Sub-regional workshop on gender mainstreaming for Ministries of Labour and National Women Machineries, UN-House Beirut, 3-5 August 2010

Information sheet

Gender

While sex refers to the biological differences between males and females, gender refers to the social roles, expectations and needs of both girls and boys, women and men. Such roles and attributes that are socially acceptable or desirable can change over time and vary between different societies and cultures, because they have been learned.

To emphasize gender is not about supporting only women but rather about understanding a community in all its diversity, not as a homogeneous group. While working on gender can mean to implement activities to support women in order to reduce inequalities that have put women at disadvantage before, it must ensure at the same time that no new inequalities occur. Therefore, gender can also mean to look at areas where boys and men are being discriminated against based on their gender roles in the society.

Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a strategic tool for addressing inequalities. It aims at ensuring equality for men and women that takes the social roles and needs resulting from existing social roles of men and women into consideration in all decisions and policies, and combats unintentional or intentional discrimination of one of the sexes by examining "gender-neutral" or gender-blind policies, which lead to disadvantages for either women or men, and replacing them with gender sensitive policies.

Gender mainstreaming means to analyse the underlying causes and structures of inequalities, define ways to address these and take affirmative action to introduce real and sustainable change for combating inequalities could not take place.

The United Nations Fund for Population Affairs defines gender mainstreaming as "The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned actions, legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's and men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. "(UNFPA, 2006, Focusing on Gender)

Why do we need gender mainstreaming in the Arab region

Although there is increased recognition of women rights in the Arab region, and ESCWA member countries have taken a number of steps for improving the situation of legal frameworks, the latest CEDAW reports show that inequalities between women and men in Arab societies still remain a major obstacle for achieving good governance and full socio-economic development. Women and girls in the region still face discriminatory practices, stereotyping and negative attitudes, and where legislation is in place, social practice often does not respond to it but remains behind.

Why is gender mainstreaming important for successful development planning

Gender mainstreaming provides equal access to opportunities and resources for women and men and is an important element of good governance. It is an essential tool for creating a society that respects diversity and is enabled to reach its full potential and achieve higher development goals.

Gender mainstreaming in organizations and institutions

Organizations and institutions - in the public as well as in the private sector - are essential players in societies. Their structure and organizational culture reflect those of the society at large, and inequality that exists and is being reproduced within them gives the impression for society that these are acceptable and "normal". At the same time, processes for improvement and for increased equality have a key role model function and are perceived as leading processes for society, thus have an important influence on initiating change processes in society.

Gender mainstreaming in organizations and specifically governmental institutions is key to improving governance and aiming towards more successful socio-economic development, because imbalances between women and men in any society cannot be efficiently addressed by other actors and without strong leadership and support from the political system of that society.

How gender inequality is expressed in organizations

- Women occupy only few managerial and decision-making positions
- While men are mainly decision-makers, women fill mainly subordinate and service jobs
- Different wages are paid for the same job, with women earning 75% on global average for the same jobs compared to men
- Women climb up in the hierarchy much slower than men
- Management and supervisors have different expectation towards women and men
- Part-time positions are usually filled with women
- Women interrupt their work more often than men
- Men have serious accidents during work more often than women
- When pursuing a career, women postpone their marriage or having children more often than men
- Etc.

Gender mainstreaming in organizations means to integrate a gender perspective into all aspects of that organization, i.e. its structure, culture, programmes and activities. In all aspects, the needs and rights of both women and men are taken into consideration in order to provide equal opportunities for both sexes.

Responsibilities for gender mainstreaming organizations and institutions

Although there is a special responsibility for management and leadership to provide guidance and provide the necessary main frameworks and setting which allow for gender mainstreaming, the responsibility for implementing gender mainstreaming lies with all staff.

This responsibility covers the following areas:

- Understand the different roles and experiences of women and men and promoting knowledge and awareness among colleagues
- Actively seek opportunities to involve women and men in consultation and decision-making
- Be aware of personal attitudes and behaviour as well as organizational culture in relation to gender and equality

Gender mainstreaming in organizations means that the organizational structure, culture and activities are assessed from a gender perspective, and if inequalities exist tools and strategies for organizational change are being developed in order to overcome these inequalities and achieve greater accountability and efficiency.

Organizational change

Organizations are systems created to achieve certain goals. They are not rigid but rather function like organisms, i.e. can change through learning processes and changed external and internal needs towards their function. Organizations consist of many layers of factors, and are systems within systems, i.e. are partly defined by the environment and settings that surround them.

In order to be true and sustainable, organizational change must take place on three levels:

(a) structural changes, (b) behavioural changes, (c) technical/physical changes. While structural changes address work flows and decision making processes based on the organizational setting of the organization, changes in organizational culture address underlying issues, e.g. informal factors of decision making in the organization, and address behaviour and attitudes. The technical setting of an organization often reflects inequalities in organization and can be supportive or counterproductive for gender mainstreaming and greater equality.

The key to gender mainstreaming in organizations is to create a gender-sensitive culture. This means that the system of values that is shared by members of this organization will change and take gender aspects into consideration. It also means that power structures, ways in which interaction takes place and decisions are made will also change, both at the formal and the informal level.

The first step in changing an organization is to assess it and find out what organizational culture pertains. In a second step, the organization, based on these findings, will decide what kind of changes it wants and needs to make and what its goal is. The last and hardest step is to actually accept and implement these necessary changes.

Enabling factors for gender mainstreaming:

- Political will and leadership
- Policy framework
- Government structures, mechanisms and processes
- Sufficient resources
- Sex-disaggregated data and information
- Tools and skills for gender analysis
- Motivation
- Demand from civil society

Organizational structure

In order to assess the situation and develop a gender mainstreaming strategy for an organization, it is essential to analyze its structure thoroughly, in quantitative aspects as well as in qualitative ones. This means that an assessment will be conducted to establish how many women and men are employed in the organization, how they are represented on the various levels of responsibility and decision-making, and where the biggest discrepancies between female and male representation exist. E.g. in most organizations all over the world, women are still underrepresented when analyzing the responsibility they (are allowed to) carry and the influence they have on the organization's activities and decisions.

It is also important to find out informal and "hidden" inequalities. E.g. it might be the case that women and men are equally represented in a decision-making body within the organization, but due to informal communication structures, cultural stereotypes or gender-insensitive organizational arrangements women might not really have influence on that body's decisions in the same way that men do.

Organizational culture

Organizational culture consists of values, beliefs, understanding, language, behavior of its members. The culture helps the organization manage its tasks and solve problems, and it defines approaches towards new issues and newcomers.

Visible components of organizational culture: logo, corporate design, symbols, ceremonies, dress code, behaviours, language, physical environment, office settings, reporting mechanisms, work flows, processes,

Underlying invisible components of organizational culture: values, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, decision-making processes, problem-solving approaches, leadership styles,

Visible elements of organizational culture:

Practices and behaviour: include formal and informal interaction of people with each other, direct and indirect communication, habits, informal guidelines and code of conduct, verbal and corporate language used in communication lines, open and overt expression of power, decision-making, team work, recognition and reward systems, training, ceremonies, and events.

Example: in many organizations, career development is linked to the ability to work after regular hours. But contrary to most men, for whom the time after working hours is leisure time, women have other duties to fulfill after their working hours: taking care of the household, the children, the husband. Thus, it is more difficult for them to stay after hours and build their career this way. Therefore, organizations should not link career success to availability outside regular working hours but rather to success and results gained within regular working hours.

Physical environment: includes the material objects that surround people in their work place, their characteristics, placement and use. Buildings, furniture, clothing, distribution, layout and location of offices, toilets and meeting points, signs, ambience, noise levels, lighting, decoration. It also includes objects like publications and manuals.

Example: in conservative settings office design should ensure that female and male colleagues can work together in public space while at the same time cultural borders are not being crossed and existing social structures are taken into consideration. This can be done e.g. by inserting windows in office doors so that female and male colleagues can meet in a closed office if necessary, and by providing meeting space in which staff can meet with sufficient privacy for meetings but sufficiently public atmosphere for respecting cultural necessities.

Invisible elements of organizational culture:

Values, beliefs and meanings: They are expressed, e.g. in concepts, the organizational vision. They include prejudices, stereotypes and opinions about people or groups of people, leadership and management models.

Example: in the Arab region, "wasta" plays an important role for career development. While men have easier access to networks, also due to their ability for social networking after hours and because they can move more freely in public space, women are disadvantaged in assessing such networks.

Concrete steps for gender mainstreaming in organizations

In order to achieve gender equality in organizations, it is important to analyze the organizational settings and culture in a first step. In that assessment, the factors that hinder gender equality or even aggravate gender inequalities will be identified, and underlying causes linked to them in order to analyze not only the phenomenon but also the reasons behind it. The areas of analysis will be:

First step: Gender analysis

The following areas will be analyzed:

- Practices: Staff composition by gender, division of labour, selection of personnel, training, welfare programmes
- Career environment: Leadership criteria, promotional policy and practice, performance evaluation, recognition, celebrations and events, absences and leaves, team and group work, prevalent attitudes, decision-making, management of technology, activities outside the work place
- Physical and material environment: distribution, arrangement and use of space, audio-visual aids, symbols and signs, corporate image, labels, posters
- Meanings: organizational history, anecdotes, language, jokes, stereotypes, expressed and practiced values, arguments (e.g. for resistance)

Tools for gender assessment

- Sex-disaggregated data: for collecting *quantitative* information on differences and inequalities between women and men. They can e.g. reveal differences in access to services, differences in access to decision making positions. All data that are collected should always be disaggregated by sex.

- Gender analytical information: for collecting *qualitative* information on differences and inequalities between women and men. They provide information about cultural norms and patterns and reveal the underlying causes of inequalities. Gender analysis should be a part of any kind of analysis or evaluation process.

Second step: Development of strategy and tools

In a second step, the organization needs to develop a strategy with concrete adequate measures to strengthen and enhance gender equality. The strategy needs to be integrative and to address all levels and dimension of the organization, e.g. its vision and objectives need to be reformulated in a gender sensitive way, its structure and processes need to be restructured, its physical setting might need to be adjusted in order to respond to the needs of all employees in an adequate manner.

In order to be able to measure improvement and identify areas for further improvement, it is important to develop a good system for monitoring and evaluation with gender sensitive indicators, and to regularly assess the situation.

Gender-sensitive indicators are important for measuring gender equality. They might e.g. measure the accessibility of trainings for women and men, the influence women have on decisions taken, or the effectiveness of activities designed to increase awareness for gender issues among staff and managers.

Third step: Monitoring and evaluation of the process

In a third step, the organization needs to ensure that constant monitoring and evaluation of measures that have been introduced for gender mainstreaming are taking place. This is essential for assessing whether the tools and strategies that are being applied are indeed reaching the expected and intended goals and objectives. If they don't, or if unexpected or negative results outweigh the positive results, re-assessment needs to take place.

Some suggested reading on gender mainstreaming and organizational change *(selection of recommended readings, but there are many more sources available, also online)***:**

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) (no year): Accelerating change: resources for gender mainstreaming. Available online at http://www.sice.oas.org/Genderandtrade/CIDA_Accchange-E.pdf

GTZ (2001): Gender and change in the organisational culture (2 parts). Available online at http://www.gtzgenero.org.ni/_publicacion/Gender_and_Change_part1.pdf and http://www.gtzgenero.org.ni/_publicacion/Gender_and_Change_part2.pdf

Swedish Gender Mainstream Support Committee (2007): Gender mainstreaming manual: A book of practical methods from the Swedish Gender Mainstreaming Support Committee (JaemStoed). Stockholm . Available online at http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/08/19/82/3532cd34.pdf

UNDP (no year): Gender mainstreaming tools marketplace: an annotated resource guide. Available online at http://www.undp.org/women/tools_marketplace.pdf

UNDP United Arab Emirates (no year): A how-to guide to gender mainstreaming your organization. Available online at http://www.undp.org.ae/Upload/Doc/GenderMainstreamingGuide.pdf

UNIFEM (2005): Guideline manual on gender mainstreaming. (disseminated in the training workshop)

UNIFEM (2006): Gender mainstreaming and institutional change towards sustainable development. Training manual. (disseminated in the training workshop)