



## EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY<sup>1</sup>

How can we increase the likelihood of women benefiting equally from development activities? What strategies have proven to be effective in the field?

This tipsheet summarises strategies which have worked in practice, based on findings from a review of 85 evaluations undertaken by bilateral and multilateral agencies from 1999 to 2002. There was a great deal of consistency in evaluation reports about the most effective strategies for addressing gender equality issues, regardless of the type of assistance, the donor agency, the partner country or sector. Findings from the review also support anecdotal evidence about how to promote gender equality in development programming.

### *Discuss gender equality with partner countries*

Dialogue to develop partnerships on gender equality is needed when agencies are developing country assistance strategies, and also at the activity level during design and implementation. This means that development workers need to talk with partners about how women's needs, benefits and rights are relevant to the development activities being planned and implemented, taking into account the social, economic and political context; and how equal benefits will increase the effectiveness of activities and the sustainability of outcomes. Ideally, this dialogue and negotiation will result in agreement on investments and activities, with a clear understanding of how benefits for both women and men will be realised.

### **Successful partnerships had:**

- a shared vision;
  - stakeholder involvement;
  - long-term commitments;
  - attention to partner capacity.
- 
- ***Develop a shared vision and explicit consensus on gender equality objectives*** relevant to the country strategy or development activity. Evaluations show that lack of ownership of gender equality goals and strategies is a key obstacle to addressing gender issues in development activities. Ownership of objectives and approaches is more likely to be shared if there is a clear link to policies and commitments that the partner has already made on equality for women.

---

1. Prepared for the OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality by Juliet Hunt, April 2004. Based on Juliet Hunt and Ria Brouwers 2003 "Review on Gender and Evaluation: Report to DAC Working Party on Evaluation" undertaken by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

- **Involve stakeholders from civil society in dialogue on objectives and activities.** National machineries for women, local women’s organisations, NGOs and other local advocates for women’s rights can play a key role in setting directions for country strategies and in activity design. They can hold institutions accountable for addressing gaps between commitments and practice.
- **Make long-term commitments to partners and activities.** This is essential for sustainable progress towards gender equality at both macro and micro levels.
- **Assess and strengthen partner capacity for gender responsive and participatory analysis, planning and implementation.** Lack of attention to partner capacity is a major obstacle to addressing gender equality issues. Assessing partner commitment, capacity and context provides insight into the types of interventions on gender equality which may be successful, and helps to identify appropriate strategies for strengthening partner capacity. For example, in difficult social contexts, the use of sound data based on empirical research and evaluation can help to make a case for investing in women, and for strengthening partner capacity. Knowing and understanding the partner is essential for effective dialogue, and for negotiating shared objectives.

### *Effective strategies for activity design, implementation and monitoring*

There is very clear evidence that attention to gender issues in activity design and implementation is essential if agencies want to increase the likelihood that both women and men will participate and benefit, and to ensure that they are not disadvantaged by development activities. Even very limited attention to gender issues in design can make a significant difference to whether women benefit, although local context is critical for sustaining benefits and for making progress towards gender equality.

#### **Social, institutional and political context is critical for sustainability of benefits**

Some macro-level evaluations found that the local cultural, institutional and policy context is more important than activity design in determining whether women will benefit, and whether benefits will be sustained. For example, both women and men benefited from largely gender blind World Bank assistance in Poland and Vietnam, where implementing partners stepped in to effectively target women, or where women were able to access benefits. DFID found that including gender equity in design had little impact in public health systems, unless partner government policies and practices were favourable.<sup>2</sup>

- **Incorporate gender equality objectives into activity, programme or project objectives.** This is often noted as a key reason for success when evaluators find positive benefits and impacts for women. This does not mean that activities need to focus exclusively on women or on achieving equality. Gender equality issues are given more systematic and serious attention if they are reflected in the design objectives. This increases the likelihood that attention to gender equality will flow through into strategies, activities and indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

2. World Bank 2002 “The Gender Dimensions of World Bank Assistance: An Evaluation of Results”, OED; DFID 2001 “ODA/DFID Support to Health Sector Reform and Health Management: A Synthesis Study” Andrew Cassels and Julia Watson.

- **Use participatory strategies to involve both women and men in design and implementation.** Participatory strategies need to be informed by sound analysis of gender relations, socio-economic and political context. The review found evidence that participatory strategies by themselves do not guarantee that gender equality will be adequately addressed, since participatory methods still often overlook women's perspectives.
- **Ensure there is adequate time and resources for fieldwork during design.** This is essential for collecting adequate sex-disaggregated baseline information and for employing participatory approaches.
- **Ensure that gender strategies are practical, and based on quality gender analysis.** Gender strategies need to identify how differences between women and men are relevant in each programme and context, and what this means for the way the programme is designed and implemented: what activities are needed, with whom and why; what results are expected; how these activities and results contribute to achieving the overall objectives of the intervention; resources needed; and indicators to monitor the strategy and its results. To ensure that they are implemented, key elements of gender strategies need to be integrated into day-to-day implementation and management tools and processes, such as the logical framework matrix.
- **Provide in-country social and gender analysis expertise** to undertake analysis and support the implementation and review of all strategies.
- **Ensure that responsibilities for implementing gender equality objectives are explicit in job descriptions, Scopes of Services and Terms of Reference, for all personnel at every stage through the activity cycle.** This significantly increases the likelihood that gender equality issues will be seriously addressed, as long as there are sufficient resources, time and support available to develop and monitor gender equality strategies. Having staff and stakeholders who are competent and committed to gender equality is also a critical success factor. The review found that training is most effective at increasing competence, and more likely to be applied, when it is sector-specific and directly linked to individual project contexts and activities.
- **Collect adequate and relevant sex-disaggregated baseline information, and use gender responsive indicators and monitoring processes as a minimum standard for activity design, implementation and monitoring.** Many development activities lack gender responsive indicators and sex-disaggregated baseline data, and have limited monitoring information. These are serious constraints to assessing possible differences in participation, benefits and impacts between women and men. Where sex-disaggregated information is collected, this tends to focus on inputs and activities (such as participation of women in training, number of women in groups, or number of loans provided) rather than benefits and impacts (such as how women and men control or benefit from loans). Unintended impacts on women, or on any other group such as men, women or children living in poverty, are seldom investigated. Monitoring needs to collect sex-disaggregated information on who participates and benefits; what prevents women and men from participating and benefiting; unintended or harmful effects; and changes in gender relations.

### Examples of gender responsive indicators<sup>3</sup>

**Girls' education:** retention rates; attention given to female students; greater participation of women in community decision making; reduction in barriers to girls' education; gender responsive curricula, teaching materials, teachers and infrastructure which take into account the different experiences and needs of boys and girls.

**Empowerment of women:** participation and influence over decision making for own needs, children's needs, family needs and community activities.

**Economic, social and political results:** increased yields and income; improved nutrition; improved awareness of domestic violence in the community; improved capacity of women's leaders; improved gender perspectives in decision making; increased ability of women's organisations to negotiate with government; increased respect for women leaders.

### *Effective approaches for making progress towards gender equality*

Where evaluations have found evidence of progress towards women's equality with men, a **combination of strategies** has been key to that success:

- **Support women's organisations to work towards gender equality.** Activities which have been specifically designed to promote gender equality, by strengthening local women's organisations to set and carry out their own agenda for equality, show the strongest evidence of strategic and sustainable changes in gender relations. Effective strategies include support for women's analytical, networking and organisational capacity, and support for women's advocacy activities with men in local political and social institutions. Accountability of government agencies to civil society is critical for making progress towards gender equality. Frequently, local women's organisations have limited capacity to influence development priorities, and need to be resourced to fulfil this role.

### Women's organisations and sustainable change

**In Peru,** CIDA support for women's organisations resulted in improved gender focus and programming in local NGOs, women's involvement in decision making and leadership at community and local political level, the election of women as municipal councillors, increased ability of women's organisations to negotiate with local government and other institutions, responsiveness of those institutions to women's demands, and evidence of men supporting these changes in women's roles.

**In Vietnam,** training and institutional strengthening for women's organisations from CIDA has resulted in more women in economic and political decision making at local and national level, and improved capacity of public and private institutions to deliver programmes which benefit women.<sup>4</sup>

- **Strengthen women's leadership capacity using participatory strategies.** Providing women with skills training has had an empowering impact on women's decision making capacity, particularly when combined with participatory planning and monitoring processes, or strategies which

3. CIDA 1999 "Evaluative Review of Ghana Girl Child Education Project" by Patrick Cummins and Akosua Anyidoho; USAID 2001 "Final Evaluation Survey of the Women's Empowerment Program" PACT, Ava Darshan Shrestha and Janardan Khatri-Chhetri; CIDA 2000a "Evaluation of Inter Pares' Program in Peru: Final Report" NGO Division of CIDA, Catherine Gander.

4. CIDA 2000a op cit; and CIDA 2000b "Review and Monitoring Report: SWIF Project Phase I" Veronica Huddleston.

enable women to work together or gain support from each other. In some programmes, strengthening women's leadership capacity has enhanced community efforts to reduce poverty.

### Women's leadership and poverty reduction

**In India, Sida support for the empowerment of women** focused on training and preparing women to become effective participants and decision makers in local government structures (panchayats). Women took the initiative to solve community problems with local and state government. This resulted in improved accountability by government institutions, including the extension of basic services and programmes to the poorest people.

**A USAID-funded programme in Nepal** aimed to empower women by providing literacy and legal rights training and credit. The evaluation found increased decision making by women on household matters. More household resources are being spent on family well-being, including food, clothing, education and health care. This has a direct impact on poverty reduction. Indirect impacts on poverty are due to women taking individual or collective action with local authorities to improve various aspects of their lives - for example, on domestic violence, alcohol abuse, and property settlement after divorce, polygamy, and community perceptions of women's work and appropriate behaviour.<sup>5</sup>

- **Target women.** In some projects, using female staff, extension agents and women's groups has helped to target women effectively, to facilitate women's participation, and to ensure that they have access to programme and project resources. However, the content of targeted programmes is just as important as the strategy of targeting. It is essential to analyse the constraints which prevent women from accessing resources and benefits, develop strategies to target women more effectively, and monitor the effectiveness of targeting strategies.

### Targeting women, poverty reduction and good governance

**Increasing the number of female food monitors** has increased the World Food Programme's effectiveness at reaching female target groups, and ensuring they are aware of their entitlements. Supporting women from different ethnic groups to participate jointly in food management and distribution committees has also helped to overcome ethnic divides that caused civil strife and conflict.

**In Rwanda, USAID provided funding to rural women's associations** for agricultural, livestock and micro-enterprise activities. Women's associations were successful at targeting the most vulnerable, including female headed households. Through these small projects, women gained experience in decision making and in managing local development activities. As a result, women were more likely to participate in new political structures. This helped to reduce social tensions and promote unity.

**AusAID's evaluation of a community development project in China** found that women were poorly served by credit, training and "cash for work" inputs, with men dominating in all areas. However, employing female credit extension agents improved targeting both to the poor in general and women. Working with women's groups reinforced patterns of cohesiveness and social support. This resulted in better loan recovery performance, even where loan repayments placed exceptional demands on women's and children's labour.<sup>6</sup>

5. Sida 2000 "Empowerment of Women through Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan and Orissa, India" Sida Evaluation 00/31, D.K. Manavalan; USAID 2001 op cit.

6. USAID 1999 "Evaluation of USAID/OTI's women in transition initiative in Rwanda" Office of Transition Initiatives and the CDIE; WFP 2002 "Final Evaluation of WFP's Commitment to Women 1996-2001, Full Evaluation Report, Final Report" Camillia Fawzi El-Solh; AusAID 2000 "Qinghai Community Development Project: Evaluation Report".

- **Work with men to promote equality for women.** Sensitisation of men (including husbands and male leaders) is critical for securing increased participation by women in many contexts. Dialogue and involvement of men is also essential to achieve sustainable benefits for women and changes in gender relations.

### *Ongoing challenges*

**Confusion about concepts and objectives relating to gender equality** needs to be addressed through dialogue with partners, and capacity building within agencies. It is still common for the word “gender” to be used as a synonym for “women”, and men are missing from most evaluations reports. This means that there is little or no focus in these evaluations on gender *relations* (economic, social and power relations between men and women), how these relations influence women’s capacity to participate or benefit, and on the impact that development activities may have on gender equality. Another problem is the tendency to treat gender mainstreaming as a goal, rather than as a strategy for achieving equality between women and men.

**Accountability and commitment at all levels, and leadership from senior and middle management, is essential to speed up progress towards gender equality.** Donors’ lack of accountability to gender equality policies is an ongoing and serious obstacle to ensuring that both women and men participate and benefit from development activities. Evaluations highlight a failure to prioritise gender equality objectives in country strategies, and a lack of guidance on how to operationalise policy. Gender equality policy commitments are generally not embedded into overall agency procedures, management tools and systems, which results in a failure to monitor policy implementation. Ineffective gender training, a lack of accessible gender analysis tools, and a failure to use existing tools are also noted as obstacles. Implementing the strategies outlined above will greatly assist with policy implementation. Agency plans for implementing gender policy have been useful in some cases. The likelihood of gender training being applied increases when it is sector-specific, hands-on, and directly relevant to individual project contexts and activities. There is very clear evidence that attention to gender issues in activity design and implementation is essential if agencies

#### **Taking stock of gender mainstreaming: progress remains slow**

A BMZ review of 21 basic education projects in 7 countries found that 1 project had undertaken gender analysis, which was partially implemented. A Sida review found that most projects had only embryonic evidence of gender mainstreaming; and an ADB review concluded that many designs overlooked the most relevant gender issues. Of 42 agricultural activities reviewed by the World Bank, 14 included components or activities to benefit women. These were “ad hoc and appended, but resulted in small positive results for women”.<sup>7</sup>

**The quality of gender analysis needs to be improved, by linking it coherently with activity objectives, social and poverty analysis, and expected results.** When gender analysis is undertaken during design, it is often not linked in any meaningful way to the activities to be implemented, or to the expected results. A failure to integrate gender analysis with overall social, poverty and sustainability analysis increases the likelihood that women will be marginalised during design and implementation. Integrated social, gender and poverty analysis needs to identify: the different

7. World Bank 2002 op cit; Sida 2002 “Mainstreaming Gender Equality: Evaluation of Sida’s Support for the Promotion of Gender Equality in Partner Countries” Sida Evaluation Report 02/01, Britha Mikkelsen, Ted Freeman, Bonnie Keller et al.; BMZ 2001 “Main Report on the Series Evaluation: Prospects of Success of Basic Education Projects (English version)”; ADB 2001 “Special Evaluation Study on Gender and Development” OED.

vulnerabilities of females and males to becoming poor (such as differences in access to employment, productive resources, education, and lack of decision-making power over life choices); the different experiences of males and females living in poverty (such as in access to basic services, legal redress, and vulnerability to violence, illness and various forms of exploitation); the different options which females and males have to escape poverty, and their priorities; and, different impacts of poverty reduction interventions on males and females.

**Explicit links between poverty reduction and gender equality objectives** are needed in policies, country assistance and sectoral strategies, activity designs and in evaluations of development activities. For example, it is important to show how promoting gender equality and women's rights will help to reduce poverty, and how specific poverty reduction strategies will impact on females and males.

### **Is there evidence that benefits for women and changes in gender relations lead to improved development outcomes?**

**At macro-economic or national level**, partner capacity and commitment and local social, economic, institutional and policy context are key factors which determine whether benefits for women and overall development outcomes will be sustained. Very few evaluations included in the review investigated these types of links. As a result, there was no evidence in agency evaluations that changes in gender relations or benefits for women improve development outcomes. This contrasts with a growing body of empirical evidence which demonstrates that there are significant costs to development as a result of persistent gender inequalities, and many social and economic benefits to be gained by promoting greater equality between males and females.<sup>8</sup>

**At activity and community level**, there is clear evidence in agency evaluations that benefits for women improve the effectiveness of development interventions and their outcomes. For example:

- Where evaluations demonstrate changes in gender relations, this is usually related to increased decision making by women at the community level or in local government structures, with positive outcomes for accountability and good governance.
- Women's participation in project activities, groups and committees has increased the overall effectiveness of development interventions (see Box on targeting).
- Where women do gain control of income, there is evidence that they are likely to use this for basic family needs and schooling for children, which has both direct and indirect impacts on poverty reduction at household and community level.

**More research is needed** to identify women's and men's perceptions of major changes in gender relations which have occurred in different contexts, the causes of these changes, and how they impact on overall development outcomes.

---

8. World Bank 2001 "Engendering Development: Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice" World Bank and Oxford University Press.