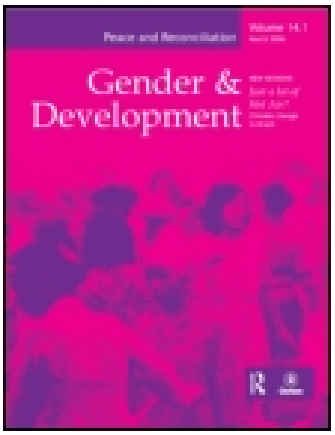

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Introduction to Citizenship

Caroline Sweetman, Jo Rowlands and Lina Abou-Habib

This issue of *Gender & Development* takes a new look at Citizenship – a theme covered in an earlier issue (Vol. 11 No. 3), published in 2003. Our themes for the journal are chosen in as participatory a way as possible, via a consultation with our users and editorial advisors (1). In our consultation for 2011's themes, Citizenship was by far the most popular. Why is it seemingly both a perennial concern, and a cutting-edge 'hot topic', for gender and development policymakers and practitioners, feminist researchers and women's movements?

Citizenship is a development issue, bringing in issues of power and inequality to the supposedly politically neutral concerns of economic growth. Development comes to citizenship via three paths. First is a focus on the importance of the participation of people in their own development; second is a shift towards 'rights-based approaches' to development during the 1990s; and third is the ongoing and seemingly inexorable process of economic, cultural and social globalisation that challenges the power of countries to provide for, and protect, their citizens: 'No single centre of authority has the ability to manage the changes [brought about by globalisation] in a way that will take care of those groups of people who are harmed by such changes – especially those whose livelihoods are lost' (Mukhopadhyay 2007, 266).

Citizenship concerns the relationship between women, men, their 'membership of a group or community that confers rights and responsibilities. . .', (Meer and Sever 2004, 2), and their relation in particular to the state. When we talk about citizenship we are concerned intrinsically about rights, and about equality. We are also concerned with the indivisibility of economic, social and political aspects of life. All human beings need to live with our rights to food, water, shelter, security and other fundamentals respected by others, and with the freedom to use our skills and abilities. As citizens, we look to authorities – including our communities, our governments, and the companies and businesses for whom we work – to guarantee us these essential underpinnings of a decent life.

Given the state of the world in 2011 – the continuing impact of complex crisis (including the 2007–8 economic crisis which began in North America and Northern Europe), a rapidly-changing map of global economic power, high and rising numbers of women and men migrating far from their country of origin, others eking out a living in 'failed states', others undergoing political transition in the countries of the so-called

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'Arab Spring' - the question of what citizenship means for women and men, girls and boys, has never been more important and significant.

Citizenship from a gender perspective

Taking a gender perspective on citizenship begins with an assertion of the rights of all human beings to equal treatment. Articles here examine different experiences of citizenship experienced by women and men, girls and boys, in both the global South and North. All of us, regardless of our personal attributes, abilities and the perceived contribution we make to wider society, have a moral claim to being treated equally. While the relationship between the claims of individual women and men, and the communities in which they are born and live their lives, differs according to context and culture, nevertheless the idea of universal rights is useful for all. 'The promise of universality contained in the idea of rights has proved to be a useful resource for groups seeking to pursue their claims for justice and recognition' (Kabeer 2004, 10).

Authors featured in this issue assess the extent to which each of us can secure the protection, resources and entitlements which - at least in theory - the state should provide for all who live inside its boundaries. Does the country where we live guarantee our rights? Is there a functioning government where we live and work, and can it give each of us what we need, in terms of providing us with protection from crime and conflict, and essential social services including health and education? How do we challenge failure to provide these services and resources that we all need?

For some of us, born or naturalised citizens of a country, there may be a sense of rights and entitlement on which we can build a strategy to claim what is due to us. For others – the many millions of women and men who live most of their lives as migrants in countries where they have no formal citizenship status - there is a fundamental issue to challenge before even getting to this point. This is the extreme inequality which leads to differential access to the law, services and resources of citizens of a country, and the foreign migrant workers who service their needs. Many women and men have few or no rights as citizens where they are living and working, despite their immense contribution to the host economy. All too often, their reason for working as migrants is to provide resources to make up for their home states' own failures to provide decent work, health and education for their families. The question of how being a migrant affects ideas of 'belonging', entitlement, agency, and citizenship, is explored by Fatema Jahan in her article in this issue, on the lives of four women in the Bangadeshi community in London, UK.

Constitutions, laws and legal processes therefore need to enshrine and support the rights of *all* women and men living in a country. But this is not the end of the story. A gender perspective on citizenship challenges us to extend our gaze far beyond the state to the range of other social institutions – including the family and the household, but also traditional legal systems, employers and other economic institutions, and civil

society organisations (including NGOs and women's movements), all of which affect our lives and options. This complex 'citizenship landscape' is mapped and explored in detail by contributors to this issue.

Active citizenship and gender equality

Citizenship needs to be an active concept - not only a status, but 'a practice and process of relating to the social world through the exercise of rights/protections and the fulfilment of obligations' (Meer and Sever 2004, 2). Citizenship has different dimensions: political, legal, cultural, social and economic, national, regional and international (Cecchini 2003). Drawing a distinction between the status of being a citizen, and 'doing' citizenship by seeing it as a social role and behaving accordingly, is very important. For many people living in the West, the work of being a citizen starts and ends at the ballot-box. In contrast, for others living in states where no formal democratic processes exist, the opposite is true – in the absence of state services, citizenship can involve substituting for police forces, social services and many others through direct action.

It is natural for active citizenship to be a focus for gender and development researchers and practitioners. Gender, race and class, in addition to other aspects of identity including religion, nationality, and age, intersect and shape women's and men's experience of poverty. Too frequently, unjust laws, customs and practices that regulate women's lives are tolerated and upheld by wider society, despite clear evidence of the hardship and suffering that they cause.

This analysis leads gender and development workers naturally to focus on giving support to women living in poverty to set and voice their own agendas as activists. Development organisations can helpfully support women at global, regional, national and local levels, in their ongoing struggle to gain a voice in the halls (and corridors) of power, participate equally in decision-making which shapes their realities, and ultimately to set the world on a different course to a more equitable, decent, and dignified model of human development. They can, of course, also hinder, if they fail to use empowering approaches in their engagement with women's organisations, taking up the space which should be taken by local activists themselves.

In their article, Melanie Reyes and Anamaine Asinas discuss the process and outcome of a recent workshop focusing on young women's active citizenship in the Philippines. This article brings, first, a perspective on the ways in which particular groups of women experience the issue of citizenship. Insufficient attention is often paid to the specific struggles of young women. Secondly, it focuses on the concept of active citizenship. This is a relationship between individuals and the state in which they live, including engagement, participation and agency, to assert and claim rights, and redefine social justice. As Melanie Reyes and Anamaine Asinas say, 'reconceptualising citizenship this way uncovers issues of inclusion and exclusion, social action, moral

responsibilities, and bottom-up approaches to development and social change' (this issue, p. 350).

Universal citizenship experienced at local levels

While the idea of citizenship today is based on the idea of universality, 'what it means and how it is experienced is not' (Kabeer 2005,1). Gender, race and class, and other aspects of identity including migrant status, religion, and age, shape the degree to which people are able to participate in governance, and shape decisions which will have an impact on their lives. How this plays out in practice is very context-specific, making it critical to begin working on citizenship with a grounded, concrete analysis of the reality of women's lives in particular localities.

A range of different forces, ranging from traditional patriarchal social relations which conceptualise men as full citizens and women as their dependents, to global markets and businesses which circumvent labour rights, seeing women's work as of secondary importance to men's, undermine the idea of a state which can protect and support human rights for all.

The current model of global development is based on extreme and growing inequality. There is inequality in the different degrees of access to the law, services and resources of citizens of a country and the foreign migrant workers who service their needs; inequality in the pay and conditions of women workers in offices and factories worldwide, when compared to men; inequality in the response to the global economic crisis, in which the excesses of (predominantly male) bankers is to bail countries out of debt by massive cuts affecting essential social services, particularly critical to the poor.

For millions of women in the global South, and for poor women in so-called 'developed' countries also, a key issue is their lack of power to change the situation by participating in political life. As stated earlier, people who migrate to live as aliens in states where they have no citizenship find themselves living a precarious life. The presence of migrant workers may be tolerated because of some degree of acknowledgement of the economic contribution they make to the host community. Those women (and men) who have migrated for marriage or family reasons may live their lives feeling profoundly isolated from the wider community.

In her article, Fatema Jahan highlights that the complexity of possessing a transnational identity gives women a sense of being 'in-between, everywhere'. If one's identity signals 'foreignness' in terms of skin colour – as these women feel it does – and yet one's life is led completely in the UK, the sense of being a citizen is shaped by contradictions. Fatema Jahan states: 'One hand, the British passport guarantees them some citizenship rights in their public lives, which contradict with their traditional values that they practice at their private lives. For example, the right to work outside home contradicts with the traditional values which expect women to be at home for taking care of their children. This may be one of the reasons why most of my

interviewees do not work outside their home. On the other hand, they are often denied the citizenship rights on the ground of their transnational or Bengali identity' (this issue).

Even for women who live in their country of citizenship, this status may mean little in the face of the many obstacles that face them when attempting to claim social, economic and political entitlements. 'Power differentials lie at the centre of poor women's inability to enter institutions, to hold them accountable, and to claim their full rights as citizens' (Mukhopadhyay and Meer 2004, 69). Many of the issues which are most critical to women – marriage and divorce, sexual and reproductive health, rape and other forms of violence against women, and inheritance among them – are inadequately understood and legislated for, in states which were shaped by beliefs that these matters were private matters to be decided by the head of household, or dealt with as a last resort by male elders within a community.

Inclusive citizenship: a gender perspective

Clearly, in addition to being active, citizenship also needs to be inclusive – that is, a concept which enshrines the interest and needs of everyone. In the 21st century, citizenship rights should be universal, but are not. Even countries with democratic systems face serious challenges in putting the principles of equal and universal citizenship rights into practice. This requires an emphasis on equality of outcome, rather than an assumption that everyone starts out from a position of equality.

Concepts of citizenship from ancient Greece and from seventeenth- and eighteenth century Europe focused on the needs and rights of men (and not even all men at that). Today, in a world in which the principles of gender equality are enshrined in international laws and policy commitments, a focus on citizenship has to include 'a notion of justice which revolves around when it is fair for people to be treated the same and when it is fair that they should be treated differently' (Kabeer 2005, 3). For women's rights activists, therefore, securing the goal of a state and a legal system which responds to all women's interests and needs is a critical part of attaining a world in which women and men have genuine equality.

Translation of *de jure* citizenship rights into equal treatment before the law is another challenge. How can the issue of competing rights of groups or individuals be resolved? One person exercising their right to free speech, for example, may compromise the rights of another. 'Cultural rights' may come into conflict with women's rights. Another question is how to ensure that all who want to use citizenship rights to further their interests and needs are actually able to. Even in states like South Africa which have Constitutions which are progressive in terms of guaranteeing the rights of women, there is a gap between these principles and national laws, and another yawning gulf between laws and the women who could potentially use them. This gap needs bridging by much more than money and knowledge: for many, the civil

law is inaccessible because to use it would be so shocking and challenging to the norms of society that to do so is actually an impossibility.

Citizenship, governance and development

Over the past decade, there has been increasing awareness of the limitations of Western-style representative democracy to guarantee people's political, economic and social rights. Ten years ago, Andrea Cornwall and John Gaventa spoke of this as 'a growing crisis of legitimacy [which] characterise[d] the relationships between citizens and the institutions which affect their lives' (2001, 32). A decade on, the focus on 'good governance' which was an initial response to this crisis is maturing into a very much more nuanced debate about the kinds of institutions which are needed to respond to the needs of citizens. It has been argued that: '"good governance" provides a one-size-fits-all policy solution which fails because 'it contains a surfeit of purportedly universal notions about what is good, which actually reflect certain rather specific features of the recent history of the West' (Booth 2011, 2).

It is important to recognise these ongoing debates about what forms of institutions are best able to deliver human development, and critiques of Western forms of democracy as necessarily 'the best', or 'the least worst'. However, we need to be cautious of arguments which potentially support undifferentiated and generalised notions of 'traditional cultures' as being more introinsically more beneficial for all, in societies where gender inequality requires challenging. Feminists working from within these cultures require sustained support to enable them to undertake the job of challenging gender biases in all social, economic and political institutions.

In order to evolve effective and user-friendly political and legal systems which respond to and accommodate the complex economic, social and political realities in which women and men live, it is clearly essential for women to participate as active citizens from both inside and outside state and government institutions. Attaining full citizenship rights can happen through reform from within – if a critical mass of a formerly marginalised interest group manages to enter and influence an institution – or through direct action if the formal routes are closed to them. Direct action, advocacy and campaigning present opportunities for citizens to question issues including global inequality which results in over-consumption among elites and starvation for the world's poorest people; and to work actively on sustainable development and justice regarding climate change. Active citizens are addressing issues that states and governments are reluctant to engage with due to pressure from vested interests.

Global economics, and the global impact of climate change, are highlighting the need for activism as global citizens. Citizenship is no longer an issue of local political and economic realities, but about the struggle to regulate the behaviour of currently largely unaccountable corporations, and the elites who run countries in both the global North and South, at the expense of poor and disenfranchised people. We need effective

and accountable international political institutions which can cope with the challenges thrown up by our economically globalised world. Increasingly, rights cannot be guaranteed by states, since economic globalisation has created a situation in which capital and investment can swiftly move from country to country, relatively unimpeded by regulation. It is ironic that the people whose livelihoods depend on employment opportunities offered by these businesses find their movement is constrained, and those who are accepted as migrants find their attempts to live as full citizens are met with resistance.

Citizenship in times of crises: challenges and opportunities

Another key focus at the moment is on women's citizenship rights in fragile or failed states, and after national liberation struggles. 'Times of turmoil' – including civil war, national liberation struggles and other conflicts – offer chances to women to participate alongside men in effecting regime change, but afterwards their gender interests are often ignored in the peace and reconstruction period.

In their article, Bijan Pant and Kay Standing explore the ways in which women are included in development in post-conflict Nepal, in the wake of challenging the security forces and beginning to assert their rights as citizens. They find that development projects have tended to ignore this shift, and failed to respond to the challenge of supporting women in their efforts to further their citizenship.

In turn, Helen O'Connell discusses research funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID) into state-building in conflict-affected and fragile contexts, in her article in this issue. This can potentially be seen as offering chances to make gains for women's rights and gender equality. However focusing only on the formal aspects of political participation – for example, promoting women's participation in elections and election to government, or on supporting women to engage in the market as entrepreneurs – is much too narrow. Without supporting women to challenge inequality within household and community, opportunities have been lost.

In her article, Marjoke Oosterom charts the perceptions and practices of citizenship are experienced in the post-conflict situation of the Acholi region in Northern Uganda. Here, the population lived through protracted conflict and long-term displacement into camps, caused by the Lord's Resistance Army. The article focuses on the lives and experiences of Acholi women during and after the conflict and how their experiences shape their understanding and practices of citizenship, in a context of recent conflict.

In her article in turn, Meghan Cooper explores the One in Nine Campaign and its treatment of sexual violence – in particular, sexual violence against lesbians - in South Africa. The OINC is one of a host of movements and organisations that are fighting the insecurity and lack of justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTI) communities in South Africa. She argues that the battles that remain not only concern the state and its treatment of these communities, but include challenges which arise as

a result of the complicated history of women's activism in South Africa, which is in turn deeply enmeshed in the politics of the national liberation movement.

Lina Abou-Habib's article discusses action research into citizenship rights of women in three MENA (Middle East and North Africa) countries - Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine. This action research is now shifting to become an advocacy and awareness-raising and policy dialogue initiative, focusing mainly on Lebanon. The focus of the article is women's ability to claim their rights to three kinds of entitlements: health services, education and social support in times of crisis (social protection). The research has raised awareness of the participants and the women's organisations in the region, and provdes a basis for claiming rights as active citizens. It concludes with a brief but up-to-the-minute analysis of the impact of the 'Arab Spring' – described as a 'time of turmoil' - and the role of women in this process of challenging various states to respond to the demands of citizens within them for democratic rights and entitlements. There is a growing concern that the women of the region are facing a *déjà vu* scenario reminiscent of the post-independence struggles in many other parts of the world, where women are left out of the process of state-building. Whereas the radical changes in the MENA region present a golden opportunity for a new definition of inclusive citizenship, there is nevertheless a growing concern that alternative forms of governance will carry similar ideas of patriarchy, strengthened by emerging conservative groups, thus further undermining women's identity as citizens as well as failing, yet again, to recognise their rights.

Development responses to struggles for citizenship rights

Asserting the rights of all to the resources needed for a decent life is a key role for organisations working nationally and internationally to hold governments to account, either directly via advocacy, or through resourcing and supporting interest groups and organisations including the women's movements in different countries and regions.

For development organisations, a gendered approach to the issue of Citizenship entails first recognising women as citizens in their own right (rather than represented by fathers, husbands or sons); and then supporting them to set their own political priorities, identify the institutions which they need to engage with as active citizens, and take action. It involves securing resources through mounting a challenge to states and international bodies which fail to fulfil their commitments to all the world's citizens.

Oxfam GB has run a programme called Raising Her Voice in collaboration with Oxfam local offices and partner organisations in seventeen low- and middle-income countries. Soledad Muniz and Hannah Reardon have contributed an article on the experience of RHV in Bolivia. At the heart of the success of RHV has been a joining of forces to make women voices heard more effectively. Building women's capacity and confidence to participate, and developing safe spaces is not only empowering to the

individual, but also to the coalition and its members –the personal and social spheres. This collective force has then been able to open up new spaces for participation in the political sphere, which has led to greater representation, changes in public policy and increased participation in public decision-making.

An important insight from Soledad and Hannah's article is the importance of large and international organisations treading lightly when becoming involved in contexts in which local collective action is already bringing about change. It is all too easy to inadvertently sabotage lengthy and sensitive processes of engagement with advocacy targets in government, risk losing legitimacy for issues which are critical to women on the ground, but which are vulnerable to being wrongly understood as the agenda of outsiders, and for the work to evaporate when outside funding disappears at the end of an unrealistically short time period. RHV has attempted to avoid these pitfalls and actually add value to regional and local processes.

Conclusion

Focusing their analysis and action not only on the global South, but also on post-industrialised countries including the UK, marginalised and disenfranchised people – and women in particular – are interpreting the concept of citizenship in ways which make sense to them. Women and men are adopting the role of active citizens – both nationally, and internationally - in challenging injustice and inequality, and playing a part in evolving new political contracts with the state, international financial institutions and major development and aid agencies, and other bodies critical in their lives. The hope is that this action will result in a better framework to support women, men and their dependents to realise their full political, economic, and social rights.

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