7 | The Social Relations Approach

Introduction

The Social Relations Approach to gender and development planning was developed during the early 1990s by Naila Kabeer at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex, UK. It is firmly grounded in structural feminist thinking, which focuses on the interchange between social relations and patriarchy (Weedon 1997). In the context of education, there are parallels with the structuralist accounts of schooling of Bourdieu and Bernstein, where social identities are formed through a process of internalisation of three core classifications: those of age, sex, and social class (see Arnot 2002, chapter 4). The same social relations classifications are to be found in the family and the workplace. It differs from the other frameworks in that it engages in an analysis of institutional *relations* rather than focusing on roles, resources, and activities (as in the Harvard Framework and the Gender Analysis Matrix). It takes the four key institutions of society to be the State, the market, the community, and the family or kinship. It encourages analysis between these institutions as well as within a single institution. As with the other frameworks, Naila Kabeer’s approach provides a structure for planning an intervention based on the gender analysis that has been undertaken. It is complicated to apply to practical situations, however, and should be undertaken only when there is sufficient time to engage thoroughly with the concepts around which it is constructed.


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Basic principles

This approach is intended as a method of analysing the gender inequalities within institutionalised relations that affect the distribution of resources, responsibilities, and power. It can also serve as an aid for designing policies and programmes that support women as agents of their own development. It is a powerful vehicle for examining and explaining the institutional construction and maintenance of gender relations. It concentrates on the relationships between people and their relationship to resources and activities, and the way in which these are re-worked through institutions such as the State or the market.

The Social Relations Approach can be used in a narrow application to analyse how gender inequality is formed and reproduced within a single institution. Alternatively, it can be applied more broadly to reveal how gender and other inequalities are interlinked through interaction between different institutions, creating situations which disadvantage certain individuals and groups in multiple ways. Naila Kabeer makes the point that there are efforts to move beyond the task of integrating gender issues into mainstream development, to the more challenging task of transforming the meaning of development from a gender perspective. Transforming development practice (rather than just ‘adding women on’) requires a focus on the nature of institutional rules and practices and the way in which they embody male agency, needs, and interests. This implies offering different bases for claiming resources (including both biological difference and socially constructed disadvantage) with differing degrees of transformatory potential (Kabeer 1996: 15–16). We have to recognise that men and women are different, and that between women and between men there are also differences. Therefore, if our goal is social justice rather than formal equality, then the ‘how’ of a policy or plan is as important as the ‘what’.

Social relations

Naila Kabeer uses the term ‘social relations’ to describe the structural relationships that create and reproduce systemic differences in the positioning of groups of people. Such relationships largely determine our identity, what our roles and responsibilities are, and what claims we can make. They determine our rights and the control that we have over our own lives and those of others. Social relations produce inequalities, which ascribe to each individual a position in the structure and hierarchy of their society. Gender is one type of inequality generated by social relations; others are class, race, ethnicity, caste, kinship, age, and (dis)ability.

Social relations are dynamic and changing; they are not fixed or immutable. Changes in government policy, labour-market legislation, economic trends, and so on can all have an impact on social relations. Human
action, such as a public protest, mass campaign, or civil uprising, can also change social relations. Social relations determine what tangible and intangible resources are available to groups and individuals, and what social networks they have access to. Poverty arises out of people’s unequal social relations, which dictate unequal access to resources, benefits, claims, and responsibilities. Poor women in particular are denied access to formal resources, so that they have to rely on other forms of social capital such as networks of family, friends, or interest groups, or patronage and dependency, as a critical part of their survival strategy. The role of education is in part to provide young people with the knowledge, information, and skills to help them to reduce their dependency on others and to challenge inequitable social relations.

**Institutional analysis**

Naila Kabeer defines an institution as a framework of rules for achieving certain social or economic goals (Kabeer 1996: 17). Institutions produce, reinforce, and reproduce social relations, thereby creating and perpetuating social difference and inequality. She suggests four key institutional locations: the State, the market, the community, and family and kinship. In an era of globalisation and international consortia and alliances, the international community can also be considered as an institution. These institutions are not ideologically neutral, and they are not independent of each other: a change in the policy or practice of one institution may bring about change in the others. For example, changes in the labour market which allow many more women to obtain paid employment are likely to bring about changes to relationships within the family and the community. Expansion of secondary or higher education will increase the supply of skilled labour, which may dampen salary levels and increase unemployment; this may also have an effect on the family and on women’s access to jobs.

In contrast to ‘institution’, the term ‘organisation’ refers to the specific structural forms that institutions take. In the current context, schools are organisations; they are part of the educational system, which is an important arm of the State (an institution). In engaging in gender analysis we need to examine the way in which institutions create and reproduce inequalities through their organisations. Gender inequalities are not confined purely to household and family relationships but are reproduced across all four institutions. Bringing about institutional change requires negotiation, bargaining, and reciprocity at all levels and in all domains.

In the educational context, in almost all countries it is schools, colleges, and universities that are the principal organisations by which the State reproduces its ideology among the young. While the State jealously guards its power to determine the structures of schooling (including varying degrees of control over curriculum content, teacher training, assessment, etc.) and hence control
over its capacity for social reproduction, it is not the only provider of formal education. The market is also involved in the buying and selling of education through private provision, as is to a lesser degree both the community (through schools run by community-based organisations and NGOs) and the family (where parents choose to educate their children at home). Private and community provision has grown largely because the State is unable to meet public demand for schooling, especially in poor countries, and because the quality of the education that it provides is seen as unsatisfactory. Privatisation and competition are also part of the capitalist state ideology, and so are considered just as applicable to basic services such as education and health as to other sectors such as industry or commerce.

It is not surprising that education has a powerful role to play in the perpetuation of state ideology. Schools play an important part in contributing to individual achievement, social and economic progress, and democratic practices. However, as Nelly Stromquist (1998: 397) points out:

... they are powerful ideological institutions\(^1\) that transmit dominant values, and function as mechanisms of social control. Schools transmit values that not only reproduce social class but also maintain gender structures. The formal school system contributes to the reproduction of gender inequalities through such mechanisms as selective access to schooling, the content of what is being taught and what is not and how it is taught, and the kinds of knowledge men and women (and boys and girls) get. School curriculum functions to legitimate the political order, and any curriculum change often involves changing the definition of knowledge held by dominant groups; thus these changes are often fiercely contested.

On the gendered nature of institutions, Naila Kabeer (1996: 17–18) writes: ‘Many of the official ideologies through which institutions describe themselves tend to get uncritically reproduced in social science text books, in public policy and in popular discourse, while the compartmentalised nature of the social sciences has led to the treatment of key institutions as somehow separate and distinct from each other, the subject matter of different disciplines’.

Kabeer argues that to understand how social difference and inequalities are produced and reproduced through institutions, it is necessary to move beyond the official ideology of bureaucratic neutrality to examine the actual rules and practices of institutions to uncover their core values and assumptions. Her suggested institutional locations and the types of organisation that they incorporate are usefully outlined in the *A Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks* and shown in Table 7.1.
Kabeer sees each location as pursuing a dominant or ‘official’ ideology (which is espoused in much development-policy discourse, but is not necessarily born out in reality):

- The State pursues the national interest and national welfare.
- The market pursues profit maximisation.
- The community, including NGOs, is involved in service provision.
- Family and kinship is about altruism; it is a cooperative, not a divisive institution.

### Five aspects of social relations shared by institutions

Although institutions vary in their purpose, their culture, and their working practices, according to Kabeer they share five distinct but inter-related components of social relationships: rules, resources, people, activities, and power. Analysing institutions according to these categories helps us to understand why some people gain and others lose out. This is applicable to education as an institution (part of the State). The five categories are (taken from *A Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks*):

#### Rules: how things get done

Institutional behaviour is governed by rules. These may be official and written down or unofficial and expressed through norms, values, traditions, and customs. In schools and other educational organisations, there is a gendered dimension to rules in terms of who does what, how it is done, and who will benefit.
Resources: what is used, what is produced?
Institutions mobilise and distribute resources; these may be human resources (labour, education, skills, etc.), material resources (food, assets, land, money), or intangible ones (information, political power, goodwill, or contacts). As the Harvard Framework analysis shows, organisations often distribute resources according to social categories (gender, ethnicity, religion, for example) tied to rules.

People: who is in, who is out, who does what?
Institutions are selective about whom they allow in and whom they exclude, who has access to various resources and responsibilities, and who is positioned where in the hierarchy. This selection may reflect class, gender, or other social inequalities. For example, in the UK labour market most managing directors are male, middle class, and white; most workers on the London Underground are male and black; most teachers are female and white. However, there are many more male head teachers, college principals, and professors than there are female, which is indicative of a hierarchy.

Activities: what is done?
Institutions do things: they try to achieve things by following their own rules and ensuring routinised practice for carrying out tasks. These activities can be productive, distributive, or regulative. They consider who does what, and what they get for doing it.

Certain tasks become attached to certain social groups, sometimes in the belief that they are the only people capable of doing them, for example, women as carers of the sick, the young, and the elderly. Rewards (including monetary gain and status) vary, for example, surgeons (mostly men) earn many times more than nurses (mostly women); a head teacher (more likely to be a man) earns more than a teaching assistant (more likely to be a woman). Such a hierarchy of rewards reinforces inequalities between women and men, and between different social classes. People who only carry out a particular task become very good at it, and particular attributes are attached to this group as a result. For example, women’s ‘nimble fingers’ make them more ‘suitable’ than men for assembly-line work in the electronics industry; it is considered ‘natural’ that primary school teachers should be women, as this is a job which involves the ‘caring’ and ‘nurturing’ responsibilities associated with women.

Power: who decides and whose interests are served?
Institutions embody relations of authority and control. Few institutions are egalitarian even if they profess to be so. The unequal distribution of rules, resources, and activities ensures that some institutional actors have authority and control over others. All educational systems are hierarchical, with the Minister at the top and moving down through ranks of provincial and district officials to head teachers, teachers, and finally pupils, who wield the least power.
An institutional gender analysis of the educational system as a key arm of the State can be carried out using the Social Relations Approach. This can also be applied to a single organisation (e.g. a school or even a classroom), illustrating the way in which the social relations that are framed by educational structures operate at the micro-level. Such analyses illustrate how formal education discriminates on the grounds of gender, race, and/or class at all levels, for example, an examination of how teachers and pupils interact in the classroom will usually reveal stereotypical patterns of behaviour informed by social relations based on gender, class, religion, etc. These structural relationships in education have been researched and written about extensively in industrialised countries (for example, by Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, Young 1971, Weiner 1994). A more challenging analysis would involve examining how the educational system intersects with other sub-components of the State (such as the law, social services, the civil service), or with the community, the family, and the market, to reproduce social inequality.

Naila Kabeer’s approach could have been used as an alternative to the Harvard Framework in analysing the teachers’ college in Nigeria (chapter 4). There is clearly some overlap between the five categories of analysis listed above and the ‘activities’ and ‘access and control of resources’ categories of the Harvard framework. However, Kabeer’s categories of ‘rules’ and ‘people’ provide a useful additional dimension to the boundaries of what is and is not acceptable (rules) and who is included and who is excluded (people), which is not clearly picked up in the other framework.

The following case study offers an institutional analysis using the Social Relations Approach to school provision of HIV/AIDS education in Uganda.

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**Case study: HIV/AIDS education in Uganda**

This is an analysis across all four institutions (State, market, community, and family or kinship), which seeks to illustrate the shortcomings and difficulties of teaching about HIV/AIDS through the school. It takes Uganda as an example of a country which has experienced a dramatic decline in HIV infection rates over the past decade, in part through energetic and sustained government campaigns. However, the extent to which the school has helped to reduce these infection rates among the young by persuading them to change their sexual practice is not clear. This analysis may clarify its role.

Uganda has been praised for its exemplary and energetic early approach to tackling the epidemic. It is the one African country to have experienced dramatic declines in infection rates; Senegal has also experienced a decline but not as steep as that in Uganda, where it is claimed that rates have fallen from a high of 30 per cent in some parts of the country in 1992 to eight per cent nationally in 2001. The epidemic has clearly peaked in Uganda, with the decline being most noticeable in the 15–29 age group. This appears to be the
result of an aggressive public health campaign with support and encourage-
ment from the President of Uganda. The early fear-based messages about
AIDS (‘AIDS kills’) have been replaced by messages that stress compassion,
solidarity, and hope, and which aim to reduce the stigma attached to AIDS so
that individuals feel that they can tell family members and sexual partners
about their status. These messages also promote abstinence, faithfulness in
sexual relationships, and the use of condoms during sexual intercourse.

Early surveys in the 1990s showed that young Ugandans become sexually
active at an early age, often as young as 13 or 14 years (Hyde et al. 2001: 12).
This clearly exposes many young people to a high risk of HIV infection. Girls
are the most vulnerable, given that in the high-prevalence countries they are
six times more likely to be infected than boys (Mirembe and Davies 2001:
402). However, the sustained campaign by the Ugandan government to
change sexual behaviour appears to have had an impact on this younger age
group, with a 1997 study showing that growing numbers are having sex at a
later age (a two-year delay), and those who are sexually active adopting
condom-use faster than other sections of the population. A claim is therefore
made that ‘education reduces the likelihood of being HIV positive’ (Hyde et al.
2001: 17).

While this record is impressive, the way in which education has
contributed to the decline needs to be scrutinised. Relevant questions that
need answering include:

• Have schools played a central part in helping to change sexual behaviour
  among adolescents, or have the education messages come from other
  sources?

• Is it education alone that has reduced sexual activity, or are there other
  factors?

• Does a change in sexual behaviour (fewer partners, greater use of
  condoms) include a change in the gendered nature of sexual
  relationships, and in particular greater female control over when and how
  sex takes place? And if so, how sustainable is this, given the dominant
  pattern of power imbalance in gender relations across all social
  institutions?

• These same studies show that sexual behaviour in those over the age of 30
  has not changed despite the public campaigns. Is it possible that schools,
  which it is claimed reproduce and maintain social structures and
  relations, have been able to spearhead changes not experienced more
  widely in society?

In fact, the Rockefeller study into HIV/AIDS and schooling in three African
countries on which this case study is based, found that most work with
adolescents was the result of community initiatives, public campaigns, and
media exposure. Relatively little had been done by schools themselves, even
though some outside agencies were operating within schools and were providing training to female and male teachers in health-education strategies, guidance, and counselling. Overall, however, the authors found that

- there was very little reference to HIV/AIDS in the formal curriculum;
- schools depended on invited guests, outreach workers, public campaigns, and counselling from senior male and female teachers to provide AIDS education to students;
- guidance and counselling was an underdeveloped part of the curriculum;
- HIV/AIDS was not seen as a major problem among students.

They concluded that ‘although community-based HIV prevention programmes have achieved significant results, the opportunity to make a lasting impression on children during their school years – before they become sexually active – has not been fully utilized’ (ibid.: 1).

If it is the case that schools have played only a limited role in changing sexual behaviour among adolescents in Uganda, the Social Relations Approach may allow us to unpack some of the reasons for this, and suggest ways in which their involvement can be strengthened. Naila Kabeer suggests analysing the causes and effects of a particular situation according to its immediate, underlying, and structural factors; in this way it is possible to isolate the key factors and to address them through a planned intervention. The following analysis examines the causes and effects of the limited impact of schools on HIV/AIDS prevention, looking at contributory factors across all four institutional locations. Education is taken as representative of the State in this example. Table 7.2 lists aspects of the school, market, community, and household or family that inter-relate and contribute to this limited impact of HIV prevention messages through the school. Table 7.3 sketches out a strategy to strengthen the school’s role in the HIV prevention campaign. The lower section of the Table 7.2 identifies factors that contribute to the core problem, the upper section the consequences of these factors. Table 7.3 lists the means to address the problem and the anticipated ends (outcomes). It is probably easiest to understand the tables by looking at the causes and effects by level (immediate causes and immediate effects, intermediate causes and effects, etc.).

This inter-institutional analysis reveals a wide range of factors, some originating from within schools and some from other social institutions, which contribute to the limited impact of schools in passing on health messages about safe sex. The analysis shows schools to be highly gendered places, where unequal power relations are played out and gendered identities are developed and reproduced.

This scenario conflicts with the Ugandan government’s current message as one that seeks to empower individual actors to take responsibility for their own actions and thus avoid getting the HIV virus (Hyde et al. 2001: 23).
### Table 7.2 Inter-institutional analysis of reasons for limited involvement of the school in HIV prevention

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Long term effects:</strong> continuing neglect of women’s and children’s rights</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuing gender inequality, with few women in decision-making positions and women in lower paid and less skilled jobs than men</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Intermediate effects:</strong> decline in HIV/AIDS infection rates may slow down</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender bias and gender violence in social relations in and outside school are sustained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School continues to promote dominant views of masculinity and femininity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erosion of family life due to AIDS-related bereavement</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Immediate effects:</strong> limited effective teaching about HIV/AIDS either in the school or in the home / community</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching style raises awareness and fear of HIV/AIDS but does not bring about change in gender relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing denial that school children engage in sexual activity, which places them at risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents, especially girls, continue to be exposed to sexual aggression and to engage in transactional sex</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The core problem: schools’ limited impact on HIV/AIDS prevention</strong></th>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Immediate causes</strong></th>
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**School:** reluctance to teach sex education / HIV prevention in school in an open way  
Lack of appropriate training for teachers  
Reluctance to admit that young children engage in sexual activity, while teaching abstinence as the solution to the HIV epidemic  
Reluctance to acknowledge girls’ vulnerability to sexual violence  
Acceptance that male teachers have affairs with schoolgirls  
Authoritarian / didactic teaching style and superficial learning, which does not promote behaviour-change  
School as a site for promoting dominant views of appropriate male and female behaviour, which encourages violence against girls  

**Market:** limited income opportunities for girls, which oblige them to accept gifts from male students, teachers, and ‘sugar daddies’  

**Community:** difficulty in providing for orphans  
Difficulty in talking about sex openly, limited sex education for children, especially with the decline of traditional initiation  
Transactional sex between older men (‘sugar daddies’) and schoolgirls  
Myth that having sex with a virgin cures AIDS  

**Family:** girls stay at home to nurse the sick and undertake additional tasks, and so miss school  
Early marriage
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Intermediate causes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School:</strong> the imposition of school fees at secondary level through structural adjustment programmes forces some girls into transactional sex, or to drop out of school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inadequate support for bereaved families and orphans, making the latter vulnerable to sexual exploitation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failure to address the sexual harassment of female teachers / students by male teachers / students and to punish inappropriate gendered behaviour.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media messages promoting equality in gender relations which conflict with the reality of a male-dominated school culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture of masculinity, which encourages boys to engage in risk-taking behaviour, so as to prove themselves, and to appear ‘tough’; high levels of bullying by male students.</td>
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<td>Peer pressure to conform to gendered behaviour styles.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Market:</strong> girls and women seen as a ‘commodity’ to be bought, with men ready to pay for sex.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment in the workplace.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male migration to urban areas in search of work encourages multiple sexual partners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discriminatory employment practices, with well paid jobs held primarily by men.</td>
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<td><strong>Community:</strong> dominant male roles in the community – women mostly in community maintenance, not political roles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservative views of gender – power of opinion leaders (religious, political, etc.).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beliefs around male virility and prowess – men must have children (and so need unprotected sex).</td>
</tr>
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<td>Male sexual promiscuity is condoned while emphasising female virginity / faithfulness; young boys are encouraged to experiment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health campaigns promote gender-unaware messages about abstinence and safe sex, without acknowledging power differences in sexual relationships.</td>
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<td><strong>Family:</strong> enforcement of social and cultural norms, including early marriage and marriage of widows to a male relative (who may pass on the infection if her husband died of AIDS).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extended family already eroded by employment practices and labour-market trends; exploitation of orphans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women unable to negotiate sex and insist on safe sexual practice (e.g. use of condoms with partners); promoting safe sex within marriage questions faithfulness, openness, and truthfulness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male migration to urban areas in search of work encourages multiple partners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male dislike of condoms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less access for women and girls to health facilities than men and boys in poor households.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reliance on women and girls to provide free care and nursing for those sick with AIDS, leading to absenteeism from school.</td>
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</table>
This message assumes that women have the same opportunities as men to determine when and how sex takes place, which is clearly not the case either for adolescents or for adults. It ignores the role that unequal gender relations and patriarchy play in the spread of the virus and the lack of choice experienced by women in their sexual relationships. This in itself raises questions about the sustainability of any change in sexual behaviour brought about as a result of the campaigns.

As far as adolescents are concerned, it would appear that these campaigns have been relatively successful at transmitting (gender-unaware) messages about HIV/AIDS, passed on by outside facilitators or in some cases specially trained teachers. As a result, school-going children in Uganda, as in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, have a high level of knowledge and awareness of the disease. This may deter them from starting sex at an early age and may encourage them to use condoms, but it does not mean that there has been any fundamental change in the nature of the sexual relationships that they form. Hence the question mark over the continuing downward trend of HIV infection rates in Uganda beyond that achieved through the build-up of natural resistance and/or medical intervention; this may not continue unless there is change in the way in which sex is negotiated within relationships, and a change in the male-dominated power structures which sustain all four institutions of social relations. If significant change has only occurred among the young, is this sustainable when the wider social relations remain unchanged?

**Intervention**

After identifying a problem of gender relations and analysing its causes and effects from a gender perspective, Naila Kabeer proposes the design of an
intervention to address the problem by challenging and changing these relations. The next step is therefore to elaborate the range of means and ends that emerge from the close analysis of causes and effects. The gendered effects of the problem provide us with the rationale for a gender-sensitive or gender-redistributive policy response, laying out the immediate needs and longer-term interests which are implicated in it, and sketching out the desired ends which will constitute the overall goals and objectives of the policy response (Kabeer and Subramanian 1996: 35).  

Table 7.3 looks at means and ends in relation to a core response (to teach HIV/AIDS effectively in schools). It shows that there are clearly identified strategies for teaching more effectively about HIV/AIDS within schools. There are resource implications to this, but with international agency funding and political will these are not insurmountable. There are also implications in terms of the role that the school can and should play in terms of changing the negatively gendered pattern of relations that develops among adolescents during their school years.

The authors of the Rockefeller report acknowledge that there remain major challenges. AIDS will not be fully defeated until the knowledge gained by young people about HIV/AIDS that has led them to postpone sex or practise safer sex is carried forward into adult life. ‘They are ... not yet equipped with the skills to carry these positive behaviours into the long-term formalised relationships (marriage and cohabitation) that are more complex and seem to be unrelated to the decision-making and negotiation skills of their youth that are focused on promoting abstinence. Safer sex within marriage, particularly the use of a condom except when trying to become pregnant with a partner who is known to be HIV negative, brings up issues of trust that few couples are able to confront and resolve’ (Hyde et al. 2001: 25). And they caution that ‘some important gender issues, especially with respect to condom use, faithfulness and openness between spouses, are far from being resolved ... This is particularly an issue for poorly educated women in rural areas. A small number of well educated Kampala women may be able to refuse to have sex with their husbands without condoms, but they are very much in the minority.’ (ibid.: 26). At the same time, the authors reported that informants felt that government initiatives to address gender gaps, for example in the proportion of female MPs, helped explain what progress had been made, however modest. Although gender relations remain unequal, some women did feel empowered to make sexual decisions and this was contributing to the decline of the infection.

The above analysis shows not only how important are the skills to develop positive social relationships and healthy sexual practices for young people, but also that they are achievable. Schools can do much more to help them to develop constructive relationships and make rational life choices.
Long-term ends: develop mature citizens who can make independent and informed decisions

Intermediate ends: change school culture and organisation to reflect more equal relationships

Immediate ends: greater awareness and discussion of issues around HIV infection and how to mitigate the impact of the disease

Improved access to information, advice, and counselling

Learning through school-based support system for orphans and infected students and teachers

More constructive and meaningful adolescent relationships

Core response: teach HIV/AIDS effectively in schools

Immediate means: create space for discussion of adolescent issues in a secure environment

Promote communication between teachers and students and between students themselves

Train teachers and outside facilitators to deliver reproductive health messages effectively

Hold open discussions on gender issues, empowerment, relationships; engage in participatory activity (drama, radio, etc.), through extra-curricular and peer-led activity such as AIDS, sports, drama clubs as well as through the curriculum

Give opportunities to students of all ages to voice their concerns and seek information, advice, and counselling on HIV/AIDS, reproductive health and puberty, cultural practices that pose a sexual risk to children and adolescents

Allow condom distribution to school children

Intermediate means: develop a new curriculum with improved HIV/AIDS content, which presents it in a social as well as a medical context

Address the implications of this new curriculum content for assessment, examinations, and inspection

Improve the ability and skills of teachers to teach life skills in a creative and engaging manner, which will enhance understanding of the gendered dimension of sexual relationships and bring about change

Train a cadre of specialist teachers with specific skills in reproductive health education

Develop training materials on HIV/AIDS prevention

Develop and enhance guidance and counselling services; provide students with easy access to information and advice on HIV/AIDS as well as access to HIV testing

Promote the welfare of AIDS orphans and staff living with HIV/AIDS in schools, thus sending messages about how to care for sufferers

Develop partnerships and networks with NGOs and CBOs, the private sector, and other stakeholders in AIDS education

Structural means

Create a gender-sensitive and gender-equitable environment within schools which is hostile to sexual harassment, early sexual activity, and physical violence

Enforce sanctions against those who violate gender rights, e.g. male teachers who threaten female students if they don’t have sex with them

Develop a value system in schools that promotes self-esteem and mutual respect, and allows girls in particular to be more assertive and to take on leadership roles.
Commentary

Uses

The Social Relations Approach can be used for many purposes; it is particularly powerful because it is multi-levelled and multi-dimensional. It can be applied to a number of institutions and organisations as well as to a single entity. Because it engages in institutional analysis, it is useful in helping organisations translate analysis into action, and so it supports efforts at gender mainstreaming. It helps in understanding how structures, processes, and relations inter-relate. The approach shows how features of one institution link to, reinforce, and influence those of the others, and how inequalities of gender, class, ethnicity, etc. interact and reinforce each other. It shows how changes in one institution, the State, for example, have an impact on other institutions, such as the market. In an educational context, it offers opportunities to clarify links between the gendered aspects of education and jobs, labour legislation, economic forces, and so on.

Strengths

The Approach places gender at the centre of the institutional analysis, where often it is added on; organisations using this analysis are obliged to examine their own practices and address them in their own planning process. It challenges the myth of the independence and neutrality of institutions and shows that in fact they are inter-related and are social and cultural creations. It offers both the opportunity for analysis and for identifying strategies for change. It emphasises the connectedness of men and women and boys and girls through social (gender) relations, while highlighting their different needs and interests.

Limitations

The Social Relations Approach is complicated in practice; it may be difficult to use unless adapted (March et al. suggest a modified set of categories: rules, practices, and power). Conceptually it may be difficult to grasp, for example, the distinction between institutions and between an institution and an organisation are not always clear-cut. The distinction can be arbitrary between immediate, intermediate, and long-term structural causes and effects, means and ends. It emphasises structure at the expense of agency; for example, seeing girls as passive victims of ‘sugar daddies’, when in fact they might choose such relationships to enhance their status within the peer group.
It requires detailed knowledge of the situation being analysed; at the same time it is difficult to use in a participatory way. It is more appropriate for macro-level analysis (the Harvard Framework, the GAM, and Sara Longwe’s Empowerment Framework may all be more appropriate for small case studies). It ignores other important institutions (e.g. the media, formalised religion) in its analysis of the Social Relations Approach and the examples provided.

**Further reading**
