



GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS: ISSUES BRIEF 7

POLICY AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL

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The purpose of this Issues Brief is to present ideas and strategies for integrating a gender equality perspective into policy and political dialogue at the country level. The paper identifies concrete entry points and opportunities.

This is one of a series focussed on gender equality and aid effectiveness prepared by the DAC Network on Gender Equality.¹ It is intended for representatives from donor agencies, developing countries and civil society.

INTRODUCTION

Policy and political dialogue has always been an essential element of the development co-operation relationship, but gender equality has not been well integrated into these discussions. In the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action, development actors agreed that:

*"We will engage in open and inclusive dialogue on development policies (...) Developing countries and donors will ensure that their respective development policies and programmes are designed and implemented in ways consistent with their agreed international commitments on gender equality, human rights, disability and environmental sustainability."*²

More recently, the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (2011) called for *inclusive development partnerships* based on *openness, trust, and mutual respect and learning*³ as one of the common principles which form the foundation of effective development co-operation.

Policy dialogue is an interactive process of communication and exchange of viewpoints. Not all policy dialogue is overtly political. The political nature of the exchange depends on the issue at stake and on the actors involved. Definitions of policy and political dialogue include:

"Policy dialogue is a way of working with partner countries to explore and implement policies that accelerate sustainable and equitable growth, improve the allocation of the entire budget, and enable a broad cross-section of stakeholders to engage in policymaking." (*Review of Literature and International Practice in Policy Dialogue. Policy Dialogue Evaluation*, AusAID, Office of Development Effectiveness, Canberra, July 2011, p. 3).

"Political dialogue is a long-term process of negotiation, which is effective if it develops within the framework of contacts and collaborative relationships where trust, mutual respect and openness are built up over a long period of time." (*Dialogue for Change. Reference Materials in Support of Policy Dialogue on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Stockholm, June 2010, p. 9).

"Policy dialogue is a means by which development co-operation agencies advance major policy concerns and assess the room for manoeuvre in addressing them. National partners participating in policy dialogue are generally doing the same." (*DAC Source Book on Concepts and Approaches Linked to Gender Equality*, OECD, 1998, p. 48).

All dialogue that aims to influence development outcomes towards achieving gender equality and women's rights can be considered policy dialogue. Given the political nature of gender equality and women's empowerment, dialogue on these issues is inherently political.

1. Other briefs include: "Making the Linkages" (July 2008), "Finding the Entry Points" (July 2008), "Innovative Funding for Women's Organisations" (July 2008), "Managing for Gender Equality Results in Donor Agencies" (May 2009), "Managing for Gender Equality Results in Partner Countries" (May 2009), and "Integrating Gender Equality Dimensions into Public Financial Management Reforms" (October 2010). They are all available at www.oecd.org/dac/gender/effectiveness.

2. Accra Agenda for Action, paras. 13 and 13c.

3. Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, para. 11c.

OVERVIEW

WHY:	Building on the momentum of the Paris, Accra and Busan agreements, development actors are moving towards a more holistic model of development – one that goes beyond technical solutions in favour of genuine partnerships for development. A more inclusive and reciprocal dialogue on development policy is key to seeking out new ways of working together to achieve lasting results.
WHAT:	Policy and political dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment at the country level is an exchange of ideas on how to improve development outcomes for both women and men. It can be opportunistic and flexible or planned and structured.
WHEN:	Whilst drafting the country strategy, during sector reviews, in the context of budget support and programme-based approaches to delivering aid, and informally – whenever opportunities or entry points arise or can be created.
HOW:	There is no single recipe for success: informal and <i>ad hoc</i> dialogue on gender equality and women's rights can be as effective as other forms of more formal and structured exchanges. What is key is to be aware of underlying power dynamics and of their influence on actors' behaviour.

POLICY AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IS HAPPENING

Gender equality and women's empowerment are central dialogue issues in 64% of Sweden's country strategies.⁴

Development partners are conducting dialogue on gender equality and women's rights in different ways. In 2007, a Development Assistance Committee (OECD – DAC) study showed that about 37% of DAC members regularly addressed gender equality in their policy dialogue, and not only with the Ministries of Women's Affairs in partner countries.⁵ In 2013, nearly all members were able to provide specific examples of when and how they had addressed gender equality in their policy dialogue.⁶ For example, Sweden has strategically used dialogue as an advocacy tool for promoting gender equality with multiple co-operation partners at global, regional, and country levels.⁷ The European Union has committed to addressing gender equality in at least 50% of its political dialogue with partner countries “as an opportunity to ensure that the gender dimension is included in the broader poverty analysis, and supporting the development of national authorities' capacity for gender analysis and planning.”⁸

Broad-based dialogue⁹ on the status of women is in place in 16 of the 24 partner countries that completed the gender equality module of the 2011 Paris Declaration Monitoring Survey.¹⁰ Half of these countries indicated that gender equality is addressed, or partly addressed, in this dialogue. Sometimes, the dialogue between donors and partner governments focuses on sector-specific concerns such as agriculture, health and education (as in dialogue on sector budget support) rather than on overall policy and budget priorities (as in dialogue on general budget support).

Policy and political dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment helps create a shared understanding of country-specific issues, perspectives and approaches to the effective promotion of gender equality and women's rights.

4. European Commission (2012), *Commission Staff Working Document: 2012 Report on the Implementation of “EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Development 2010-2015”*, p. 6.
5. OECD (2007), *Gender Equality and Aid Delivery. What has Changed in Development Co-operation Agencies since 1999?*, Paris.
6. According to DAC members' replies to a questionnaire intended to provide inputs for a forthcoming study by the GENDERNET on how DAC donors address gender equality, undertaken in February–March 2013.
7. Sweden's Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2011), *Gender Equality for Development. Results and Lessons*.
8. European Commission (2010), *Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender Equality in EC Development Cooperation*.
9. Broad-based dialogue involves “a broad range of government ministries (including line ministries and relevant departments) and donors (bilateral, multilateral and global initiatives). Government and donors should also consider engaging with non-executive stakeholders, including parliamentarians and civil society organisations.” OECD (2011), *The Paris Declaration Monitoring Survey Frequently Asked Questions and Glossary*.
10. OECD (2011), *Findings from the Gender Equality Module of the 2011 Paris Declaration Monitoring Survey*.

BURKINA FASO: POLITICAL DIALOGUE INSPIRED BY THE PRINCIPLES OF THE PARIS DECLARATION¹¹

To conduct political dialogue on gender equality with the government of Burkina Faso, bilateral and multilateral partners created a Framework of Consultation on Gender which aimed to co-ordinate and harmonise their approaches and strategies on the ground, based on the Paris Declaration principles. Advocacy efforts to raise awareness of gender equality issues amongst government members have been undertaken as part of this Framework of Consultation. For example in 2005-06, ambassadors from the Framework's donor countries visited each Burkinabe minister to discuss the importance of gender equality to achieving development results. In addition, bilateral and multilateral partners decided to create a Joint Gender Fund in 2005 with the goal of harmonising financing efforts to support the Government's efforts to promote gender equality. These initiatives contributed to the adoption of a National Policy on Gender in 2009 which resulted from a participatory process involving civil society, women's organisations, and regional and national government structures.

The political dialogue was successful because of the close consultation between the Burkinabe government and its partners, and the coherence and co-ordination of donor interventions inspired by the Paris principle of harmonisation.

EMBEDDING A GENDER EQUALITY PERSPECTIVE INTO DIALOGUE AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL IS KEY TO ACHIEVING PROGRESS AND BENEFITS FOR ALL

Development partners are inevitably making a political choice when they choose – or choose not to – address gender equality. Bringing a gender equality perspective into policy and political dialogue at the country level is essential to ensuring that significant funding opportunities (e.g. climate change funds, IDA¹² 16 and 17) benefit women and men *equally* and that their respective needs and viewpoints are taken into account. For example, effective dialogue led to the inclusion of gender equality as one of the special themes for the sixteenth (2011-14) and seventeenth (2014-17) replenishments of the World Bank's International Development Association.

Influencing power dynamics is at the heart of policy and political dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment at the country level

Recognising the role and influence of power imbalances on actors' behaviour is essential to the success or failure of policy and political dialogue on gender equality at the country level. To have an impact, policy dialogue needs to acknowledge and be conscious of the underlying power and leadership dynamics and politics in which local stakeholders operate. A 'power-aware' type of dialogue can help redress power asymmetries between men and women and shape attitudes and approaches towards achieving gender equality and women's rights.

A comprehensive and inclusive approach to dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment will integrate a complete picture of the policy context (institutions, political actors, discourses), including how networks of people are working for or resisting policy change. Only a dialogue that is able to incorporate diverse local perspectives can generate lasting change.

ELEMENTS AND ENTRY POINTS FOR EFFECTIVE DIALOGUE AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL

Assessing the political, institutional and policy context

Developing a sound understanding of the national structures, institutions (formal and informal) and discourses at play in a given country will serve as useful preparation for engaging in dialogue. This will help to identify a country's specific gender equality issues, priorities, needs and opportunities. An awareness of the socio-economic and cultural environment is as important as knowledge of past policy processes, strategies and efforts geared towards improving gender equality and women's rights, including any regional and global commitments made.

An in-depth country analysis of opportunities and constraints for policy and political dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment can be enhanced by:

- Planning, preparation and sound research in order to identify and address in-country power and leadership dynamics, whether visible, invisible or informal.¹³ Reviewing existing research material and country studies could be a good starting point.
- The human qualities of sensitivity, empathy, patience, listening, mutual respect and humility, based on a recognition that no country in the world has achieved full gender equality.
- Devoting adequate financial resources and time to collect sex-disaggregated data and undertake analysis to inform the dialogue and any results or accountability mechanisms.

11. Input from Switzerland.

12. The International Development Association (IDA) is the part of the World Bank that helps the world's poorest countries. IDA's gender results include more than 188 million pregnant women receiving prenatal care from a health provider and an increased gender parity in primary schooling in IDA countries. World Bank (2013). *The ABCs of IDA. Gender.*

13. For a more complete explanation of visible, invisible and informal forms of power, see Eyben, R. (2010), *Supporting Inclusive and Democratic Ownership. A 'How to Note' for Donors*, IDS, Prepared for the OECD DAC Working Party on Aid Effectiveness

LESSONS LEARNED FOR SUCCESSFUL POLICY DIALOGUE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS – A NORWEGIAN PERSPECTIVE¹⁴

Norway's gender equality reviews of Norwegian Embassies have identified six factors that contribute to successful policy dialogue on gender equality and women's rights:

- Management commitment and will to lead
- Donor co-ordination to create a stronger voice
- Consistent messaging
- Embassy staff that have the competence and confidence to bring gender equality issues to the table in a convincing manner
- Using policy dialogue and programme support as reinforcing elements in the co-operation
- Support for the participation of national stakeholders for women's rights and gender equality in important policy arenas.

Identifying key actors, their interests and needs

Familiarity with the national context can facilitate the identification of allies, as well as actual or potential sources of resistance. It is important to identify individuals or units that support gender equality issues (as a matter of personal commitment or organisational responsibility) and to gain their insights into potential challenges and opportunities. Key country actors may include:

- Government officials, staff in planning and line ministries, parliamentarians
- Members of policy networks, think tanks, academia
- Members of civil society groups – particularly women's groups, traditional leaders, local activists
- Private sector representatives, union leaders
- Other informal gender equality "champions".

IDENTIFYING ALLIES FOR POLICY AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN NEPAL

As part of its systematic approach to policy dialogue, UN Women has carried out "a broad and in-depth mapping of actors to identify roles, influence amongst the players as well as identify their position and potential for supporting demands for more gender responsive policy processes. In addition, a mapping of gender responsive budgeting and related programmes was conducted to clarify the linkages between these interventions with the gender focused interventions in order to ensure complementarity."¹⁵

An ally may not always be obvious and it is important not to overlook those whose voices have been marginalised (often women), and who hold key insights into the local context, causes of inequality, and innovative solutions to addressing these challenges. Policy and political dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment will be successful if development partners learn to work with and support the participation of a diverse range of actors.

Finding entry points and creating opportunities for dialogue on gender equality

Policy and political dialogue on gender equality and women's rights can take place in formal and informal settings. Ensuring that policies and programmes address gender equality will require the identification or creation of opportunities for discussion. Key entry points for dialogue include:

- The preparation of the country strategy/joint assistance strategy
- The design of programme-based approaches or when allocating of budget support (sector and general)
- New funding opportunities
- Sector reviews and mid-term reviews of Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs)
- Ahead of and after elections
- New and revised legislation
- The launch of key statistics and reports (either specifically on gender equality or with relevant data)
- Informal opportunities (e.g. dinners, receptions, gatherings)

14. Adapted from Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (2011), *Lessons Learned from Gender Reviews of Norwegian Embassies*, Oslo, p. 8.

15. Input from UN Women.

- Discussions ahead of and at key international and regional fora such as the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)
- The 4-yearly country reporting cycle and followup to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

In the context of major intergovernmental processes such as Rio+20, the Busan Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and negotiations on the post-2015 framework, policy and political dialogue at the country level can help inform global policy discussions and increase understanding of local gender equality and women's empowerment issues.

It has been suggested that policy dialogue is often effective in countries that are extremely aid dependent, as dependence on donors' financial support encourages these countries to engage. Yet, policy dialogue becomes even more relevant – although it may be more difficult to implement – in less aid dependent countries, where this dialogue may be the only instrument available for donor influence.¹⁷

Where lacking, opportunities for policy and political dialogue on gender equality and women's rights can be created. This could be accomplished, for example, by hosting informal gatherings where key policy and government officials from both donor and partner countries can get together to discuss the role of gender equality and women's empowerment in meeting overall development objectives. Engaging with civil society in a formal or informal manner is another strategic way of generating debate on gender equality and women's rights.

Taking action

Some key actions can help strengthen policy and political dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment at the country level:

Draw on national commitments to women's rights and gender equality

The importance of gender equality and women's empowerment can be more readily established if there is a clear linkage to policies and commitments that the partner country has already made on gender equality, women's rights and empowerment, such as in national development strategies or in poverty reduction strategy papers. Most countries have endorsed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the Declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (2000). Others have developed regional frameworks including the Inter-American Convention of Belem do Para (1994), the Cairo Declaration issued by the First Arab Women's Summit (2000), and the Maputo Protocol (2003). These are important tools for dialogue on gender equality because they ground the discussion in commitments already made by partners.

USING STATISTICS TO INFLUENCE POLICY DIALOGUE IN SOLOMON ISLANDS¹⁸

The 2009 'Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: A Study on Violence against Women and Children' generated strong interest across government and civil society in taking action to end violence against women. This national survey was carried out by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community in partnership with the Government of Solomon Islands, with funding from AusAID and the United Nations Population Fund.

The data was striking and validated anecdotal evidence on the prevalence rates of violence against women. It enabled the Solomon Islands Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs to engage in dialogue with other areas of Government on this issue. Using this evidence base, the Government of Solomon Islands has adopted a National Policy on Eliminating Violence against Women and an action plan to address violence against women.

ENTRY POINT FOR POLICY AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN BOLIVIA

"In the new Constitution several gender indicators have been included which also includes an accountability tool. This provides the basis for the donors to address gender at all different levels in Bolivia. Donors have for example included gender indicators in different governance institutions, such as the Ombudsman, the Electoral Board, and the Supreme Court."¹⁶

Draw on the experience of countries in the same sub-region as an example

Citing the case of a nearby or comparable country's successes and/or failures to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment can spark interest and add a sense of urgency to the dialogue. Most partners will more easily relate their own situation to that of countries with similar development trajectories and may therefore be more inclined to engage in discussions on policy change.

Rely on statistical evidence

The collection of sex-disaggregated data is key to tracking and understanding demographic, economic, social and cultural factors driving gender inequality as well as establishing a baseline against which the impact of the dialogue strategy can be monitored. Data and figures can effectively be mobilised to show that gender inequality is a reality deserving serious and open discussion.

Using statistics can also help address a sensitive issue indirectly. For instance, in Uganda, during the review of the education sector, Irish Aid and UNICEF used dialogue on the quality of education services as

16. Input from the Netherlands.

17. DfID (2005), *Alliances Against Poverty. DFID's Experience in Peru 2000-2005*.

18. Input from Australia.

an entry point to address gender-based violence in schools. They used police statistics as data to support this dialogue. This effort resulted in a gender-based violence protection strategy for the education sector.¹⁹

Set gender equality and women's rights as objectives from the outset

In meetings between development partners and the government, gender equality and women's rights should ideally be addressed from the outset and as part of the main discussion, and in as concrete terms as possible. If gender equality is an add-on agenda item ("finally, let us discuss the gender equality aspects..."), it signals that this is a low priority that does not require dedicated attention. In order to be treated systematically, gender equality and women's empowerment need to be core elements right from the design stage of the policy dialogue.

USEFUL TOOLS FOR DIALOGUE

Sweden has developed some very comprehensive guidance on how to conduct effective dialogue on sensitive issues such as gender-based violence (see *Gender Equality in Practice. A Manual for Sida*, 2009). The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has also produced guidance for dialogue on sexual and reproductive health and rights (see *Dialogue for Change. Reference Materials in Support of Policy Dialogue on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*, 2010).

Use clear language and make the issues concrete

It is important to raise issues in a way that makes sense to all partners. For example, if a member of a donor agency wants to ensure that the benefits of an agricultural diversification policy reach both women and men, then he or she should begin the discussion by saying so. Governments are more likely to become engaged on issues when their relevance to people or to the country is clear.

Take advantage of informal opportunities

Informal opportunities can be strategically used to foster dialogue on gender equality and women's rights. For example, in Uganda, the Irish Ambassador hosted a private reception for actors in the justice sector where he raised gender-based violence.²⁰ It is also possible to combine formal strategies for dialogue with more subtle but effective means of influence as described in the example from Tanzania below.

Encourage broad-based public debates

A lack of knowledge on gender equality issues may be the reason for lack of interest. Moving away from meeting exclusively with government officials to fostering broad-based public debates on the causes, consequences and solutions to gender inequality could allow both donors and their partners to gain insight into what citizens think of this issue and into what they identify as possible drivers of change.

POLICY DIALOGUE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN TANZANIA²¹

Sweden conducted a dialogue with Tanzania in 2008-2010 which focussed on pregnant pupils' right to education and preventing young girls' unwanted pregnancies. As a supplement to sector support and dialogue, a girls' school was funded that served as a "model school" for addressing these issues. The Ambassador also actively championed gender equality through writing newspaper articles and giving public speeches and interviews about women's security, combating gender-based violence, and advancing women's and girls' rights.

The dialogue may have prompted the change that occurred in Tanzanian society with regard to attitudes towards young girls' pregnancies and pregnant girls' right to education. This change is reflected in a revised education policy that raises the issue of girls' right to return to school after childbirth. Another result that the dialogue is thought to have contributed to is that in March 2010 the Ministry of Education adopted guidelines on how pregnant girls can continue their studies.

19. Input from Ireland.

20. Input from Ireland.

21. Adapted from Sweden's Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2011), *Gender Equality for Development. Results and Lessons*, p. 14.

Respond to common statements

Finding some ground for constructive dialogue based on trust and mutual respect is as important as making explicit any concerns or reservations regarding the way women and gender equality are depicted in a particular setting. Below are some strategies and ideas on how to respond to certain common statements whilst conducting policy and political dialogue on gender equality and women's rights at the country level.

"It's about culture."

Just as we would not accept custom or tradition as a rationale for discrimination against an ethnic group, justifications for discrimination against women based on culture should not be tolerated. Culture does change. It is important to take advantage of potential windows of opportunity to improve the situation of women and girls.

Aspirations to equality and freedom are gender-blind and universal across cultures, regions and generations. Evidence of this universality can be found in the broad international agreements signed by a majority of the world's governments where they commit to uphold the principles of non-discrimination, gender equality, and women's rights.

"Gender equality is not a concern for our country (or region, or community)."

Gender equality and women's rights issues can be made more concrete through the presentation of sound empirical evidence (statistics, oral histories, research) that documents gender disparities and discriminatory practices in the specific setting.

"This is what women want."

Generalising one or two experiences into a broad statement about all women shows disregard for the great diversity between and amongst women. It also neglects the voices that are missing, often due to women being excluded or silenced as a result of inequality and discrimination.

"Gender equality can come after we deal with more pressing issues such as poverty reduction or food aid in the wake of humanitarian disasters."

Just because an issue is more intractable and difficult to tackle does not mean that it is less important. No serious or comprehensive poverty reduction framework could ignore the specific situation of women since they make up more than half of the world's poor. It is impossible to reduce poverty without addressing gender inequalities. Women are not merely victims of discrimination and poverty but an integral part of the solution. Development partners need to work with women in order to harness their capacity to build effective partnerships and more sustainable approaches to development. In this regard, working closely with and investing in a strong women's movement may be an effective (if indirect) mechanism of policy influence.

CONCLUSIONS

Set against the backdrop of an unprecedented set of worldwide crises marked by financial, environmental and economic insecurity, opportunities for promoting dialogue on development policies have never been greater – nor has the need for dialogue been more pressing. Policy and political dialogue on gender equality and women's rights at the country level offers a means to assess, address and improve the condition of women and girls. Shaping people's attitudes as well as policy and political decisions through dialogue in favour of gender equality and women's rights is critical to the empowerment of women, the unleashing of their full potential, and the achievement of sustainable economic growth and development for all.

POWER DYNAMICS IN BOLIVIA²²

In Bolivia gender equality can be seen as a western, imperialist concept. Indigenous groups often consider that gender inequity is not an issue in their communities; rather, men and women play complementary roles that are supposed to be equally important. In practice, the complementarity is embedded in unequal power relations and decision-making processes.

In Bolivia's National Plan on Equity these ideas are called into question. Studies were undertaken on gender relations from a historical perspective (before colonisation, within indigenous groups) by local researchers including indigenous women. Studies were also conducted on the relation between gender, class, ethnicity and culture. Programmes that empower women at different levels and in various elements of life – including indigenous women and programmes on masculinity – are the basis for an awareness process and for change of prevailing prejudices, ideas and behaviours.

22. Input from the Netherlands.

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