



Challenges and Opportunities for Integrating Gender Policies across Organisations and Programs

Purpose: This brief summarises the key challenges and opportunities on integrating gender policies across organisations and programs, as explored in a joint DFAT-ACFID workshop in June 2015. Case studies of gender policies from ACFID member agencies were used to prompt discussion and provide background for workshop discussions.

Challenges	Opportunities
<p>Lack of understanding about the importance of integrating gender policies across the organisation. Gender is sometimes seen as a niche issue or a single sector, rather than as something to be integrated across all areas of an organisation’s policies and practices, leading to competition with other priorities for attention and funding.</p>	<p>Understand the nature of resistance and tailor the response. For some agencies, framing the necessity of gender as a credibility issue worked – for example, by posing the question, ‘how can we ask our partners to implement gender equality programs when we aren’t doing it internally ourselves?’. Other agencies found that integrating gender into training for all staff (whether programming, fundraising, accounts, or human resources) was crucial to socialise the importance of gender at all levels of an organisation and make it a part of the ‘organisational DNA’. One key success factor was to have a resourced staff position within the organisation dedicated to gender – to support staff, advocate for change, and inform organisational leadership.</p>
<p>Push back from staff and/or leadership. Push back may stem from a lack of recognition or acceptance that anything needs to change, due to differing perceptions of the relevance of gender issues. For many organisations, understandings differed between departments and between men and women.</p>	<p>Get your CEO and board involved. Leadership buy-in was consistently highlighted as necessary to successful integration of gender policies. Consistent communication about the importance of gender at a high level will inform all other activities across the organisation. One organisation had a ‘gender champion’ who became CEO, while others found that taking board members to visit projects with a gender focus helped create support for an increased focus on gender.</p>

Challenges

Opportunities

Difficulty communicating the importance of gender policies to partners in-country. Differing cultural and/or religious understandings of gender roles can make it difficult to communicate the importance of integrating gender policies.

Work with local change agents to drive change within in-country partners. Members highlighted the need to make sure change isn't imposed from a 'Western perspective', identifying the importance of working with local change agents and focussing on understanding and working with the beliefs and values that drive social behaviours in a given context to encourage meaningful and locally owned change.

Maintaining momentum and depth of engagement – keeping gender as an ongoing priority in the context of a less-secure funding environment, and moving from surface level or symbolic policies to fully integrating gender policies and monitoring their implementation.

Establish a gender working group or 'champions group' with a mix of skills and roles across different departments of an organisation to support, monitor and hold leadership to account for the implementation of policies on an ongoing basis. Several agencies conducted a gender audit of the organisation to establish a base line for monitoring progress and catalyse discussion, and built gender reporting into key performance indicators for staff and into terms of reference for consultants/projects. Once you're on the journey, celebrate successes and keep setting the bar higher.

Addressing intersectional disadvantage (e.g: gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion and sexuality). Moving beyond a simple focus on gender to a more nuanced understanding that includes analysis of intersectionality is a challenge for many organisations.

Leverage the expertise of others to address intersectionality. Form strategic partnerships with other staff within your organisation, or with another organisation that is focused on the issue you want to address. Use a specific issue that is relevant to your organisation to build an intersectional approach. For example, how is access to water impacted by different positionalities? What are the different barriers? Use this as a base to build an intersectional framework.

Gendered sectors and skills within organisations. Agencies reported that sectors requiring extensive field time such as the emergency/humanitarian response sector tend to be male dominated. In comparison, the health and education sectors are dominated by women, increasing the gendered perception of these skill sets.

Promote gender balance within teams and sectors as well as across agencies as a whole, support women's participation and leadership in male dominated areas such as humanitarian response, and ensure all sectors within the organisation are given equal recognition. This could include supporting women to take on roles as first responders through flexible institutional policies, as well as working with local women's groups to increase the participation of local women in emergency situations. Additionally, giving recognition the work done by different parts of the organisation is crucial to ensuring all skills are equally valued.