

Gender Equality & Public Sector Capacity Development

Tipsheet #4: General design considerations (integrated projects)

What do “gender equality” and “gender mainstreaming” mean for public sector capacity development initiatives? This tipsheet provides a general perspective on this question and is followed-up with a separate tipsheet that focuses on practical tips for project planning.

What should we focus on? Why?

In discussions of gender equality and capacity development initiatives, there is a frequent tendency to focus on staffing issues such as the number of women employed, or on the possibility of adding an activity that will involve women. However, the important gender equality issues are related to the overall capacity development purpose of the initiative. The key question is – capacity for what? Consider, for example:

- ▶ if the aim of the initiative is to improve the capacity of local government to design and deliver appropriate services – then the major gender equality concern is whether local governments have the data and technical skills to analyze the specific needs of women and men, to identify if and how they differ, and to plan accordingly;
- ▶ if the overall aim is to improve the quality of judicial decision-making – then the critical gender equality concern is whether the judiciary is aware of national legislation on equality and familiar with international equality conventions and norms of interpretation;
- ▶ if the aim is to increase capacity for trade policy analysis – then the principal gender equality concern is the capacity of the partner agency to identify different impacts of trade and production shifts on women and men in its assessments of economic impacts and adjustment requirements.

Capacity development initiatives generally focus on the effectiveness of the partner agency in doing its job, or some particular aspect of its job. One important aspect of effectiveness is the agency’s ability to respond to different needs and priorities of women and men in implementing its mandate.

Some of the partner agencies for capacity development initiatives deliver services to the public (health care, employment training, public transport, etc.). Others are responsible for policy and regulatory frameworks that set the conditions for economic development and public well-being (such as policies and regulations related to investment, tax, resource management).

Women constitute half the public or clientele that each of these institutions exist to serve. However, research in both Canada and partner countries has demonstrated that a policy or program directed to “the public” cannot be assumed to meet the needs of both women and men or to serve women equitably. This is because of differences between women and men in what they do, and because of inequality between women and men in access to resources and opportunities. These factors must be taken into account in policy development and program implementation if public institutions are to serve women and men equitably and to contribute to increased equality between women and men.

Elements of public sector capacity on gender equality

As highlighted above, analyses of the gender equality capacity of a potential partner must be linked to the partner’s mandate, or that part of the mandate the CIDA initiative intends to target.

A first set of questions would therefore consider the partner’s current performance in providing equitable services to women and men, and in responding to the different needs and priorities of women and men – what results is the partner achieving in this area?

A second set of questions would analyse gaps and strengths related to the partner’s performance – what is the partner’s capacity to serve women and men equitably? We know from experience that capacity on gender equality is not only a matter of individual skills and knowledge, but also includes institutional processes, information, policy guidance, leadership and networks. Elements to

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consider when analyzing the existing capacity of potential public sector partners, and possible elements for attention include:

- ▶ *guidance from agency strategy or policy* – do agency policy or strategy documents incorporate gender equality perspectives or indicate how gender equality is relevant to the agency's mandate? are staff clear about their roles and responsibilities for gender equality?
- ▶ *technical skills of policy analysts & planners* – do professional staff have the knowledge and skills to identify whether existing or proposed policies have equitable impacts on women and men, or are consistent with government policy on gender equality?
- ▶ *data and information systems supporting decision-making* – do existing data systems generate the sex-disaggregated data required for policy and planning in the sector? have any steps been taken to improve this aspect of data collection, presentation and use?
- ▶ *program and project planning mechanisms* – are there any steps in the planning process that encourage attention to gender equality?
- ▶ *program and project review mechanisms* – does program monitoring assess whether women and men have equitable access to services?
- ▶ *consultation mechanisms* – do processes for consultation with the public include women's organizations? or seek to ensure that the views of women as well as men are expressed about policy priorities and choices?
- ▶ *research* – does the agency have the capacity to undertake or commission empirical and policy research on the gender equality issues relevant to its mandate? does it make use of research on these issues done by other organizations?
- ▶ *networks* – does the agency have any links with other governmental organizations or with civil society organizations that have knowledge and experience related to gender-equitable policies?
- ▶ *resources and expertise devoted to gender equality* – has the agency devoted any staff or other resources to increasing its effectiveness on gender equality?
- ▶ *participation of women at the decision-making level* – are women represented at the policy

decision-making and management levels? to what extent is the decision-making level of the agency representative of the public served?

Lessons from experience

Several project design lessons can be drawn from the experience of national agencies and donors on factors influencing the effectiveness of initiatives to build capacity on gender equality issues.

- ▶ Approaches to introducing gender equality issues are more effective where they are concrete and practical, and where planners (or sectoral agencies, or legislators) can see the relevance to their specific concerns and understand how gender analysis can inform or make a difference to policy choices. For example, a learning-by-doing approach that includes actual planning exercises relevant to the everyday work of planners makes it much easier for them to recognize, acknowledge and address the gaps between women and men in current policies, programs and practices.
- ▶ The creation of separate systems or activities to deal with gender-equality issues is an approach that often has the result of marginalizing these issues. Examples include: gender training that is not integrated into other skills training offered; sex-disaggregated data that is only available in a separate booklet, rather than in the standard sources; project review processes in which the gender analysis requirements are fulfilled by staff outside the main planning unit.
- ▶ Senior management needs to be informed and involved in efforts to increase capacity on gender equality – they provide the cues to staff about what is important and what should be done, such as attention to gender equality concerns in policy and program activities.
- ▶ External projects can assist in building linkages between sectoral agencies and local gender equality advocates and experts in women's organizations, academic institutes and other development organizations that have useful knowledge and experience.
- ▶ Sustainable increases in capacity to address gender equality issues will not be achieved easily or quickly. Experimental and cumulative efforts are required to achieve such changes.