

INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

b) Organisational change

Gender equality and institutions: two challenges

Organisations and institutions are crucial players in development and development cooperation. A gender lens can be applied to NGOs, government bureaucracies, UN organisations, private sector companies, and to development cooperation agencies themselves.

From a gender equality perspective, there are at least two challenges regarding institutions:

How can an organisation promote more equitable relations between women and men through the implementation of its mandate?

Organisations have a profound impact on gender relations and inequalities. Given their mandates and resources, organisations decide (implicitly or overtly) who gets what resources, who benefits from a specific programme and who participates in decisions. For example, there are gender equality implications in the actions of both the Ministry of Finance setting tax policy and a community-based organisation developing a water-users' committee.

Most organisations pay little attention to the relevance of differences and inequalities between women and men to their area of work. Many people assume that organisations operate in 'gender neutral' ways, that their actions will have the same impact on women and men. Yet, it is rarely the case.

Organisations can perpetuate inequality between women and men through implementing policies that widen economic disparities (in the case of a Ministry of Finance) or that fail to support women's involvement in decision-making processes (in the case of a development cooperation agency). Institutions also have the potential to act in other ways. They can seek to ensure that policies and programmes narrow gender disparities, recognise domestic work, promote more equal decision-making authority and eliminate discrimination on the basis of sex.

How can women and men participate equally in the institution (in its structure, in its decision-making processes, and in the jobs it offers)?

Analysts have argued that organisations themselves (their structures, ways of working, decision-making, and institutional 'culture') can have significant

gender overtones. For example, they point out that organisational expectations imply that workers have few or no family responsibilities (that they can be away from home for significant periods of time or that they can work late into the night).

Changing organisations

Planned change, the change agent, leading change, the challenge of change, managing change... The business section of any bookstore is full of texts and studies of organisational change. Yet there are no easy solutions – organisations have proven to be complex. Reaching the goal of equitable relations between women and men will depend on multi-faceted strategies.

Attention has recently begun to focus on how development cooperation organisations can be changed to better promote equality between women and men. The initial focus was on the development of policies, but it was soon realised that the implementation of these policies would require additional supports and even organisational transformation. Key factors that can support the change process include:

- Development of a strategy that is based on the individual characteristics of the specific organisation (mandate, structure, staff...);
- Support from the leadership of the organisation;
- Clearly articulated arguments about why and how a gender equality perspective is relevant to the work of the organisation (even better if backed by strong research);
- Development of strategies to deal with resistance;
- Clear organisational targets and goals (with timelines) to hold the organisation accountable for progress;
- Adequate resources (including staff time);
- An internal catalyst that can mobilise resources and keep the issue on the organisation's agenda;
- Solid networks with gender equality advocates;
- Identification and mobilisation of allies inside an organisation; and
- An organisational strategy that holds all staff responsible for the gender equality mandate (rather than assigning implementation responsibility to a small, marginal unit).

Models and responses in organisational change processes

(Adapted from: M. Macdonald, E. Sprenger & I. Dubel (1997). *Gender and Organizational Change: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice*. Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute.)

Status of gender equality issues in the organisation	Responses of management to a gender equality agenda	Typical behaviours of other employees vis-à-vis gender equality issues	Situations and roles of change agents	Strategies used by change agents
<i>Gender-blind</i> : no recognition of gender differentials; assumptions include biases in favour of existing gender relations	Defensive; easily accused; insulated by power	Passive; lack awareness	<i>The lone pioneer</i> : frequently stigmatised; needs support base; primary support often comes from outside the organisation	Putting gender on the agenda by explaining; giving facts and figures; formal/ informal organising
<i>Gender aware</i> : recognition of gender differentials but often only fragmented, translation into practice. Also little recognition that gender equality is the ultimate goal.	Can feel attacked or intimidated Can seek solutions to fulfil commitments to gender equality that do not challenge status quo; looks for 'easy solutions' that will make the issue 'go away'	Increasingly aware but often afraid to rock the boat Request 'tools' that will tell them what to do Some seek to promote gender equality, but lack political/institutional support to take risks	<i>The fighter</i> : charismatic, fast moving; risk-taker; not afraid of conflict; has a small support base in the organisation <i>The bureaucratic entrepreneur</i> : analyses institutional opportunities and obstacles	Arguments based on ideology and values; forms strategic alliances (inside and outside the organisation) Seeks to create opportunities and mobilise resources with the current organisational context
<i>Moving toward gender-redistributive</i> : interventions intended to transform existing distributions to create a more balanced relationship between women and men.	Cares about the organisational gender image; is interested in making alliances with change agents; needs support in policy development and implementation	Prepared to support management; in need of skills and tools to bring policies into practice	<i>The player</i> : 'plays the organisation; recognises opportunities, negotiates; is diplomatic, flexible. <i>The catalyst</i> : rather than implementing, seeks to assist others to implement.	Builds planning, monitoring and evaluation systems; mechanisms for learning and accountability; promotion of innovative practices; outside networking

Institutional Analysis from a Gender Equality Perspective

(Adapted from OECD/DAC (1998). *DAC Sourcebook on Concepts and Approaches Linked to Gender Equality*. Paris. Available at: <<http://www.oecd.org/dac>>)

A gender analysis of an organisation involves looking at several aspects:

- **The institution's mandate and area of work:** It is important that the relationship between the primary area of work/mandate of the organisation and equality between women and men is clearly understood. For example, if the institution is concerned with promoting environmental sustainability, are the linkages between gender inequality and differences and the environment understood and recognised throughout the organisation?
- **Organisational history and culture:** Both the informal and formal rules that guide an organisation can have gender implications. Factors that support increased attention to equality issues include: flexibility, valuing diversity and different professional specialisations (for example, are social analysis skills considered important or just a 'frill'?), recognition and support for people's family responsibilities.
- **Current personnel:** The skills and attitudes of both management and regular staff are important. Does the leadership of the organisation support the move to greater attention to gender equality issues? Does the current skill profile within the organisation support the consideration of gender equality issues or is there a need for new skills?
- **Organisational routines and procedures:** Internal procedures may offer support or hinder the consideration of gender equality issues. For example, if evaluation and monitoring are weak in general, it will be difficult for the organisation to monitor the impact of its programmes and policies on women and men.
- **External environment and pressures:** Effective organisational change is often promoted through a combination of internal advocates and external pressure organisations. Many organisations have moved to develop new skills or programmes at the prompting of external advocacy groups, donor agencies, or 'global opinion and consensus' (such as that established through the Beijing Platform for Action).

See also two 'think pieces' published by Sida's Department for Policy and Legal Services: *Gender Equality Action Plans* (1996) and *Mainstreaming: A Strategy for Achieving Equality between Women and Men* (1996).