

Gender Equality & Public Sector Capacity Development

Tipsheet #3: Questions at the country program level

Many of CIDA's country programs in Asia identify good governance as a priority for attention. Initiatives to strengthen the capacity of public sector institutions are one of the approaches pursued to address this priority. This includes, for example, initiatives that seek: to strengthen an environment department's capacity to implement its mandate for environmental monitoring; to improve the capacity of local governments in service delivery; to improve the client-orientation of health service providers.

A number of these initiatives have included measures to increase capacity and action in addressing gender equality issues relevant to the mandate of the partner – for example, in work with the Bangladesh Ministry of Health and with local governments in the Philippines.

However, to date CIDA investments in increasing public sector capacity on gender equality have tended to focus on government offices that have gender equality and women's advancement as their specific mandate ("national women's machineries" or NWMs). Efforts and results in integrating this theme into capacity development support to central agencies and line ministries have been limited.

CIDA's Policy Framework encourages a broader approach. The Framework establishes gender equality as a cross-cutting theme that should shape approaches to programming in governance and other areas. It also explicitly links public sector capacity and gender equality in providing an illustration of expected results for gender equality as a cross-cutting theme: *building the institutional and technical capacity of government and civil society institutions to promote gender equality*.

This tipsheet highlights several issues to be considered in developing a strategic approach at the country program level to public sector capacity on gender equality, as well as examples of areas of potential that could be further explored.

See also Tipsheets # 4 and #5 on general design considerations and practical tips and # 10 on PBAs.

Considerations in developing an effective program-level approach to public sector capacity on gender equality

A strategic approach at the country program level should not be limited to initiatives with national women's machineries, for several reasons.

(1) Public sector capacity on gender equality depends on a number of system-level or sector-wide factors that are difficult to address by or through NWMs

The overall capacity of government is a major influence on capacity to address gender equality issues. Processes for addressing gender equality issues can only be as good as overall planning processes. For example, if there are no processes for monitoring policy impacts, or program results, then monitoring for gender equality results is unlikely to occur. If population and administrative data generated by government statistical systems is partial and poorly presented, then sex-disaggregated data will also be poor.

While NWMs can raise concerns about data, program analysis and monitoring processes, they do not have the status and clout to initiate major changes in planning and decision-making processes. Similarly, NWMs can point out how policies or expenditures in particular sectors fail to address women's needs, but sectoral reforms can only be initiated within the sector itself.

Furthermore, it is when system-wide changes are undertaken – changes such as decentralization, or reform of planning and budgeting processes – that the greatest opportunities arise to take effective action to increase capacities, processes and skills on gender equality. Similarly, it is when sectoral reforms are being debated that questions related to gender equality are also open for discussion. If these opportunities are missed in initiatives supported by CIDA, then subsequent efforts to incorporate gender equality are limited to small changes at the margin.

“Where gender issues are highlighted, shouldn't the ministry of women's affairs be taking the lead?”

This is a frequent misconception. But consider:

- ▶ Partner governments have endorsed the gender mainstreaming strategy in the 1995 Beijing *Platform for Action*, which emphasizes the responsibility of *all* government agencies in addressing issues of gender inequality.
- ▶ The gender mainstreaming approach responds to evidence that policies and programs will generally have a different impact on women and men because men and women tend to have different responsibilities, rights and resources. For example, a social security scheme developed without consideration of differences between women and men in work history, sector of employment, and income is unlikely to meet the specific needs of women and is thus likely to exacerbate disparities between women and men. These concerns about the design and terms of a social security scheme can only be addressed effectively by the national agency with responsibility for this policy sector.
- ▶ The primary function of the national women's machinery is to act as a catalyst and support for other government agencies to take up their responsibilities for women and gender equality (and not to serve as a separate government for women).

(2) Focusing support on the NWM but not pursuing related issues in other capacity development projects confuses the message (and undermines the NWM initiative)

The primary role of the NWM is to act as a catalyst for more effective action across government on gender equality issues. CIDA's initiatives with NWMs have aimed to make them more effective in carrying out this role. In such a project, an NWM might use CIDA support to promote awareness in other agencies of their responsibilities to act on the government's gender equality obligations. This would only be a first step to changing the capacity and performance of these agencies on gender equality. The NWM could provide further support to these agencies in reviewing data sources and systems, strengthening analytic skills, providing technical support in applying new skills to particular policy or program issues, etc.

At the same time, any other CIDA initiative with government agencies that has related activities (with data systems, skills training, technical support, change management) provides an opportunity to reinforce the gender equality messages of the NWM project. The failure to do this represents more than a missed opportunity to achieve complementarity and results – it actually undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of the NWM's efforts.

(3) Promising entry points and partners for increasing government capacity on gender equality may exist in a range of sectors

While NWMs have a mandate to advocate government action in support of gender equality, they are not the only source of innovation in government on gender equality issues.

A CIDA program that wants to identify a project specifically aimed at strengthening capacity on gender equality could consider whether there are there any sectoral agencies that show particular promise as partners on gender equality, for example because they have established a sectoral unit on women's needs that has strong leadership. Or whether there are areas of sectoral or process reform in which key managers demonstrate interest in addressing gender equality. Useful initiatives could be designed in support of such partners, with the NWM also involved in the role of technical advisor (as a means of recognizing and reinforcing their role, without necessarily making the NWM the lead agency for the project).

(4) But initiatives with NWM can contribute to government-wide capacity to address gender equality

The points above highlight the limits to results that can be achieved when program support focuses solely on NWMs. However, it is also important to recognize that such NWM-focused projects have made useful contributions to increased capacity in the public sector through activities such as:

- ▶ providing technical expertise to other agencies on particular issues, such as gender equality issues in the PRSP or civil service reform;
- ▶ undertaking and disseminating policy-relevant research, for example on employment conditions in women-dominated sectors;

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- ▶ promoting use of sex-disaggregated data in policy and program analysis;
- ▶ developing tools and guidelines to assist in integrating gender analysis into policy analysis, program development, and evaluation;
- ▶ building relations between government and civil society organizations (women's organizations, gender equality advocates, academic institutes).

Possible ways in which a country program can have a positive impact on public sector capacity on gender equality

As suggested above, support to a national women's machinery may be one element of a country program's approach to increasing public sector capacity. There are other steps that country programs can take to complement and reinforce the efforts of NWMs to promote implementation by governments of their gender equality commitments. CIDA programs can, for example:

- ▶ ensure that capacity development initiatives with sectoral ministries address gender equality issues;
- ▶ take advantage of sectoral reform processes as entry points for strengthening partner approaches on gender equality;
- ▶ ensure that support provided for changes in government processes, such as decentralization reforms or changes in planning and budgeting processes, responds to new to pursue gender equality in more effective;

- ▶ take advantage of opportunities to advance gender equality in conjunction with broader government processes, for example in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS).

Tipsheets #4 and #5 provide further guidance on integrating gender equality into capacity building projects with public sector agencies. The two examples below show how donor support in a strategic area enables partner countries to make a significant step forward in capacity to address gender equality issues. In Nepal, a strategic intervention when the approach to the census was being planned ensured that gender equality objectives were integrated into capacity development of the national statistical office. In Vietnam, where the MDG process was a major focus of planning and resource mobilisation, the incorporation of gender equality concerns in the analyses and localization of targets has increased momentum for action in a wide range of sectors.

Finally, the literature on capacity development points to demand from civil society for capacity improvements and government accountability to commitments as a factor in successful capacity development initiatives. Such demand has also been noted as a critical factor in studies of progress in government action on gender equality. This suggests that support aimed at strengthening women's advocacy organizations is an important complement to capacity development initiatives with public sector organizations.

Capacity of government statistical systems to generate adequate data for policy & planning

Governments have made commitments over three decades to improve the quality of statistics for planning and evaluation of policy to better reflect the situation and needs of women as well as men. Disaggregation by sex is an important step, but improving data quality also requires consideration of concepts and definitions and in the methods used in data collection and reporting.

This challenge was taken up in Nepal as part of a larger exercise by the Central Bureau of Statistics to improve the quality of census data. The process was supported by the European Union and involved a United Nations interagency group. With this assistance, "the national statistical office undertook a comprehensive approach to incorporating a gender perspective in all aspects of the 2001 census. Activities included

- ▶ gender-orientation workshops for senior and mid-level census management;
- ▶ the establishment of four gender-oriented technical committees, including one to review the questionnaire and manuals and one to review the occupation and industry classifications used;
- ▶ mobilization of female field personnel; training for enumerators; a census media campaign promoting the gender perspective to respondents; and

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- ▶ generation of both sex-disaggregated data and special tabulations on gender issues.

Gender-specific questions on ownership of housing, land and livestock were added to establish the sex of the owner. The existing occupation and industry classifications were found to be gender biased – with occupations and industries dominated by men classified and specified at more refined levels than those in which women predominated – and were replaced by a new standard classification. Following lobbying by women’s groups, the census also implemented the 1993 revision of the System of National Accounts and the International Labour Organization standard of economic activity and work participation to a much greater extent than previous censuses.”

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division (2006). *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*. <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/wwwpub.htm>. See discussion and other examples of initiatives to improve statistics, page 87.

Building capacity around major national goals such as the MDGs

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the international community in 2000 have provided a clear focus for policy development and assessment in a number of countries. Some have followed up on the MDG commitments by formulating localized targets and integrating the goals into national development strategies and policies, including Poverty Reduction Strategies. Much effort has been invested in identifying steps required to achieve the goals by the target dates and in annual monitoring. So there is considerable momentum and importance accorded to the MDGs and to associated government processes.

In a few countries steps have been taken to seize the considerable potential to build on the MDG momentum and processes to strengthen capacity and action on gender equality commitments. The eight MDG goals all have gender equality dimensions, and one focuses specifically on gender equality and women’s empowerment. Planning processes within government toward achieving the MDGs provides opportunities to increase awareness and attention to key gender equality issues related to poverty, economic opportunities, education, health, reproductive health and rights, and participation in decision-making and also to set localized targets that reflect these concerns. In order to monitor progress on the MDGs, there will need to be improvements in national statistical capacity. Data remains weak in such key MDG concerns as maternal mortality (MDG5, and the availability of sex-disaggregated data on infant mortality (MDG4), adult morbidity (MDG6), and educational enrolment (MDG2 and 3).

Efforts to strengthen government capacity to work toward achievement of the MDGs and efforts to strengthen capacity on gender equality are therefore closely related and should reinforce each other. The government of Vietnam has described the approach it has taken: “Vietnam signed the Millennium Declaration, strongly reaffirming its commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015. The MDGs have been localized into the Vietnam Development Goals (VDG). In many cases, the VDGs go further than the MDGs and incorporate more targets in relation to gender equality. To transform these targets into reality, the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) was developed and approved by the Prime Minister in May 2002. The CPRGS incorporates gender targets, the VDGs, and draws together existing national strategies (including the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women) and sector plans into a concrete road map for development. The NCFAW (National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam) and Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) were invited as consultants in the process of drafting the CPRGS. As the result, gender issues have been considered and integrated into every objective of the CPRGS. Its implementation is currently being supervised by VWU - as a member of the Central Management Board with a gender perspective. The skilful incorporation of gender concerns in Vietnam’s CPRGS is considered a model for other poverty reduction strategies in the region.”

Vietnam shows that the localization of targets can highlight gender equality objectives that are also critical to poverty reduction: for example, for MDG3, Vietnam specified as a target “ensure that the names of both husband and wife appear on land use certificates by 2005.” Vietnam’s MDG report suggests that making strategic use of the MDG process can promote understanding and action on gender equality at the same time as enriching the approach to the MDGs. The report includes a section on “cross-cutting gender issues” including violence, traditional attitudes, access to resources and lack of data, and how they affect all the MDGs; also a section on provincial and social disparities included under each goal

Sources: Vietnam report, Beijing +10 questionnaire: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/english/responses.htm; Vietnam MDG report: www.undg.org/content.cfm?id=79; *En route to Equality. A Gender Review of National MDG Reports*. UNDP, Bureau of Development Policy (2005). www.undp.org/gender/publications.shtml, pp. 25, 55.