'Nongovernmental Ogres?', 47.

37 Alvarez, 'Latin American Feminisms', 306; italic emphasis in original; my emphasis in bold.

38 See also Cornwall et al., 'Reclaiming Feminism'; Sharma, Logics of Empowerment.

39 Goetz, 'From Feminist Knowledge to Data for Development', 28.

40 Sharma, 'Crossbreeding Institutions', 79.

41 Nagar and Raju, 'Empowerment and Disempowerment', 1.

42 Nagar, 'Postscript', 147.

43 Cammack, What the World Bank means by poverty reduction, 7; emphasis in original.

44 Alikhan et al., NGOs and the State, 22.

45 See Chant and Sweetman, 'Fixing women'.

46 See Hickel, 'The "girl effect"'.

47 Nagar, 'Postscript', 147.

48 Raju, 'Contextualising Gender Empowerment', 292.

49 See Narayanaswamy, 'NGOs and feminisms in development'.

50 Monasterios, 'Bolivian Women's Organizations'.

51 Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 'Disconnections and exclusions', 170.

52 Amadiume, Daughters of the goddess, 155.
53 Chaudhuri, 'The Indian Women's Movement'.
54 See Mies, 'Indian Women and Leadership', 57.

55 Muthulakshmi Reddy, 1964: 47, as cited in Caplan, Class and Gender in India, 116.
56 Mazumdar, 'The Social Reform Movement in India', 65-66.
57 Subramaniam, *The Power of Women's Organizing*, 29.
58 Please see Caplan, Class and Gender in India; Mies, 'Indian Women and Leadership'; Subramaniam, The Power of Wome*n's Organizing*.

59 Stephen, 'Give us our due'.

60 Ibid.

61 See Ghosh, 'LGBTQ Activist Organizations'.

62 Sangtin Writers, Playing with Fire.

63 Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, 216.

64 Sangtin Writers, Playing with Fire, 143.

65 Ibid.

66 Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 'Disconnections and exclusions', 171.

67 See Hannerz, 'Being there …'.

68 See for example the critiques of Edwards and Hulme, 'Too Close for Comfort?' on how short-term quantitative measures are used to measure the impact of mainstream NGOs and Mayoux, 'Avoiding the Black Hole?' for how quantitative measures are used to assess the impact of gender-based interventions.

69 See Narayanaswamy, 'NGOs and feminisms in development'.

70 Nagar, 'Postscript', 147.

71 See for example Piva and Dodd, whose study 'Where did all the aid go?' suggests that funding for MDG 6 accounts for some of the substantial increases in aid for health in the period 1998-2006, whilst Shiffman's 'Has donor prioritization of HIV/AIDS displaced aid for other health issues?' suggests that some 'displacement is likely occurring', particularly as the share of money diverted to HIV/AIDS funding has grown as a share of total aid for health, itself increasing, between 1992 and 2005.

72 Caplan, Class and Gender in India; see also Subramaniam, *The Power of Women's Organizing* for a critique of how these health and education programmes also had a tendency to treat women as 'dependents'.

73 See Harcourt, 'Women's Global Organizing'.

[74] There is a concomitant literature on the 'elitism' of New Delhi-based NGOs see for example Townsend and Townsend, 'Accountability, motivation and practice', a charge that may be similarly levelled at feminist NGOs in Delhi.

[75] See Laurie et al., 'Ethnodevelopment' and Olwig, 'Beyond translation'.