

# Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION<sup>Review</sup>

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## *Features*

### **A New Approach to Gender-Lens Grantmaking**

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# A New Approach to Gender-Lens Grantmaking

INDIA PROVIDES PARTICULARLY FERTILE GROUND FOR THE GENDER-LENS MOVEMENT, WHICH IS BEGINNING TO FUND CULTURALLY TAILORED EFFORTS TO TRANSFORM UNDERLYING BELIEFS THAT SYSTEMATICALLY DISEMPOWER FEMALES.

■ BY EMILY NIELSEN JONES, MUSIMBI KANYORO, & NEERA NUNDY

Philanthropists and for-profit investors are increasingly using a gender lens to screen opportunities for funding social change as awareness of the need continues to grow. Funders now take it for granted that empowering women is a linchpin of global advancement. Yet report cards marking the 20th anniversary of the passage of the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995—a blueprint created by 189 governments for advancing women’s rights in 12 areas—show that progress toward gender equality has been painfully slow.

The most shocking indicator revealed that global rates of gender-based violence—which the World Health Organization estimates affects about one in three women—have remained unchanged over the past 20 years despite billions of dollars in private and public investment to combat it. Gender-based violence is just one indicator, but it is both a proxy for stalled progress on multiple fronts and testimony to one of the most stubborn obstacles to bettering women’s lives: the persistence of both conscious and subconscious beliefs and norms that sanction an imbalance of power between men and women and foster conditions that inflame violence.

It is harder to change what happens behind the closed doors of huts and homes than it is to help a woman open a savings account or apply for a microfinance loan. This suggests that funders must begin looking beyond efforts at redress, mitigation, or even women’s empowerment—though these are still sorely needed—to more directly fund efforts to reexamine and transform the underlying norms and beliefs that disempower females.

**NORMS AND BELIEFS—THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM**  
Despite variety across cultures, social norms and beliefs that justify the subjugation of women and girls are remarkably similar across

the globe. A 2001-2007 UNICEF survey of household attitudes toward domestic violence in 67 countries found that roughly half of female respondents believed that violence is justified to enforce a husband’s “authority” in the household. In India, 47 percent of the women surveyed expressed such a belief. Among boys and men in India, 42 percent consider a husband to be justified in hitting or beating his wife for, among other things, burning the food, arguing with him, or going out without telling him.<sup>1</sup>

How can empowerment programs help someone whose culture and religion deny her the right or even the basic human capacity to participate equally in her family, her community, and other aspects of society? This is the “elephant in the room” that philanthropists must address to improve the world’s truly dismal record on gender-based violence, discrimination, and disempowerment.

Taking on the elephant in the room does not simply mean providing the same programs and opportunities for women and men—gender neutrality. Rather, gender equity is about creating transformative opportunities targeted at the specific, and sometimes different, needs of men and women. This approach requires changing norms and beliefs by supporting grassroots change agents working toward equity from within their own cultural and religious contexts.

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## BRINGING MEN INTO THE GENDER LENS

As difficult as this task is, more and more philanthropists and NGOs are trying to find culturally appropriate, transformative ways to address the gender-based beliefs and social norms that are undermining humanitarian progress. Some global development organizations, like Tostan, Beyond Borders, and World Vision International, are finding paths to change these harmful gender norms. Importantly, their work includes reaching out to men as well as women to identify and foster solutions.

World Vision's Channels of Hope for Gender program, for example, explores gender identities, norms, and values from a faith perspective in countries around the globe. The program challenges faith leaders to acknowledge and act upon gender injustices in their communities. One man newly participating in Channels of Hope asked: "But if I love my wife and my children, isn't it my role to discipline them?" He was participating in an open-minded conversation that constitutes the first step of the program, designed to create a safe space for men and women to open their minds and hearts to how they treat each other.

Meanwhile, a participant in Beyond Borders' Rethinking Power program in Haiti says that as a result of community-based dialogue around gender roles and norms, he no longer sees men publicly hitting their wives in his community, and that people have started to intervene when they hear things that sound like domestic violence behind closed doors.

As these examples show, applying a gender lens to grantmaking means taking the needs of women and men into account. Think of a gender lens as putting on spectacles. Out of one lens you see the participation, needs, and realities of women. Out of the other lens, you see the participation, needs, and realities of men. Your vision is optimum only when it combines the two. "If we don't start to work with men, we might still be here in another 25 years," says Will Muir, cofounder and director of the India-based Equal Community Foundation.

A recent white paper on gender equality in India, *Ladies and Gentle Men*, concurs, noting that if gender norms are at the root of unequal treatment of women, then men—who in most traditional societies are the gatekeepers of these norms—must be enlisted as role models of change and advocates of gender equality.<sup>2</sup> This means that men (and boys) must be approached as partners rather than as perpetrators, an approach that has the advantage not only of being strategically smart but also of recognizing the ways in which men as well as women are prevented from realizing their full human and social potential by the strictures of patriarchal cultures.

## TAKING ON THE NORMS

How exactly can funders go about addressing the norms and beliefs that are the root causes of gender-based violence, discrimination, and oppression in so many places in the world? The first step is to be clear about what a strategy that aims to change norms and beliefs actually entails.

Consider a hypothetical example described in *Insight: Why Grant-Making in India Needs a Gender Lens*, a paper published by Dasra, an Indian strategic philanthropy foundation.<sup>3</sup> A funder decides to pay for the renovation of a secondary school building in India to help restart a defunct coeducation program in a region where student attendance is low. The renovation transforms what had been a typically dreary and uninviting government school building into a well-built and colorful structure with a playground and well-lit classrooms filled with pictures, maps, and books. As a result, overall student attendance increases. Yet the attendance data show that far fewer girls than boys are attending. A gender-lens analysis of school attendance reveals several reasons for this disparity:

- A majority of the girls in the target region perform household chores in the morning, which makes the school hours of 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. unsuitable for them.
- The absence of a separate toilet for girls (with access to sanitary materials) in the school building makes it challenging for menstruating girls to manage their periods, forcing them to remain absent for some part of each month.
- Lack of a safe mode of transportation to and from the school makes families hesitant to send girls there.

While the gender bias inherent in the renovation program is obvious, what may not be so clear is how the situation should be remedied. Here it is useful to consider the Gender Continuum framework developed by the Interagency Gender Working Group, for use in applying a gender lens to development projects. The continuum of possible responses revealed by a gender aware framing ranges from actively reinforcing gender imbalances ("exploitative") to merely accommodating them ("accommodating") to attempting to transform them ("transformative"). The difference between the accommodating and the transformative approaches is that the first accepts and works around gender inequalities, while the second seeks to examine and change the norms and beliefs underlying them.

To return to our example of the school renovation, an accommodating approach to improving attendance among girls might mean changing the school's hours from morning to afternoon to work around the expectation that girls stay home to help with household chores earlier in the day. While this might help get girls to school, it would not challenge the norm by which girls, but not boys, bear responsibility for household chores. The transformative solution lies in changing the norms and beliefs that demean and disempower girls and women in the first place.

It is not our place as outsiders to come in and try to change someone else's cultural beliefs. But if that's the case, what role could philanthropists play in freeing women and girls (and men and boys) from oppressive gender norms and beliefs? Grantmakers certainly need to tread lightly onto the culturally and religiously sensitive terrain of changing social norms. Yet it is also possible to respect the sovereignty of other cultures and religions while finding



ways to fund and empower grassroots change agents working from within their own cultural and religious contexts to transform gender beliefs and norms. As difficult as this balance is, more and more philanthropists and NGOs are trying to find culturally appropriate, transformative ways to address the beliefs and social norms that are undermining humanitarian progress.

**FUNDING INDIGENOUS GENDER-NORM ENTREPRENEURS**

Macro-change happens within the microcosm of myriad individual hearts and minds. There is no way to artificially speed up this slow, very human process of change. That’s why it can be extremely challenging to fund this type of social transformation. Nonetheless, our work, and our observations of the experiences of NGOs that are engaging in this work, suggest three clear ways in which grantmakers can support like-minded organizations.

*Fund “bellringers,” the grassroots women’s rights organizations that are today’s pioneers.* Every social movement has its “bell ringers” who wake people up to the existence of a problem. Think of 19th-century American reformers such as Sojourner Truth, who campaigned for the abolition of slavery and equality for women, or

Susan B. Anthony, who fought for women’s suffrage. Even in the most patriarchal societies, there are grassroots women’s organizations leading their own women’s movements. Many are fledgling entities run by passionate and brave women who put their own lives on the line to advocate for equality and safety for girls and women.

One such organization in India is Jagori, which means “Awaken, women!” in Hindi. Jagori is a women’s training and resource center whose mission is “to deepen feminist consciousness with diverse partners at local and national levels.” The organization offers a variety of services, including training programs that provide young women and young men with analytical tools and hands-on support for working to end violence against women. Jagori’s other activities include violence intervention programs; a Safe Cities Initiative to make Indian urban areas safer for women and more gender inclusive; support for women’s leadership in local communities; and work with men and adolescent boys to redefine “dominant masculinities” and support ending violence against women and girls.

It is not easy to find and fund such grassroots organizations, but one alternative is to donate to women’s funding organizations, such as the Global Fund for Women, that make grants and offer technical assistance to a web of women’s rights groups around the world.

# How Grantmakers Can Apply a Gender Lens

Dasra conducted a series of interviews with leading foundations in India to craft strategies that all grantmakers can adopt to make their own organizations and those of their grantees become more gender aware. A gendered approach works best when it is incorporated into the very DNA of an organization, understood and valued across all organizational levels, and woven into all aspects of its work: strategic, operational, and cultural. Funders have the responsibility to lead by example if they are to ask their grantees to account for gender differences in program design.

Dasra has found that most gender-aware grantmakers apply a gender lens to their funding priorities, processes, and people, and then apply it to their portfolios of grantees. While every organization is likely to apply a gender lens differently, all should aim to become more gender transformative in order to improve return on investment and create sustainable impact.

PRIORITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Identify women and girls as a high-priority beneficiary group for funding to strive for gender equity and equality</li><li>● Use an intersection of lenses—gender, caste, religion—when setting priorities</li></ul>
PROCESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Institutionalize a gender lens through internal policy directives, frameworks, tool kits, and impact assessment</li><li>● Provide learning opportunities for staff to understand gender equality</li></ul>
PEOPLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Drive the gender lens agenda through the founder and leaders of the organization</li><li>● Promote gender diversity and equality in leadership, staff, and board membership for better decision making</li></ul>
PORTFOLIO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Build capacity of each grantee to drive gender equality through their priorities, processes, and people, and create platforms for peer learning among grantees</li><li>● Collect impact data—outreach, outcomes—disaggregated by sex and other appropriate determinants such as age</li></ul>

*Fund gender equality “mainstreamers”—reflective, dialogue-based programs that engage community and religious leaders in community-driven change around gender practices.* If you can’t talk about the way things are, you can’t fix them. Women and men alike need safe spaces—for their own genders and for dialogue between the genders—to open their minds and hearts to one another about how their society’s rules affect them and their relationships.

Religion often serves as the social sanction for gender practices that subjugate women and girls. Yet faith also has the capacity to support human equality and a commitment to shared human rights for all, which means that in some societies and communities religious leaders can play an important role in supporting necessary dialogue. The Indian NGO



Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC) runs a program called the Inter-Religious Priests' Forum that brings clergy from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity together to take action against human trafficking.

Forum members have now moved on from advocacy to intervention. For example, one *maulana* (a term used in South Asia to address or refer to a Muslim religious scholar) in Kishanganj, Bihar, began speaking out against trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation before Friday prayers in his mosque. Since then he has prohibited child marriages in Kishanganj, urged people to be alert to fake marriages and other means of providing cover for traffickers, and persuaded families to take back children rescued from trafficking.

In most of rural India, community leaders have more sway than religious ones. Members of the *panchayats*, or village councils, for example, are elected by their communities and make important decisions about a range of issues, such as school construction and sanitation, that can effect gender equality. These people are enormously influential in setting local norms. An effort that taps this influence is a partnership between the Grammen Vikas Jan Sahbhagita Trust, Jaunpur, and the Ujala Welfare Society that engages local leaders to increase awareness among men and boys about gender norms. The partnership offers workshops on topics ranging from the role of men in caregiving to violence against women.<sup>4</sup>

**Fund “institutional disrupters”—indigenous social entrepreneurs who are starting new kinds of enterprises or infusing existing organizations with an ethic of shared leadership between men and women.** These change agents—individuals and organizations—are responding to the degradation of women with a passionate determination not just to alleviate suffering but also to transform the beliefs and ideology that sanction and normalize an imbalance of power between men and women. They are doing what entities such as the World Bank and the UN cannot do: disrupting norms from the inside out, creating the ripples of change at the micro level that are foundational to any macro-level change.

One such institutional disrupter is the Indian NGO Prajwala (a common girl's name in Hindi meaning “eternal flame”), which combats sex trafficking and provides rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society for girls and women forced into prostitution. Prajwala was founded in 1996 by Dr. Sunitha Krishnan, a lifelong social activist as well as a survivor of gang rape at age 15, and Brother Jose Vetticatil, a Catholic missionary. The city of Hyderabad, where they launched the organization, is the capital of the coastal Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, one of the largest suppliers of women and children for the global sex trade. (In India alone, more than 200,000 women and children are forced into the sex trade every year.)

One of the most remarkable things about Prajwala is the way in which it disrupts gender norms in its own organization. For example, nearly 70 percent of Prajwala's team of 200 staff are sex trafficking survivors—meaning that its workforce is predominantly female. Another thing that stands out is the way in which the

organization encourages women to lead alongside men and enter domains where they had previously been excluded. Prajwala's Employability Training Unit works with survivors to identify employment options that are critical for their long-term rehabilitation. It has learned through experience that many female trafficking survivors excel in occupations that are traditionally male bastions, such as cab driving, security, welding, carpentry, and masonry. And if a woman shows an aptitude for entrepreneurship she can be trained in the management of microenterprises.

Prajwala also owns Prajwala Enterprises, a company that makes notebooks, file folders, and pens and pencils, providing trainees with their initial experience in manufacturing. By training and placing women in such jobs, Prajwala not only helps them to become economically independent but also smashes stereotypes about gender and employment.

### TREAD CAREFULLY YET BRAVELY

Philanthropists still need to fund basic aid and relief to girls and women victimized by gender-based crime. We also need to keep funding empowerment programs to give them a hand up. Yet even with the most effective aid and empowerment programs, girls and women can't win if the rules don't change.

Private philanthropy has an important role to play in this process. And small foundations may find opportunities to work in tandem with larger players such as the World Bank, the UN, and the Global Fund for Women to support the capacity of the networks of bell-ringers, mainstreamers, and institutional disrupters working to uproot entrenched patriarchal norms. But engaging in this sort of support requires patient capital and a knack for connecting the dots between invisible ideas and more visible problems. Thankfully, there are an increasing number of social innovators out there to support. And for those organizations slow to recognize the need for a gender lens, funders can ask good questions that encourage grantees to recognize the need for a gender lens in their programming.

As we head into the future, let's find new inspiration and enlist the assets of philanthropy to invest in the transformation of stubborn—yet mutable—beliefs and norms that impede global progress for women and men alike. Let's each do our part to make gender equality a lived reality. ■

NOTE: This article is based on the article “Belief-based Social Innovation: Gender-Lens' Next Frontier,” by Emily Nielsen Jones and Musimbi Kanyoro, published by *Stanford Social Innovation Review* on December 8, 2015.

### NOTES

- 1 Source: UNICEF global databases, 2016, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other nationally representative surveys, 2010–2015. See more at: <http://data.unicef.org/child-protection/attitudes.html#sthash.RaLNNZ2J.dpuf>
- 2 USAID, the Kiawah Trust, the Piramal Foundation, and Dasra, *Ladies and Gentle Men: Boys and Men in India Need a New Meaning for Masculine*, March 2015.
- 3 USAID and Dasra, *Insight: Why Grantmaking in India Needs a Gender Lens*, September 2015, pp. 6–7.
- 4 *Ladies and Gentle Men*, p. 22.