



GENDER EQUALITY

A KEY FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT





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«Gender Equality is the equal enjoyment by women and men of socially valued goods, opportunities, resources, and rewards.

The aim is not that women and men become the same,
but that their opportunities and life chances
become and remain equal.»

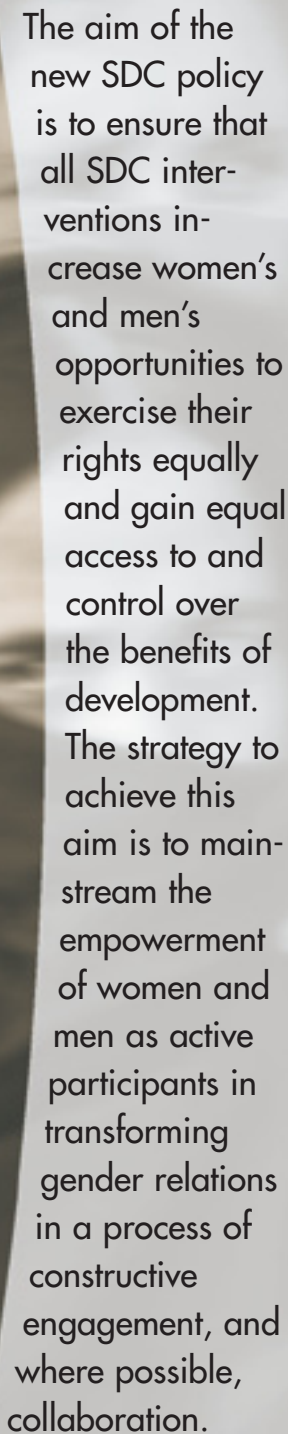
(OECD, DAC, 1998).

Despite positive initiatives and successes in addressing poverty reduction over the last decade, measures aimed at alleviating economic marginalisation, undemocratic political practices, conflict, as well as unsustainable use of environmental resources have failed in significantly reducing inequalities between the rich and the poor. Within this context, inequalities between women and men persist and grow, making gender discrimination the world's most widespread form of exclusion.

Unequal power relations and participation in decision-making between women and men are amongst the structural causes of social and political instability that generates poverty. More than ever, the reduction of gender inequalities has a strong contribution to make to social justice and sustainable development.

Since the beginning of the 70s, there has been a reinforcement of the international women's movement, with an emphasis on promoting equity and women's access to health and education, local political participation and income. After the 1995 World Women Conference in Beijing, international agencies, as well as governmental and non-governmental organisations have developed strategies to increase gender awareness and competence among actors and have mobilised resources to institutionalise the reduction of gender inequalities. These strategies are monitored at international as well as at national levels.





The aim of the new SDC policy is to ensure that all SDC interventions increase women's and men's opportunities to exercise their rights equally and gain equal access to and control over the benefits of development. The strategy to achieve this aim is to mainstream the empowerment of women and men as active participants in transforming gender relations in a process of constructive engagement, and where possible, collaboration.

SDC approach to Gender and Development

Gender has been integrated as a crosscutting issue in SDC's activities since 1990. The first SDC policy for gender balanced development was formulated in 1993, and implemented to different degrees in countries and regions. The general level of gender awareness and competence is increasing in SDC, with some countries and regions incorporating gender in their development approach and tools. However, a new gender policy is still necessary to ensure a more systematic integration of gender in the full range of SDC's activities.

SDC Strategy

Capacity building has been a key area of support to SDC's staff and partners, including skills training workshops and procedure development for gender aware planning and monitoring. SDC has adopted a flexible approach to gender mainstreaming, with Cooperation Offices developing context-specific strategies and tools assisted by the SDC Gender Unit.

This policy applies to all interventions undertaken in bilateral and multilateral work of SDC, as well as humanitarian aid. This new policy is based on SDC experience and reinforces the wider policy aims of SDC. The SDC Gender Unit has developed a tool-kit to help collaborators to put this policy into practice at different phases in the planning process.

SDC Priorities

The overall SDC priority is to reduce the growing gap between the poor and the rich, by facilitating a better distribution of the benefits of development and improving the life of poor women and men. Its strategy is to support national/local partners to act on mechanisms that create and perpetuate poverty and inequalities, including between women and men, so as to improve the economic and social framework conditions, cover basic needs, and prevent environmental problems and conflict.

A key principle of SDC is that fighting structural inequalities and unequal power relations between different groups in society is both an aim and a prerequisite of development. Reducing inequalities between women and men is a strategy to alleviate poverty and develop sustainable forms of development where women as well as men are equally involved in the governance of public affairs, at all levels.

SDC's Role

Consist in supporting, accompanying and encouraging social change which reduces poverty and promotes sustainable development. SDC seeks to work with local actors who are involved in these developmental processes in their own diverse contexts, and who are willing to engage with SDC principles to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development, including gender equality.

Why is SDC committed to Gender Equality?

Gender equality is embedded in human rights. Women and men experience differences in exercising their socio-economic and political rights, because of structural inequalities and unequal power relations in society. The promotion of women's and men's equal rights does not assume a universal model of gender relations across all societies and cultures. It merely reflects a concern that both women and men have opportunities to define what gender equality means in their particular context.

Gender equality through the empowerment of women and men is critical for good governance. In order to increase women's and men's opportunities to exercise their rights equally, women's and men's equal access to decision-making must be promoted. Enabling women and men to participate equally in governance

structures to define their development priorities and strategies, will make a critical contribution to addressing underlying inequalities.

Women's and men's dynamic contribution to society as individuals, workers, and citizens is critical for sustainable development. In many parts of the world, women have limited access to economic resources and decision-making. At the same time, men do not share the tasks associated with household management and social reproduction equally with women. While equally valuing women's and men's contribution in every sphere, exclusion of women or men from some of these spheres contributes to inequalities, exploitation and unsustainable development. Development interventions that provide opportunities for women and men to



Commitments of Switzerland to Gender Equality:

- 1981: Adoption of equality law, defining the principle of equality of rights and mandate to provide equality of rights and its integration into the Swiss Federal Constitution
- 1992: Ratification of CCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)
- 1997: Ratification of CEDAW (International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women)
- 1997: Ratification of CRC (International Convention on the Rights of the Child)
- 1998: as a member of the OECD Development Aid Committee, SDC has been under the obligation to comply with DAC regulations and to report on the impact of its interventions on the reduction of inequalities between women and men
- 1999: Post-Beijing Plan of Action. Switzerland is committed to mainstream gender in all government activities

The integration of gender is part of broader empowerment strategies and positively affects operational performance and the impact of development interventions.

The incorporation of gender methodology into development practices increases the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and equality of interventions. Because it focuses on addressing and monitoring inequalities and social injustice, gender aware analyses and planning helps organisations to develop a vision of change, and to create the conditions, methods and competence to achieve it. By so doing, it promotes values of quality and equality in organisational culture.

constructively engage in changing existing gender roles, unequal access to and control over resources as well as decision-making, are critical to achieving gender equality and sustainable development, and must therefore be promoted.

Empowerment of disadvantaged groups is a key strategy for poverty alleviation and social change.

Often, women and men experience and fight poverty in different ways. Women are increasingly at the frontline in the fight against poverty, at household and community level. Increasing women's participation in defining development priorities and strategies alongside men both empowers women and brings new perspectives, resources and dynamics to reduce poverty and empower the poor.

Gender equality is embedded in Switzerland's national and international commitments.

SDC, like any Swiss institution, has to promote equal opportunities for all the women and men it employs. SDC is committed to the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. SDC is also obliged to report to the OECD Development Aid Committee (DAC) on the intention and impact of its interventions on gender. Through international negotiations and collaboration, SDC makes sure that gender equality is taken into consideration by its partners.

Guiding Principles

- All interventions are based on a gender aware analysis

No context is free of gender relations. Therefore, a gender aware analysis at micro-, meso- and/or macro-levels, according to the intervention, is mandatory prior to the formulation of any country programme and its associated procedures. Similarly, gender needs to be incorporated at the project design stage and reflected in the project cycle. Such an analysis identifies problems and needs of different groups of women and men, as well as key gender inequalities and issues in the context. The analysis leads to the formulation of effect assumptions for different groups of women and men. This allows programmes/projects to identify strategic ways to contribute to the reduction of gender inequalities through a cross-cutting approach and/or identifying specific gender actions.

- Flexibility in implementation

Like any social change, changes in gender relations challenge traditional forms of power. Therefore, they can provoke resistance and they take time.

Approaches to gender must be flexible and context-specific. Cooperation offices and partners can choose how to strategically work with women and men as long as they contribute to gender equality. In many parts of the world, women and men are actively seeking to construct more equal gender relations. It is important that interventions build on endogenous strategies and incorporate women's and men's common as well as different/conflicting interests.

- Multilevel approach

The promotion of gender equality is effective and facilitates social change when the different levels of intervention are tackled: policy dialogue and framework conditions at the macro level, institutional development and relations between and within organisations at the meso-level and women and men in households/communities at the micro-level. This principle applies to all SDC interventions: bilateral and multilateral development as well as humanitarian aid.



- Specific Actions for Gender Equality

Specific actions to reduce gender inequalities (e.g. gender gaps in education or political representation) and/or to address gender issues (e.g. women trafficking) reinforces the impact of working with women and men in interventions or complete a cross cutting approach. They are planned on the basis of a sound gender analysis. Specific gender actions can involve working either with women and/or men.

- Equal Opportunities in Organisations

According to Swiss national policy, SDC commitment to equal opportunities must be reflected at Headquarters and in cooperation offices. In addition, SDC promotes equal opportunities within its partners, whether public or private. This implies the active promotion of equal rights for women and men at work and the protection of workers against all forms of gender-based discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment. It also implies taking positive action measures when needed to ensure gender balance between women and men, and paying attention to the gender mix of working teams insofar as it impacts on programme/project achievements.

Possible Entry Points for Mainstreaming Gender

- **A dialogue within and between cooperation offices and their partners** (Governments and NGOs, donors, and target groups) is an efficient entry point to raise gender inequalities that affect or are affected by the programmes.
- An analysis of the roles of different groups of women and men, their level of access to and control over resources makes a key contribution to **a gender aware baseline** in the initial stage of the programme.
- **The identification of objectives/ results for the reduction of gender inequalities** and/or the protection of human rights as part of programme planning is very helpful at the operational level. It makes it possible to monitor women's and men's benefits from programmes according to clear milestones.
- At all points of the planning cycle, it is useful to **develop indicators to monitor programme** outputs on women as well as on men, respectively and comparatively, as well as the outcomes in terms of social change.
- **The elaboration of a strategic framework** (a gender policy or guidelines) specifying objectives, entry points, alliances, support needed, and process indicators is most helpful for integrating gender. The implementation of such a framework can rely on specific as well as sectoral budgets.
- **Working with gender aware or competent partners** helps the process of mainstreaming in interventions. Gender awareness can be a criteria for the selection of partners. SDC supports gender competence as part of capacity building to enhance planning and monitoring skills in programmes. Development institutions are not neutral and can act as levers or brakes for the integration of gender equality. Often, organisational change is necessary to promote gender equality in interventions. This may include changing relations and procedures within and between organisations, and working more pro-actively with women organisations to identify and maximise opportunities for gender-related changes.
- **Measures to increase equal opportunities** (within SDC and its partners) facilitate mainstreaming in programmes and projects. The gender balance of teams can be instrumental to reach women and men in target groups. Furthermore, experience shows that equal opportunities influence the implementation of gender mainstreaming in policies, programmes and projects and has a positive effect on organisational culture.



Who is responsible for monitoring gender in SDC?



The Board of Directors is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Gender Equality Policy as well as Equal Opportunities. This means that the Board is responsible for incorporating gender in all approval processes (country programmes, policies, strategies etc.) and controlling systems.

Heads of divisions (thematic and operational divisions) are responsible for integrating gender in strategies, policies and country programmes, as appropriate.



Country Directors monitor the integration of gender into country and annual programmes, and the associated reporting mechanisms. They also monitor the changes in the country context, including changes in gender equality.

Programme officers and heads of project are responsible to monitor the integration of gender at the programme/project level. This responsibility is shared with partners and laid out in contracts.



The Governance Division (Gender Unit) is responsible for providing gender monitoring support to SDC and its partners.

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