

Women's Rights and Citizenship

Gender inequity and inequality continue to impinge upon girls' and women's ability to realize their rights and their full potential as citizens and equal partners in the development of their communities, despite notable gains for women globally in the last few decades. While a variety of legal instruments commits the international community and individual states to uphold women's rights, the commitments made internationally are not adequately acknowledged in national laws or practice. Important questions surrounding citizenship and women's rights confront the development field. What are the different mechanisms of exclusion that consign groups within a society to the status of lesser citizens or of noncitizens? How are women's rights to be translated into reality?

IDRC launched the Women's Rights and Citizenship (WRC) program in April 2006. WRC is a global program with activities in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. Its goal is to support research that focuses on the needs of poor and marginalized women, using empowering research methodologies and engaging meaningfully in policy debates.



IDRC: R. Sohal

OBJECTIVES

WRC's objectives are to support research, institutional strengthening, and knowledge-sharing activities to:

- Generate methodologically sound data and analysis on concrete issues of concern in the field of women's rights, citizenship, and development.
- Expand the research and policy capacity of individuals and groups working on women's rights and citizenship.
- Expose and challenge gender discriminatory structures, policies, programs, institutions, and practices, and formulate concrete recommendations for policy and/or social change.

OUR APPROACH TO PROGRAMING

WRC supports applied research in five areas:

Women's citizenship and governance

Research will build the accountability of states, political parties, and social movements for the achievement of women's rights. Using a gender lens, research will examine women's political participation and the ways in which state institutions and political processes advance or impede women's rights.

Access to justice

Research will involve analysis of the gendered implications of legal pluralism and of gender bias in the administration and performance of justice. Projects in this area will highlight women's varied experiences in challenging power, and promote a deeper understanding of reasons for the continued gaps between formal equality rights and substantive justice for women.

Sexual and reproductive rights

WRC will prioritize work on cutting-edge and regionally important issues such as gender roles and power in sexual relations; access to legal and safe abortions; regulation of reproductive technologies; and women's rights in marriage, including in polygamous unions.



IDRC: E. Pye

Economic rights

WRC will encourage gender analyses of various state mechanisms for social protection; investigation of discrimination in the labour market; and the identification and documentation of innovative approaches to addressing the particular needs of female workers, especially in the informal sector.

Migration and Women's Rights

Research will focus on the linkages between internal and international migration, as well as those between the countries of origin and destination. WRC-supported research on “trafficking” will adopt a rights-based approach that addresses the structural problems behind the phenomenon.

SELECTED PROJECTS

Culture and Women's Access to Decision-Making in West Africa

A paradox exists with regard to women's citizenship in francophone West Africa. On the one hand, a range of national and international legal instruments and institutions recognize women's right to full participation in eco-

nomie, political, and social decision-making, and indeed promote such participation. On the other hand, the political participation of women at the local, national, and regional levels continues to be weak.

Previous research carried out in West Africa has focused on the facts, leaving the deeper explanatory factors rooted in cultural meanings and practices largely unexplored. This project will allow the women's rights and citizenship coalitions of Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Senegal to investigate the interplay between the private and the public spheres, and identify cultural and customary obstacles to the full participation of women in decision-making.

Child Support, Poverty, and Gender Equality in the Caribbean

Child support proceedings are arguably the most significant component of the administration of family justice in the Caribbean. This project aims to strengthen empirical knowledge on the operation of the legal system in child



IDRC: D. Marchand

support matters. Researchers are examining and assessing the criteria and legal principles applied in resolving child support proceedings; studying the use of alternative dispute resolution in child support matters; and investigating how gender influences and informs the legal resolution of child support claims. They will produce policy guidance for improving the administration of justice in child support matters. The methodology involves examining court records and conducting in-depth interviews with a range of users and providers of court services. The project is being carried out in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. The overall goal is to reduce women's vulnerability to poverty, advance gender equality, and promote the idea of shared family responsibility within the court system.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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