



10 years SDC Gender Policy



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Gender Justice – a key to fighting poverty and to sustainable development

Maya Tissafi
Deputy Director General SDC

women and men in development programmes and also to promote these in multilateral councils. Steering and controlling instruments were adapted and gender equality was declared an important “key to the reduction of poverty” by the department.

Rightly so: it is proven that investment in improving the situation of women and in reducing discrimination against them are effective methods for promoting development. Kofi Annan declared in 2005 that the equality of women and men was the most effective agent in developing a country.

In its gender policy the SDC maintains that “the growing gulf between the rich and the poor can only be bridged by a more just distribution of resources and the reduction of the unequal balance of power between men and women”. The commitment to structural equilibrium and the balance of power between the most diverse groups of a society became the goal of as well as the prerequisite for development. Eliminating unequal balances of power between men and women also means overcoming structural causes of social and political instability, avoiding violent conflicts and fighting poverty more effectively.

10 years of gender policy in the SDC: in the SDC’s partner countries achievements in development were registered in education and income, reduction of child mortality, the access to water and technologies as well as the participation in political processes.

But the lack of political intent of governments, inconsequent implementation by development agencies, fear of change in society and loss of power have led to the fact that progress in the countries is as yet insufficient. There is still much to do – also for the SDC.

In the age of globalization gender justice will remain a key issue in the global agenda. For an institution like the SDC it must remain a part of its identity. Gender policy is not only “a key to fighting poverty”, but also a question of social justice and democracy!

Women only receive ten per cent of the world’s income and own hardly more than one per cent of all assets worldwide, even though women still shoulder more than two thirds of the world’s workload. Over 60 per cent of the so-called working poor are female. They work mainly in the informal sector and often without social protection, without appropriate pay and fixed working hours. Women are also disadvantaged in education and in the health sector: two thirds of all illiterate people and almost 60 per cent of patients suffering from HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa are female, and over 70 per cent of all people living in absolute poverty are women and children. To put an end to these structural and everyday disadvantages, the UN demanded the implementation of gender justice and promotion of women explicitly in the Declaration of the Millennium in the year 2000. Special importance is attached to primary education for all girls, the reduction of infant and maternal mortality rates and the halving of absolute poverty by 2015.

A new era in Swiss Development Cooperation began with the manifestation of a policy on gender 10 years ago: for the very first time, an issue which had so far only been pursued by a few experts in development cooperation was declared the mandatory approach for the whole institution. Tools were created in order to integrate the various roles, tasks and needs of



Women in Gaza

Photo series

Regula Brunner

cfid The Feminist Peace Organisation

Great poverty, constant occupation, a conservative patriarchal society and the struggle for power between the Hamas and Fatah parties are eliminating women from societal debates and are frustrating them deeply. The political blockade has been permeating daily life in Gaza for a long time.

Repeated wartime experiences have wounded the people physically as well as psychologically. The population of the Gaza Strip lives in constant fear of Israeli attacks and violent internal conflicts. This constant pressure also puts a strain on private relationships. Domestic and sexual violence are abundant. Despite or even because of this, people want their children to experience that violence isn't the only possible reaction to unresolved conflicts. Women play a key role in this transformation process. Because it is they who have to raise their children and

hold their families together under the most difficult political and social circumstances. The women are active, join forces, get support and help each other out.

With their project the cfd partner-organization Palestinian Working Women Society PWWSD aims to support the mental health of women in the Gaza Strip. In groups and one-on-one conversations women with problems in dealings with their families or with the upbringing of their children can get counselling, or they can talk about traumatic experiences and thus unburden themselves. This gives them the strength to deal with their difficult everyday life and to create a more ordered life for their children. In playgroup afternoons the children can forget their terrible experiences for a while.

Cfd has been working with PWWSD for several years. After the war in 2008/2009 they supported the rebuilding of the PWWSD office in Gaza and the development of an emergency relief programme. In the meantime this has been transformed to permanent psychosocial support and counselling programmes. Overcoming the closed-off borders between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are main parts of this project. The possibilities of direct meetings are very limited, so that functioning telephone lines and video-conferences are essential. People in these occupied areas are strongly linked despite all the blockades.

Anne Paq is a freelance photographer and has been living in the West Bank for many years. She has worked in the Gaza Strip several times and documented PWWSD's work in February 2013 (see below).

Variety of life situations

I did not only want to show the bitter hardships on account of the political situation, but also the variety of life situations in Gaza. The strength and determination of the women are amazing and inspiring. As direct victims of violence or because of the repressing social norms women pay an especially high price.

On the first day I visited the community centre in the Jabaliya refugee camp with two group leaders. In the beginning the room filled slowly, but then it was full of women from all kinds of backgrounds. Most of them seemed pleased to have me there. Only a few of them refused to be photographed. I can only guess that some of them are happy to have their situation shown. Towards the end of the meeting we did a bit of exercise: the women stood up and followed the group leaders in a simple game. Giggling and laughter were heard all round. To take pictures of this ease and lightness was liberating and wonderful.

I visited to more meetings in other places. Ouda, a group leader, translated some of the women's stories for me: the daughter- and son-in-law of one of the women had died in an Israeli attack. Her son was injured gravely and is now a paraplegic. Other women live separated from their husbands but cannot get a divorce. Another women, separated from her husband, is forbidden to see her daughter. I found these stories moving and I was impressed by the way the women were able to open up in the group.

Anne Paq

Activestills Photos

An SDC-anniversary with a difference

Annemarie Sancar

Gender Senior Advisor 2003–2013

The majority of people living in extreme poverty are still women. They shoulder close to three quarters of all unpaid care-work worldwide. Is our gender-strategy effective at all?

We keep asking ourselves this question. Today, effectiveness is at the centre of development cooperation; but do we know what the basic problems are, what should change and what equality in everyday life looks like? Against the background of these questions and to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the gender-strategy, the core team of the gender-network decided to launch a publication. The main idea was to give an opportunity to talk about their experiences to those colleagues who had implemented the strategy with such dedication.

On the electronic platform of the gender-network (www.sdc-gender-development.net) all members were called upon to make a contribution to the publication "10 years of Gender-Strategy". The reaction of the community was totally overwhelming: at the beginning of the year we got the first texts, and it became evident that most of the contributors were quite challenged by our ideas. We were not looking for evaluations, project reports or technical instructions on gender-mainstreaming – as otherwise usual – but for interesting, special, exiting moments in the work as a man or a woman, as an individual which is thinking about its own gender-role. At the heart of the stories we wanted personal experiences in relation to SDC's gender-strategy. How do our images of gender-relationships influence us when we are visiting projects, holding trainings or discussing contracts with partner organizations? Can we reflect our own gender-identity or are we imprisoned by it? Do we take the time to practise distancing ourselves from our own roles and thus understand-

ing others and their roles better? The stories that emerged from the members of the gender-network are enlightening and nuanced. The show that Gender is far more than the promotion of women.

SDC has achieved much, as the contributions to the institutional history also show. The framework has been developed further and especially the network-structure of SDC facilitates global learning, transnational exchange and the expansion of databases. SDC's gender-strategy advocates a gender-approach at all levels. We have succeeded in making Gender an issue in macro-economic processes, not only treating it anecdotally at micro-level (see: "Mehr.Wert. Beiträge zur geschlechtergerechten wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung"; 2011). The gender focal points, responsible for the implementation of the gender-strategy in the offices of the South and East, have been taking an active part in the debate on gender-roles in development cooperation for years. In their network they share experiences and interesting gender-reports from their regions, continue their studies in emerging sectors of international cooperation in order to be able to meet the requirements of their job, to ask the right gender-questions at the right moment and to gather the relevant information.

The challenges are nonetheless huge, not least for the young female colleagues speaking over lunch in the one report on the importance they attach to gender-equality for SDC's interventions in agriculture, in the private sector or in education and health, as well as for their own situation as a member of SDC-staff. SDC is challenged as an institution to integrate gender equality as a main effectiveness goal in its work and to promote equal opportunities inside the institution at the same time.

A big thank-you to all – and there are indeed many – who contributed to this publication! Because one thing's for sure: gender-strategic goals can only be reached with joint forces, everywhere, in the global South, the global North and East, in the public domain, at the workplace, in households.







Bilateral Cooperation

Notes on Institutions

If I speak for myself – SDC was probably the first agency which forced me to change my attitude towards gender and what it means in my life. Thanks to your efforts and the trainings you conducted for us, my MGSDP partners, staff and myself started to think about the issue as a huge challenge in our society.

For me, gender is not about protecting women or making men and women equal, but rather to ensure the equal rights of both genders. Yes, we are different, with different capacities and needs, but we should have equal opportunities to satisfy these needs in modern society.

My only child is growing up in that spirit (within my family). However, she goes to regular (I must admit Soviet-type) kindergarten, where many teachers still have the feeling what the girls MUST do and the boys MUST do. No cars for girls and no “Barbies” for boys. Once, I brought a coloring book for all the children in my group (about 20), which was produced by the UNDP Project on Gender. Coloring these books, I noticed that even teachers in the kindergarten discovered certain things for themselves, like that a baby nurse might equally be a man or a woman for example. I believe this is my small contribution towards changing their mindset.

Iryna Skally

Ensuring Equal Rights

Olena Ursu

Change

With my sincere gratitude to SDC for providing the opportunity to learn more about gender and gender equality please see my feedback below.

Due to the Gender Mainstreaming Policy of SDC, I was able to learn more about the important agenda of gender equality. It hasn't changed much in my personal life, since my husband and I have always followed the principles of democratic distribution of rights and responsibilities within our family. But it has greatly contributed to my work as the project expert, especially in the field. Our major partners were mayors of Ukrainian municipalities and their teams, who most frequently had stereotyped views on the roles of women and men in society. Only after repeated trainings, consultations and public awareness campaigns on the topic, I noticed changes in their perceptions. I still remember the words of the Deputy Mayor from Kirovske, who has always been known for his prejudiced judgments about gender, but after one of our trainings he said: “If THAT is what you mean by gender equality, ok then, I accept it”. It means that the majority of the stereotypes and misunderstandings about gender equality in our society are caused by lack of knowledge about it. And due to SDC support, we were able to develop this capacity and knowledge among our partners, who later on wouldn't miss out gender issues while planning and implementing their community projects on repairing housing and social infrastructures in their cities.

Ilona Postemska

New skills

As a National Programme Officer responsible for projects within Local Governance and Public Services Domain I was impressed with a story by Natalia Chernysh who participated in the Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project “DESPRO” implemented by the Swiss Resource Centre and Consultancies for Development (Skat).

Natalia, as an accountant at the village council, was by chance delegated to participate in a training on social mobilization and project management organized by DESPRO. Inspired by the Gender Equality Policy of SDC, gender relationships at the level of local and regional governance are constantly analyzed, and through community mobilization among others a participatory approach and gender equality are promoted. Having acquired the new skills, a young lady came back to her village full of ideas how to resolve an acute problem of the community – the lack of high quality drinkable water. She was the one who took the lead in preparing the project documentation for the construction of a centralized water supply system and the one who was on the forefront in convincing the villagers to participate in the project and contribute to it with their own funds. Going against all odds, Natalia gained important experience, which was backed by the her new professional knowledge provided in DESPRO trainings. As a result of hard teamwork and dedication, the village got centralized 24/7 water supply, and Natalia was elected the village head. Being only 27 years old, she became the youngest village head in the Vinnytsia oblast and got support from over 80 % of the voters!

Now Natalia keeps on setting high goals for the community. Having the skills and experience of project management, she managed to raise funds for reconstruction of roads in the village, for repairing the local hospital and for installment of free Wi-Fi in the village library. The forthcoming ambitious project for Natalia are street-lights. She will be realizing this project as well as all the previous ones with the support and financial contribution of the community.

Olena Suslova

Integrating precisely

Efforts on gender mainstreaming was important not only for the SDC's projects however broader for development agencies in Ukraine as a whole. Because these efforts was concise, professional and consequent. Tools developed, introduced and implemented by the SDC's partners became known and useful for other donors and institutions. Gender audit, gender organizational analysis, gender focal points council etc. used later by others and continue to be used until now. SDC “opened the door” for such “unexpected” areas of gender mainstreaming as forestry, agriculture or penitentiary system.

Guido Beltrani

Little strokes fell big oaks

I was confronted with the promotion of Gender Equality already before I joined SDC: the company where I worked before 2005 also promoted Gender Equality within the organization, but the topic had admittedly not the same emphasis as within SDC. In SDC, mainstreaming Gender Equality has been an important aspect of my work from the very beginning: I had to evaluate how Gender Equality was mainstreamed in several SDC thematic programs and core contributions, when I was Evaluation and Controlling Officer; then, I was in charge of mainstreaming Gender Equality in the Kosovo Program when I was Deputy Director of the Swiss Cooperation Office in Kosovo. Two things come to my mind when we speak about Gender Equality: on the one side, Gender Equality is mostly conceived as the promotion of women; while in many circumstances this is fully justified, as women are the more discriminated gender, I had sometimes to remind my colleagues that there is no automatism in this sense, but that we always need to assess the concrete context and see who is concretely affected by discrimination, lack of access to resources etc. By the way, this approach might also help to overcome possible fears of male colleagues who, in some cases, feel somehow threatened by Gender Mainstreaming. On the other side, it takes often a lot of energy to mainstream Gender Equality due to a certain resistance of the staff, for which addressing Gender Equality obviously means more/additional work. But my experience also shows that “little strokes fell big oaks”: if you have a committed Gender Officer and Office Management, who know how to motivate colleagues, then Gender Equality becomes more concrete and tangible. And finally: it is a topic on which it can be beneficial to have frank and controversial discussions within the team; sometimes, a conflict generates a new consciousness.

Ludmyla Nestrlyay

From alien element to mainstream

When I started to work at the SCO Ukraine in 2001 I discovered a lot of things promoting gender equality within the organisation and mainstreaming it throughout the projects. In Ukraine, as a former Soviet country, we used to believe that there is no need to promote gender equality as no gender discrimination exists at all. But these were just declarations which could be refuted very easily if looking more precisely and – what we learned by mainstreaming gender in our cooperation activities – through gender lenses – although Ukraine ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981, and the Optional Protocol on violence against women in 2003, there is still no gender balance in political life (under 10 % women in Parliament while the MDG for Ukraine is 30 % in 2015) which is caused by hidden discrimination of women and the intransparency of the political system. Official statistical data show that discrimination in labour remuneration exists (on average, women earned a salary which is 27.6 % lower than the salary of men for the same work in our country). All these facts I studied more closely after the SCO Ukraine started to invest more attention and efforts in gender mainstreaming according to the requirements of the Head Office. Of course it was not so simple, at the beginning it was considered as a “foreign body”, an artificial approach driven by donors. But through deeper gender analysis, involving gender experts, conducting several gender trainings for our partners and providing consecutive knowledge and experience sharing of the “pioneers” we managed to achieve better understanding of the gender problems and to change the attitude to gender mainstreaming which contributed to better project results. Some of the tools developed within our gender related activities (Gender Audit, Gender Certification) were taken over by our implementing partners including international organizations like UNDP. Based on the recommendations of the Gender Consultative Council (GCC, a group of national gender experts advising SCO Ukraine) and with the support of its members we established a network of Gender Focal Persons of the Swiss supported projects and provided them with necessary information, knowledge and skills. Today, these colleagues contribute substantially to mainstreaming gender equality in their particular projects quite independently. I think that all this wouldn't be possible without a sound and consequent SDC policy. A long time ago, during one of the gender trainings, I learned that “there is no gender possible without money” (in the sense of “you have to invest if you want to achieve changes”). This works also today, but even more I believe that political will (in a broader sense – from the top management to each staff member of the institution or organization) it is crucial to provide gender equality and to make really positive changes in our work and our life.

Petro Ilkiv

Respect and Partnership

When I joined SCO Kyiv in April 2007 and took the NPO position responsible for health, I could not even imagine that the issues which are the KEY priority in my personal life would also become the KEY in my professional activities. Maternal and child health, sharing pre-maternity medical care, responsible family planning and early child development are well promoted by the reproductive health projects supported by SDC in Ukraine. Active male participation in reproductive health shows a positive tendency and becomes more popular from year to year. Fathers on “maternity leave” become a common case in the country... taking into account the huge gender problems in Ukraine concerning the men (low life expectancy – the mortality rate for men is up to three times higher than that for women in some age groups). I think that Gender is not about women or men. Gender is about respect for our differences, partnership for the joint success and equal opportunities for all. Good health to all!

Gender in municipal plans and budgets

Ardiana Efendija-Zhuri

The Kosovan society has always been a patriarchal society. It is therefore difficult for women to have their voice heard at the local level. Above all other political and socio economic challenges, Kosovo in its transition process is facing challenges related to gender equality as well.

Often women do not have an independent source of income, they hardly ever own the property where they live and they are disadvantaged with regard to inheritance. A high illiteracy rate exists among women since many of them have not received a proper education. Women do not have enough self-esteem to fight for their rights and needs.

National and local institutions are not doing enough to promote gender equality and are sometimes even a bad example in this regard. From all 37 municipalities in Kosovo, not a single one has a female mayor. Only three municipal assemblies are presided by women. As for the municipal administration, no exact figures are known, but there are only a handful of female municipal directors. This is a pity, since women can make an important contribution to the development of a democratic society and its institutions.

In order to change these traditional role models and to increase the representation of women at the local level, the SCO-funded project on Local Governance and Decentralization Support (LOGOS) launched an awareness campaign. Different activities were organized and posters were designed to show the impact of several municipal competences on gender equality. One of the posters aimed to describe how the illiteracy rate amongst women is twice as high as that amongst men, and was posted in the office of the director of education. Another poster, promoting a gender-balanced budget, was posted in the office of the finance director.

Besides targeting municipalities, the campaign also targeted the general public of Kosovo. The campaign aimed to increase citizens' awareness of the importance of equal gender roles. This was also reflected with different posters that were displayed on billboards along regional roads in nine project partner municipalities.

In order to attain a gender-balanced budget, municipal staff was trained on gender responsive budgeting (GRB). As a result of these trainings, partner municipalities applied gender responsive budgeting during the budget planning for 2011 and 2012. This has led to a certain amount of budget being reserved for gender projects. At the same time, LOGOS supported municipalities and their gender officers to design action plans for 2011, 2012 and 2013. During the training on GRB, municipal officers focused on the issue of education, where they discussed drop-out rates and security for girls on the way to school.

To address these problems, one municipality provided funds for school transportation for students living in remote areas. The municipality also established scholarships for students living in difficult economic conditions. This way, the municipality made education more accessible, also for girls¹.

The project and municipalities organized several radio shows and workshops aiming to further promote gender equality laws. Leaflets on topics related to women in municipal decision-making, gender sensitive budgeting and inheritance were prepared and distributed.

Concluding all these activities and support, the Agency for Gender Equality in Kosovo has taken a leading role organizing and hosting the international conference to Introduce GRB and to further exchange best practices from countries that are already applying GRB. The conference was attended by more than 100 participants from Kosovo's central and local institutions, the civil society and international donors. The recommendations derived from the conference will be used by the gender equality agency in Kosovo to promote gender responsive budgeting nationwide.

¹ As a result of LOGOS activities and experiences, a manual that presents the method and tools for applying GRB has been published and disseminated (see http://helvetas-ks.org/wp/?page_id=28). The SDC gender toolkit was very helpful and was therefore one of the references for this GRB manual.

"Herding cats"

Jacqueline Matoro

When I first took the gender focal point role in 2009, it sounded very exciting and interesting. I was full of energy, enthusiasm and ready to learn the nuts and bolts of the "gender forest". Having no background or any orientation on gender and gender mainstreaming, my first "point of take-off" was to read the SDC Gender Toolkit and this changed my mindset on two very important points: gender is not an issue of/for women only; and gender mainstreaming must not be an additional work load, but an integral part of whatever I do.

After 3 years of my role as the gender focal point, I have come to the conclusion that my experience of mainstreaming or integrating gender into projects/programmes is comparable to "herding cats". It has not been an easy road.

Gender mainstreaming means working concurrently with project partners and colleagues in the COOF, and this has been challenging for me. I consider that despite my efforts, the commitments of the SDC Gender Policy still have difficulties to translate into project objectives, and results remain limited.

In my opinion, this problem of "policy evaporation" is due to many reasons: lack of staff capacity; dealing with various partners having different organizational cultures, approaches and attitudes towards gender mainstreaming; the treatment of gender equality as a separate process, which marginalizes rather than mainstreams the issue; staff 'simplification' of what gender is about; and a lack of feeling of ownership of the policy among partners who tend to see it as SDC requirement and not part of

their day to day work. In addition to this, my 20% minimum time allocation for this role has not been sufficient to work with the COOF and the project partners to mainstream gender, and this has compromised the quality and commitment for the mainstreaming process.

My other experience was in the so called "shared responsibility" of gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming was seen as the focal point responsibility all along. However, I am very grateful to the current management, as now gender mainstreaming has become everyone's business. Each operational staff now has a gender objective in his/her Performance Assessment Form (MAP) and this is a way for every member of staff to contribute to the gender mainstreaming process. The shared responsibility is also going to be enhanced further by introducing a rotation system of the gender focal point, a process that will bring new energy, ideas and synergy with the outgoing focal point and also by establishing small task force/working groups for carrying out different gender mainstreaming activities. This will ensure the involvement of different operational team members.

Overall, as I come to my last days as the gender focal point, and before handing over to another person, I express my appreciation for the different tools and foras that have been put in place to support the gender focal points. The Toolkit is very user-friendly and has been my good resource and point of reference; the Gendernetwork has been a lively source of new information, ideas and experiences; and most of all the gender face-to-face meetings that have brought us all together and strengthened our motivation and commitment towards gender equality.

Let's Celebrate Gender Equality!

Inclusion does not mean exclusion: experiencing diversity

During my school years, I was inspired to become an engineer as I had seen a survey team working in the village. It was not easy to pursue higher education in the city, but fortunately, I managed to do so with many hardships. But then my worry was on how to secure a job. In the meantime, I had applied for the internship programme supported by the SDC. However, I had heard many rumors that the internships would be provided only to women, Dalit and Janajati. Belonging to a Brahmin community myself, I had thought that I would not stand a chance. When I was selected for internship, I found that the inclusion promoted by the SDC did not mean 'exclusion'. I had great opportunity to work with the team in the remote districts. Finally, I was selected as district road engineer by the project and I am really happy and appreciate the SDC's work force diversity policy being implemented.

Kamal Prasad Regmi

Inclusion does not mean exclusion

Prakash Nepali

I salute the affirmative policy of the SDC

I saw a vacancy for social mobiliser in the DRSP (District Road Support Program) when I went to a local tea-shop. I had applied for the position of social mobiliser and I was very happy to receive a call informing me that I was shortlisted for the position. I was very happy and proceeded to the district headquarter in Chautara for the selection process. When I arrived there, I saw many other candidates with more experience and maturity. This made me a bit nervous.

During the interview the participants were informed that the SDC applies affirmative policy and this gave me a bit of hope, as I belonged to a discriminated community. I was able to secure the position and I think the affirmative action of the SDC's Workforce Diversity Policy enabled me to do so. I am really proud because thanks to this employment opportunity my family members are getting a better education, we are not landless any more and are able to build our own house. The most important change is that social discrimination towards us is much less now.

Mana Basnet

Social development through targeting gives me a good feeling

When I started my job with DRSP, there were only 4 female employees. I had to work with the district authorities, which in many cases were dominated by the male work force. At the same time, I had to promote inclusive work forces even in road construction work, which was difficult in a situation where women in the village were not permitted to work outside of the home, or if they were, they got lower payments than the men while they were working in the village. It was possible to bring the women out and get them organized through the social development programme of DRSP. They started saving credit and it gave bit of power to the women, making decisions to mobilize that fund. In between, numbers of trainings were given to women groups and made them able to claim their rights and space in the user committees, construction committees. It helped me a lot to learn and also feel proud for their success to secure their space and rights.

Tulaja Gurung

Challenging process of recruitment

"No work experience, fresh female engineer, and supervision of work at night required sometimes – can you handle it?" This was what I was told when I had faced the interview after my graduation. People had their own mind about "incapable" female engineers.

For me, it was a golden opportunity to be a part of the Internship programme in DRSP. The Work Force Diversity policy of SDC has provided a golden opportunity for the fresh graduates to enhance their capacities and skills in the practical fields through the Internship programme. I had the opportunity to get to know rural parts of Nepal like Khotang, Okhaldhunga. During this internship period I was challenged, and I had the chance to prove that a woman engineer can also work in the field. Wherever I went, people were surprised: "Look – a girl engineer in the field!". Many people admitted that they had never seen a female technician in the field during the detailed surveying of the Maure-Phokingtar road of Khotang. The appreciation of my work and the chance to set an example for the children of the community have become a matter of pride for me. Working in the teams with diverse age groups, caste and culture adds extra knowledge. Dealing with the community people and line agencies has increased my communication skill. The hardship that I have come across has helped me to increase my strength. The learning and working environment gives you more opportunity to boost your own capabilities. It has given me different dimensions in the way of thinking and decision-making. This whole period has become the school to build my professionalism and increase my self-confidence. This WFD policy has changed the perspective of the people about women's abilities. It has been a platform for the career of newly graduated engineers, as it focuses on marginalized groups the opportunities for women are the best. My career started from trainee and went on to professional engineer in DRSP.

Sanju Thapa Shrestha

Accepting women in the technical field is possible

I was wondering how a fresh engineer would get an opportunity to enter in the job market. The vacancy announcement in DRSP was shown to me by my brother. I surfed the internet for details and found that this program works in the field of rural roads and basically in the rural districts of Nepal. I was born in a valley and didn't know much about village life. But since my childhood I had always wanted to see the hills and rivers and wanted to feel what rural life was like, so I quickly applied for the position. When I was selected and posted in the district, I used to go to the building site everyday and learnt many more things. One day a teacher of secondary school asked me "who are you?" and I replied: "I am an engineer". He was very surprised and said "Kasto fuchhi Engineer"? With the support of all, I could work as female engineer in the district. I feel I am lucky to get this golden opportunity to be a part of DRSP.

Gender by Chance or by Conviction

Fernando Pililão

Gender is not about man or woman, is about relations, role and responsibility of man and woman in society which can change over the time

Normally it is easy to write a simple note for the file of a project but today I have to share my ideas on gender which I call “Gender by chance or by commitment”. I will share three different experiences related to my involvement with gender activities within Coof Maputo.

After the resignation of the former NPO who was acting as Gender Focal Point, the Management of Coof Maputo just inquired with all NPOs who might be interested to become the new gender focal point – and for a change, I accepted this challenging position. The first reaction on my acceptance came from a group of women who expressed their concern about my appointment (as a male) for such a position. In their mind gender issues should only be dealt with by women – but they were wrong and I am still on the job today!

At the beginning of my assignment as gender focal point, all the doors were literally closed: most of my colleagues from the operational team were not interested in discussing gender issues with me, this although gender is clearly stated officially as a transversal theme in our Mozambican Coof country strategy. Support came from few of my colleagues, especially also from the Management, who accepted to allocate financial resources. This allowed me to conduct an initial training on SDC’s gender toolkit and checklist with (external) support from an international and from a local partner. Particularly the idea of having local support for gender training was crucial for me to extend the training also to our Implementing Partners. Moreover this local partner was well appreciated by everyone including Coof Maputo, having been contributing to most of our gender trainings. This means that if you are gender focal point, do not

think that you will be doing all “gender work” alone, but try to establish external alliances as we did here in Mozambique.

Most of us normally expect to get a specific budget assigned for our activities as gender focal points. But money is not all. Gender equity is not happening by chance, we make it possible mostly due to (personal) commitment! I have to recognize that my previous training experience on gender in the Netherlands as well as during my sociology courses at university helped me a lot to really understand the gender issues at stake. For example the importance of establishing datelines for Coof as well as together with our Implementing Partners. Nevertheless, I got a big surprise when a partner representative stated: “We put gender (lines) in our project proposal as well as a budget only because you SDC-people are forcing us to do so...”. This means for me that there are organizations submitting project documents with well documented gender approaches – but do they know what they want to obtain? Is it just gender for money – or money for gender? Are we prepared to avoid such practices of our partners? If not, then we also have to be prepared and to confront them – because people are prepared to pretend but not to implement gender equity as an utterly crucial issue also in my country Mozambique.

Finally, during a “f2f workshop” in Bern I was very astonished by the level of willingness for data disaggregation as expressed during many different sessions. After visiting a crèche in small Swiss village, I asked about the number of kids by gender attending the crèche... and the teacher there did not even realize the importance of gender data disaggregation in her workplace. When I insisted why she did not take into account the number of girls and boys at her school she replied that for the school it was (more) important who is accompanying the children: if it is the mother or the father – this in order to know if both parents are well informed about the education of their children. Gender in this specific case is not just about the number of boys and girls but who really takes care and responsibility for the socialization of the children.

Let’s celebrate this 10th anniversary of SDC’s gender policy with renovated enthusiasm and a strong commitment – the gender results achieved so far and the overall impact are highly promising!

Women Empowered to Participate in Politics and Local Government

Silvana Mjeda

The Swiss Cooperation Office supports Albania in its efforts towards European integration by contributing to the improvement of governance and rule of law and to the competitiveness of economy. Strengthening local government, supporting decentralisation, and empowering regional government structures is a special focus area for Swiss Cooperation in Albania. In addition, gender equality remains a cross-cutting theme throughout all programmes and projects.

Marije Deda was one of the first four women in Lezhë who entered politics in 1991 following the collapse of communism. By 1992 she became head of sector working towards creating party cells in the Lezha district, unfolding the new programme and enrolling women members. After refusing to run for public office for many years, Marije finally accepted the invitation to run for council member in Kolsh, one of Lezhë communes, where she won against competitors.

However, like other women in politics in Albania, Marije felt a lack of formal training and a gap in political skills. At this time she came in contact with the Swiss programme on decentralisation and local development that supported women who were engaged in the political life of the region. She participated in a training designed to impart electoral and organisational skills for women in politics and government. The thematic training took place in Budva, Montenegro in cooperation with the National Democratic Institute, NDI. This was followed by networking and events for sharing experiences between women in local government and promoting best practices at national level. From the programme the women got technical tools on dealing effectively with political and public issues. “Until then, we had only conducted party propaganda”, says Marije.

The new things learned included: management of electoral campaigns, lobbying activities & practices, presentation and organisational skills, strategy design, and election campaign planning. “We learnt how to present ourselves in the best light, how to win women over, and how to represent them better”, adds Marije.

She fought for increasing the representation of women for all political groups in Lezhë. “I had a secure position as candidate of a big political party, but I fought for a 30% representation for all parties”, says Marije. She lobbied alongside women from rival parties and convinced party leaders to accept the 30% quota based on the argument that this would be filled by women who had all the qualities to contribute to public administration. The number of women representatives elected in local councils and the municipality of Lezha Qark went up from 21 to 28 in the 2011 elections and included a wider spectrum of political parties.

During training sessions they also learned about gender-based budgeting and financial planning that ensures gender equality in local government units. The added presence of women in several councils means they have more say when it comes to deciding about community services and projects. Two successful examples stand out: 1. Allocation of a waste-collection fund to buy new containers and improve collection service; 2. Establishing a fund for and renovation of a kindergarten, benefiting 20–23 children.

According to Marije, the Swiss assistance has enabled her and other women to push forward with their political careers. “This was new, fresh and different from previous types of support we received. I have learned communication skills, have gained more recognition and have secured more opportunities”. She is determined to pursue her goal of bringing about change and democratisation in her city and area. For as she likes to say: “A woman in power governs like a mother”.

Promoting women in decision-making at grassroots in Moldova

Natalia Cernat

Women are underrepresented in decision-making at all levels in the Republic of Moldova, despite the favourable legal framework and the sustained efforts in empowering women and promoting equal opportunities. In a country where, since its independence in 1991, the rural population has been struggling with poorly supplied public services, decaying infrastructure and limited economic opportunities, promoting women at grassroots level is key, believe the donor organizations supporting gender equality in Moldova.

I was already sitting in the audience, among those over 200 people half of which were women, when I heard the final decision of the general assembly of the village of Serpeni voiced by the mayor Elena Nicolaeva, an energetic woman in her late 30-ies: "Thank you all for voting. Please welcome the president and the members of the council of our Water Consumers Association." I felt my heart beating with happiness looking at the only woman among the five men standing in front of the audience. At the same time, I felt uneasy because of my "out of the blue" interference, but more about that later on. The village of Serpeni, Anenii Noi district, situated in the central Moldova, was selected by the SDC-funded Water and Sanitation (ApaSan) project for the construction of a small-scale water supply system and a water treatment plant. The general assembly of the village gathered to approve the implementation of the projects and to elect the leadership of the Water Consumers Association in charge of managing the entire process of the project implementation, from the community mobilization and setting tariffs to the service provision and the maintenance of the infrastructure.

The specialists of ApaSan explained the technical and social implications of the construction of a water supply system with the support of SDC. Invited to speak about the experience of his community, the president of the Water Consumers Association of the neighbouring village said that the most challenging task considering the low income of many families, was agreeing upon affordable but wise tariffs for the water supply services.

The tariff of MDL 10 (CHF 0.8) per ton of safe drinking water seemed to be a very good deal for the people in the audience. Some of them paid ten times as much for a ton of water of questionable quality brought to them in rotten metal tanks. Several neighbourhoods enjoyed access to piped technical water, dark in colour. The others relied on the water of the shallow wells, which contained nitrates exceeding the standards for drinking water three times.

The health assistant of the village, a middle-aged woman with a worried expression, informed the audience that the village of Serpeni was on top of the district regarding cancer. "The number of children with kidney diseases is alarming, and the men do not reach the age of 60," she said. The participants of the meeting volunteered to spread the word about the threats of using poor quality water into all homes of Serpeni.

Observing the meeting, I saw how both women and men spoke out freely, expressing their worries and proposing solutions. When the election of the decision-making body of the Water Consumers Association was announced, I was contemplating the rough, cracked skin of a young woman's hands which spoke about the hard physical work they were doing at home and in the field.

When I raised my head, five men were standing in front of the audience. The people had already nominated and voted for them. This was the moment when I asked permission to speak. I said that the audience should consider nominating women for the position of the member of the council, someone who would voice the concerns of all women present at the meeting. A woman was elected.

Back in the office, I wrote my monitoring field visit report. The conclusion was clear: the project should reach out to the local authorities and to community activists, and communicate more about the importance gender equality plays in decision-making. However, Aurelia Ciornei, the deputy coordinator of the ApaSan project, believed that this was not enough. After the hard work of awareness raising with the authorities of the village of Cioresi, the general assembly nominated a few women, however the community did not vote for them. "I could see that promoting women in decision-making is not among the real needs of the community, compared to the inadequate infrastructure, little employment opportunities and poverty generated by low income from agricultural activity," she said.

The monitoring indicators of the ApaSan project had been showing an average of 22% of women representation in water association councils for two consecutive years, when the ApaSan project took more action. The contract of cooperation with the SDC project concerning the design and construction of new water supply systems now has clauses safeguarding equal chances for both women and men to participate in administering the water consumers associations. The statute of a water association requires a membership quota of 40% women in its decision-making body. In order to make a change at the level of individual households, the contracts on the construction of individual EcoSan dry toilets are signed by both spouses.

When Catharina de Albuquerque, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to water and sanitation, visited the Republic of Moldova with the support of SDC, she raised the human rights and gender equality issues in the water sector during her bilateral meetings with the Prime Minister of Moldova and other officials. The international conference "Challenges of the Water Sector in Moldova" raised the human rights problematic high on the public agenda. The women representation in decision-making in public administration of the Republic of Moldova in 2012 reflects the situation in the SDC water projects, with 19.8% of women having seats in the Parliament of Moldova, and 18.5% of women heading mayor offices in villages. The higher up in the hierarchical structure of decision-makers, the fewer women could be found.

Summing up the activities of the year the Swedish Ambassador Ingrid Tersman, who chaired the last donors meeting, said that the wealth of gender-related events of the year gave a new impetus to women empowerment work in Moldova. A draft package of legal amendments to several gender-related laws was submitted to the Parliament of Moldova by the UN Women. However, all donors agreed that a real difference could be made only by supporting the grassroots women groups, organizations and networks more.

Womens issues in Marokko: the limit of partial reforms

Rim Hajji

In the last few decades, women's rights in Morocco have experienced significant and positive advancement. The momentum created by the "Arab spring" in the last two years has helped activists to lobby for a more progressive constitution with regards to women's rights. However, the changes in legislation are not enough, mentalities and even portrayal of women in the media needs considerable improvement; the road ahead is still long and difficult. The impact of reforms on the average woman's life is not always palpable when it is only limited to the legislative aspect. Laws are often bypassed, misinterpreted or simply not implemented. I became more aware of this reality after meeting a really inspiring woman on a recent field mission with the Swiss Program Office. A few weeks ago, I visited the Eastern city of Oujda to follow up on a few work-related projects and, to my surprise, my trip turned out to be so different from what I had expected it to be. The city, located by the Algerian border, is known for being the first entry point for many migrants and asylum seekers coming to Morocco in their way to Europe. The stories emerging from this part of the country usually revolve around the inhumane situation in which these migrant populations have to live in and the harrowing stories about the abuse and neglect they had to endure during their journeys. However, the encounter that I made that same afternoon is what really made my visit so worthwhile.

That same day, I attended a training organized for local journalists, on the significance of inclusive jour-

nalism and the importance of giving all sections of society a voice and a space to express themselves. Very quickly, the enthusiasm of one of the young female journalists caught my attention. She looked concentrated, committed and eager to learn. She was jotting down every piece of information and every technique the trainers were showcasing. Her eyes got bright when the article she wrote as a practical exercise for the training, got the praise of her peers and her trainers. She looked more proud than all the others and it seemed like the article she wrote meant much more to her than a simple exercise.

During the break she came to talk to me about her work and how she came to write about a topic that she holds dear: the rights of divorced women in Morocco. Fatima* told me that she was from a tiny village from the suburbs of the city of Oujda, and that she got married at the age of sixteen to a very "religious", traditional man who made her quit school and withdraw from public life. From that day she was not allowed to leave home, watch TV or read books. In the first years of their marriage, she had to dedicate her life to her husband and to the three daughters she had with him. Despite the domestic violence she was suffering, Fatima decided to remain silent for the sake of her children. Nevertheless, her husband divorced her because she did not give him the son he always wanted. So at the age of twenty-three, Fatima found herself back to her parents' house with three children, no education and no money.

Fatima shattered every stereotype one could have about women in our society, especially divorced women who suffer from a lot of stigma and social exclusion. She told me her story with a triumphant tone while holding her head up high. The part that touched me the most is the moment she called her rebirth, the moment she had to either face the world or just disintegrate from rejection and what everyone labelled as "her failed life". At that young age Fatima decided that she was going to detach herself from all the negativity and work on rebuilding a better life for herself and her children. Regardless of the pressure from her family, Fatima started studying again. She could not leave the house but she educated herself at home the best way she could. She confessed to me that she spent many nights crying because the books she had to study were so complex and that she did not have anyone or anything to rely on but her sheer determination. Fatima did not only graduate high school, she went on to get her Bachelors and her Masters degree in Law. She wanted to know her rights and to be the voice of the voiceless. Now Fatima is a hero in her village, she is not only a role model for her three daughters, who compete with each other to excel at school; she is also inspiring many young women who thought that they had no other option but to accept their unfortunate fate.

When one hears stories like Fatima's, the feelings of joy and hope are usually overwhelming. One senses that the fights that women take on everyday are paying off and that the future of the next generations will certainly be a brighter one. The advancements made in the last years are a source of pride to all Moroccan women and one cannot but pay tribute to all the activists, men and women, who made it possible for us to be equal citizens in rights and obligations. Last year, the women movement scored one of its most important gains by securing and strengthening women's rights in the newly adopted Constitution that established the supremacy of international conventions and stressed the necessity to adapt national laws to be in line with Morocco's international commitments. The entrenchment of the equality between men and women started from the preamble of the constitution where the state commits to "ban and combat discrimination against anyone based on sex".

However, the reality on the ground is far from reflecting the progress made in legislation. One has just to visit the family court, women's shelters or simply read the daily papers to see that the picture is not as positive as one might think or hope. The loopholes in existing laws are numerous, the complacency of authorities is unchanged and the cases of abuse of power are too many to count. Unfortunately, equality in our society is still a distant objective. In the 2012 Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum (WEF), Morocco figured among the ten countries with the worst inequal-

ity between men and women. This is due to many concurring causes with education being at the top of the list: 41.3% of Moroccan women are illiterate, and in rural areas this percentage reaches as high as 58%.

Although Moroccan women are present in a number of important administrative, judicial and business positions, they are rarely represented in decision-making jobs and they are still under-represented in political offices. For instance, only one woman was given a ministerial position in the current government. Bassima al-Hakkaoui, former MP, has been appointed as the Minister of Solidarity, Women and Family Affairs. This was a surprisingly negative development if we consider that there were 7 women ministers in strategic ministries during the previous government.

It is worth mentioning that the government issued a new "plan for equality in the prospect of parity" 2012-2016 with the objective of institutional anchoring of gender equality, equal access for girls to education and health, the fight against violence and all forms of discrimination against women, women's equal access to positions of responsibility and decision-making in government as well as the fight against the vulnerabilities faced by rural women and girls.

These gender specific policies are the answer to the many obstacles women face. Even though the change in legislation should be in the forefront of women's struggle for equal rights, one should note that the laws can be scaled back, overlooked or simply made ineffective. What could really have a direct impact is targeting the precise areas where women's rights are being trampled or where women's advancement is being stalled. That is why the Swiss Program Office in Morocco, in line with SDC's general strategy, has insured the integration of gender equality as a transversal theme cutting across all of its projects and activities. SPO Morocco works with several organizations to safeguard the fundamental rights of vulnerable women, especially migrant women who were victims of sexual abuse, human trafficking and violence.

Women like Fatima should be celebrated in our society as leaders and role models. The depth and impact of her actions could be amplified by simple actions like sharing her story. The day I spent in Oujda made me acquire a whole new perspective about the work we do. I understood the importance of supporting the small initiatives, going to the remote regions and giving people an opportunity to tell their stories. Most of the time we feel compelled to measure our impact with statistics, charts and graphs but sometimes these artifacts fail to grasp the depth of our actions. All our programs, in the different fields, aim at supporting the local endeavours that emanate from people like Fatima: young men and women who are full of life, strength and optimism and who will be the real agents of change in our society.

*Not her real name

«Sin prisa pero sin pausa»

Slowly but surely: the success of the Gender Strategy

Ursula Läubli

Gathering statements on experiences with SDC's Gender Strategy in Cuba, the pickings from the farmers (female and male) are most impressive: "You won't believe how completely my life has changed! Much is different at home: we share the housework and ideas and help each other without prejudice", says Agustín from Pinar del Río enthusiastically. He grows vegetables and tobacco in the Western part of Cuba.

What SDC's pilot projects have achieved is also visible in other places in Cuba. A woman in Villa Clara reports that women are now fully participating in political, social and economic life in the village. Some of them even rose to leading positions in the local administration or earn pin money by selling vegetable preserves. "The project doesn't only help to cultivate our soil better, it also helps me to change". While she is telling us this, her husband is quite naturally preparing lunch in the kitchen. A situation I have never before encountered while visiting a project!

But how can change of behaviour and results be achieved in a space of only about five years? This is what we wanted to find out in the course of a systemization of the implementation of SDC's Gender Strategy, commissioned by SDC's cooperation office in Cuba.

Such a "capitalization of experience" was as such innovative, and the choice of methods used determinative for a successful realization. The goal was to collect the experiences of all the stakeholders in workshops, visits in projects and conversations.

I was part of a team of three, together with two female Cuban experts. In a two-week participatory process we identified the most important milestones and factors of successful implementation. The cooperation in this interdisciplinary team was most rewarding. As a staff member of SDC I brought the institutional point of view to the table, and I could build on my previous experience as gender focal point in the Latin America division. So I was most interested to observe the way in which significant Gender-results, successful and sustainable development processes with regard to social aspects have come to pass. This is why the following positive experience can also be inspiring for other contexts.

Everything began in 2004 when we recruited a new member of staff with expertise in Gender issues for the then new program in SDC. A gender strategy was devised promptly, which outlined the goal and the way to reach it – Gender Mainstreaming – in an innovative way. One way of going about it was to include women and men at local level to raise the self-confidence and the status of the women involved in the project. Besides the economic aspects, existing stereotypes of a social and cultural nature were analysed as reasons for inequality. Even though women are present in public space, there is a lack of debate on gender-based inequality. Therefore it was decided, as an addition, to specifically support national institutions which advocate gender equality. 17 Gender Focal Points were identified in all of SDC's programs and projects, mostly women who were suited for leadership.

Between 2005 and 2006 workshops took place where Gender Focal Points practised reflecting their own role in gender issues. This was not an easy process. Personal conflicts were brought to light and some Focal Points even quit.

On this basis of experience and knowledge Gender Focal Points were now able to initiate pilot gender projects in their concepts. Even though a separate budget was at their disposal, the Gender Focal Points had to do a lot of convincing regarding their mostly male project supervisors. Arguing highly motivated and with new self-confidence, success was theirs.

At the same time three training workshops on methodology in gender-related project cycle management were conducted. The workshops on participative methods of diagnosis and the development of gender-based indicators were later identified as the turning point for the successful implementation of gender as a transversal issue. Issues like gender-sensitive budgeting or the institutionalisation of gender-sensitive monitoring also had positive feedback.

Thanks to the clever exchange between experts, gender focal points and the initiatives on national level, strategic alliances, important for everybody, have developed. Local experience formed a part of the national political dialog on promoting the rights of women, so local experiences could then be transferred to other regions of Cuba and improve the living conditions of Cuban farmers in many places.

The integration of successful pilot projects on the special promoting of the needs of women and men into the larger programs has also been successful. Some of the gender focal points are now members of project supervision boards and gender monitoring is an integral part of monitoring systems at project- and country level.

"Sin prisa pero sin pausa" – slowly but surely, said one of the participants of a workshop on experience-capitalisation. Herein lies the success of the implementation of the gender strategy in Cuba, but also in the systematic, professional and continuous implementation and support of the process. It was clear from the very beginning where we wanted to go and how to go about it, there was no dissipation of actions.

Even so the procedure alone doesn't guarantee sustainable and for men and women equally important results of project intervention. One of the protagonists, the gender focal point of the cooperation office, was crucial to the success of the process in Cuba. The gender expert steered the process by being anchored locally amongst Cuban women and men. She was able to increase her workload thanks to the support of the management until the gender-pilot-programs were successfully integrated in the programs. This took five years, a short time compared to other situations, where less was achieved despite the longer commitment. It was vital that the coordinators took responsibility for the implementation of Gender and followed the chosen path with determination, in defiance of the objections that enough had already been done for Gender.

Taking reflection of your own role-behaviour as a starting point and a declared attitude and responsibility for gender issues are factors of the success of gender mainstreaming, as well as vast knowledge of context and Gender. Finally it is also project-management-competence to take meaningful gender-sensitive steering decisions at the right moment. With commitment, readiness and resources, but mainly with a strong interest to look more closely, we can get closer to the goal of equality between women and men.

María's time for the water committee

Alfonso Flores

A cold wind was blowing through the windows of the Catholic church, standing on a hilltop in the parish of Peña Blanca in the department of Intibuca. But the cold soon vanishes in the many people attending the christening ceremony. The godmothers are holding their godchildren in their arms by the altar, while the parents hand a bottle of crystal clear water to the priest, with which he will bless the children by dripping the water on their heads. For the very first time the 38 families of this community, founded 50 years ago, have access to drinking water and sanitation.

The humble nave of the church resembles a tropical garden, the greens of the coconut palm trees blending with the colourful scarves and clothes of the women. The Lenca are devout and hardworking people, and convinced that their community has prospered because of these virtues: today there is water from the tap and porcelain toilet bowls in every household. Women and men seem to have overcome a history marked by machismo and patriarchy.

Improvement of the household situation thanks to water supply – an estimate

In Honduras, a rural family without water supply needs between 30 minutes and 4,5 hours to get to a well with drinking water. This task, traditionally taken over by women, can take up to 100 workdays a year. This time costs a household about 788 US\$ a year.

After Mass the families gather in the forecourt of the church. Some of the men and women detach themselves from the group and go to the village school for a meeting. On weekdays, the children learn reading and writing here. But every two months their parents gather here and leave the traditional supremacy of men over women at the door, in order to discuss all kinds of issues as equal residents. "We have learnt that women and men have the same abilities. That's why we want women to participate in administrating the drinking water", says Erasmo Meza, 31, member of the board of "Agua Peña Blanca".

The group is mixed, the secretary of the committee, María Suyapa Rodríguez, 26, is a quiet but very active woman who is definitely writing history: "We women used to know that the men decide alone – in the family as in the community – and we had to stay home. Today I negotiate with my husband, and he respects my wish to support the community actively and to contribute my abilities to the functioning of the drinking water system." María Suyapa divides her time between her work for the water committee and caring for her two children.

The transition of a patriarchal culture to one where equality between women and men is self-evident is giving a lot of self-confidence to the Lenca women. Even those who decided not to take an active part in the administration are profiting: "I am old and never had the opportunity to learn to read and write. I would have liked to work in the water committee, but that's not going to happen now. So I motivate my granddaughters to represent us women there," says Dolores Vasquez, 54, with a touch of nostalgia, but full of hope. According to the reports of the AGUASAN program in Honduras, 35% of the women held a leading position in the water committees between 2008 and 2012. "As AGUASAN team we are very happy about the changed relationships between men and women. We see this as a result of a process marked by conviction and enthusiasm at all levels of intervention of the program", confirms María Luisa Pardo, Head of AGUASAN Honduras.

Strength lies in joined forces

Nadège Kanyange

"RHUGWASANYE" or "let's unite" is what a group of 22 women from Nirindja in the district of Mwana, Southern Kivu, is called. They are widows, victims of rape, battered women, women who believe in the solidarity required in order to cope with the problems they face on a daily basis.

Their union has been existing for two years. At that time it was about promoting income. With the village chief's support they were able to buy a piece of land together. Today this communally farmed land has become a very fertile field. This year the weather is good and from 20kg of sowed maize they were able to harvest 30kg. "The skies were really gracious!" Thanks to the harvest the women won't have to beg for seeds for the next season. Besides the harvest there is another gain: more appreciation of their persons and their community.

One of the concerns of RHUGWASANYE is to show that field-work is not only women's work. A certain success is visible due to the fact that three men have already joined the group. But solidarity alone is not enough. RHUGWASANYE women are committed to raise their community's awareness for the rights of women and girls. Gradually the men are beginning to understand. As an expression of solidarity the RHUGWASANYE men visit households in difficulties.

The great efforts of RHUGWASANYE are beginning to pay off. A while ago, the group took on two new members: Nzigire, accused of witchcraft and driven from her village, and Kinja, outcast by her husband. Thanks to mediation by RHUGWASANYE, Nzigire has been taken in by her village again, and Kinja has returned to her husband, with whom she is now living peacefully. These success stories were possible also thanks to the village chief, who is committed to RHUGWASANYE himself. He is very committed to the cause of the women and understands more and more that it is very necessary to battle violence against women.

This year the members of RHUGWASANYE have bought a new piece of land. With a bit of support from the village chief a centre for literacy can now be built. It is meant for women and men who want to learn to read and write together, and it shall be a place where people learn to esteem the rights of each and every one, where human and women's rights are respected.

«Gender Bhaiyan»

(Gender-Brother)

Sohel Ibn Ali

**We need the commitment of men,
also and especially in matters of equality**

Male development activists and professionals in Bangladesh have only very recently started to understand and engage in gender issues, as the “gender movement” has traditionally been categorised as a “women issues movement, by women for women”, and thus led by female consultants, female leaders and female activists. Although the policies and pieces of legislations refer to gender and gender equality mainstreaming, their implementation has been headed by women activists, focussing on women empowerment as the key factor to address gender issues. Projects and programmes have been designed and implemented targeting women’s practical needs, rather than addressing strategic issues such as gender norms, roles, responsibility and gender power relations. This happened because of the limited understanding across development practitioners and activists in Bangladesh of the gender and gender equality mainstreaming theoretical construction. What’s more, men expressing interest and engaging in the gender cause were discriminated, and categorised as “those who failed to work on more prestigious issues” such as water and sanitation, microcredit and others.

In 2008, I joined SDC and I took over the responsibility of the Gender Focal Person. I was at that time the only man in both the Donor thematic group on Women Advancement and Gender Equality (WAGE) and SDC’s Partners Gender Platform (a platform comprised of gender focal points from SDC projects/organizations in Bangladesh). Female colleagues from other development agencies appreciated my presence, but I actually had to fight for my space to contribute to the thematic discussions. Bringing the “male aspect” and the “male presence” to the gender discussions hasn’t always been easy, in a circle dominated by women and in a thematic area seen as a “women affair only”. It is at that time that my colleagues called me ‘Gender Bhaiyan (Gender Brother)’. They were regularly surprised to see a man performing the role of Gender Focal Person in SDC! A couple of incidents, if I recall properly, outline how well the misconception on gender was gen-

eralised in Bangladesh’s institutions and in certain programmes. I was once on a field visit with a male colleague from SDC and we observed a gender session organized by one of our partner organizations: both girls and boys were discussing their day-to-day experiences on gender, when all of a sudden my colleague asked loudly why boys were there and why boys were participating in a gender discussion! As if gender issues were for women only. Another time I remember when SDC was providing technical support to one of the public training institutions for local governments in Bangladesh. The support included an orientation on gender and technical support to develop their organizational gender policy and action plan. It involved a series of discussions, coaching and technical inputs. However, the day they officially inaugurated it, the Director General of this institution mentioned they had improved a lot on gender as there were three women in the programme!

It is, however, important to acknowledge the fact that the overall situation has changed a lot since 2008. Now, there are a certain number of male gender focal persons not only in the LCG WAGE but also in the SDC Partners Gender Platform. After SDC, DFID, ILO and UN Resident Office appointed a man as a gender focal person. Among SDC partners, Steps towards Development (Steps) was the pioneer to appoint a male gender focal person since 2011. The importance of having a role and involvement of men in establishing a gender equality based society is now being recognized in the development field. Gender is no more only for women but also for men. I have learnt a lot which helped me to build my knowledge and expertise on gender, from the reality, field interventions, peer learning and regular exchanges with local gender experts, at the same time I have also learnt through SDC Gender Networks. The key lesson which I have learnt that Gender Equality Mainstreaming should not be limited to only developing a gender policy, tools and methods but also building long term strategic gender objectives, organizational commitment, and strategic and

pragmatic approaches, if gender-based discrimination is to be reduced and women are to be promoted by interventions. To achieve this, budgets and the commitment of the men to gender equality are necessary.

Over the last decades, Bangladesh has made significant progress towards achieving MDGs, especially the MDG3 – promoting gender equality and women empowerment. Gender relations in Bangladesh are very dynamic, positively affecting women’s position in areas like education (stipend programs), employment and income (micro-credit schemes), community mobilization (women self-help groups) and political representation (reserved seats for women candidates). SDC partners and projects have made a significant contribution.

Vive Žene – evolving from a war and post-war trauma care provider to a counterpart in policy dialogue

Almir Tanović

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) (1992-1995) and organized ethnic cleansing resulted in mass killings, destruction, and enormous migrations. These events caused a series of traumatic experiences, many of them painful and life-threatening, various long-term stressful changes in lifestyle, and huge losses for people. While the disrupted health system was mobilized to deliver services in order to help the physically injured, the social service system collapsed in many parts of BiH, leaving those in need of psycho-social care without any support. And this at a time when the number of those in need of such services was increasing every day, especially among the most vulnerable population groups – namely women and children – who besides losing their family members and homes were faced with other traumatic experiences and various forms of abuse.

In March of 1994, a group of women from Dortmund, Germany, supported by women from Tuzla, BiH, initiated the founding of the Vive Žene (Vive Women) organization. The purpose of this organization was to provide immediate, effective, and ongoing psychosocial care to women and children suffering from war caused traumas. Fulfilling this purpose was not an easy task. In May 1994 Tuzla became a place of refuge for many internally displaced persons, the majority of whom women and children, who had been expelled from the eastern part of BiH. Many of them suffered multiple physical, psychical and sexual abuses, including rapes, during fights and time spent in concentration camps.

Such circumstances required a lot of knowledge from Vive Žene staff, as well as dedication and enthusiasm in providing psycho-social and psychological assistance. As a new organization they also had to learn

how to function and manage their organization in a society where the role of a non-government organization was unknown. Their organizational structure was very weak, but, with assistance of their foreign friends and donors, and through concrete work with their beneficiaries, other organizations and institutions, they learned fast. Very soon after its foundation, Vive Žene established a therapeutic centre for psycho-social, pedagogic and medical care as well as judicial counseling for women and children who were victims of violence. In these early years, Vive Žene received women and children living in the refugee camps around Tuzla in their centre and offered them stationary psychotherapy. The therapeutic treatment lasted from six to eight months. Besides the psycho-therapeutic treatment, women and children who stayed at the Center also received complete medical, social, and pedagogical care, as well as the opportunity to engage in income generation projects such as agriculture activities. Stationary therapeutic treatment has remained an essential element of Vive Žene's work even nowadays.

A new way forward

A few years after the war ended, Vive Žene had to look more strategically into their future. They realized that they had to strengthen their organizational structure in order to be better able to respond to their beneficiaries' needs, expand activities in new areas of intervention and better position the organization in the policy dialogue with government and donors. A new vision and mission were defined, while at the same time a new organizational structure was developed with clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the organization. In cooperation with

the Swiss organization IAMANEH and with financial support from Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), the Dutch Government and land donated by Tuzla municipality, Vive Žene was able to build a new and modern facility for the stationary care of its beneficiaries and to expand activities beyond its ambulant and stationary clients to whole communities in the refugee settlements around Tuzla and selected districts of Tuzla. Former clients who benefited from psychotherapeutic treatment started working as mediators in this community building component. SDC supported not only concrete activities of Vive Žene, but also provided opportunities to the organization's staff to learn about Swiss experiences and know-how in psycho-social matters. Furthermore, SDC assisted Vive Žene in developing a long-term strategic plan, including a strategic orientation, the establishment of effective cooperation mechanisms with governmental structures, and financial sustainability.

"Many women today are silent about brutal assault, wearing chains, rapes. The basic problem is a sense of guilt and shame that is still present in them. The main prerequisite for successful therapy is to free them of that. Some of the women underwent therapy in 1994, but they concealed having been raped, and only now they come back for treatment. That is why their traumas are still being treated. The public and the state say that the war is over and we must focus on the economy. The problem is that by ignoring the health of people who suffered during and after the war, their problems are growing, not shrinking. In the context of BiH, it could be said that there is also political resistance to invest in healing the wounds of the war—in large part because of the different opinions of the different ethnic groups who run the country," says Jasna Zečević, Director of Vive Žene.

Besides war trauma, another problem in BiH has been domestic violence, with women and children as main victims. Many of them have become beneficiaries of Vive Žene's services. Vive Žene also realized that good results cannot be achieved if men do not have the possibility to develop communication skills, skills of dealing with stress, and to learn how to control their behaviour in order to prevent recurring patterns of violent behaviour. In partnership with IAMANEH and the NGO Budućnost ("Future") from Modriča, and in cooperation with BiH state institutions, activities were started with a focus on the education of professionals in public institutions. The objective of this project is to enable and educate professionals who work with perpetrators of violence in Dobojski region and Tuzla Canton, contributing to the long-term psycho-social rehabilitation of the perpetrators.

Policy dialogue engagement

Through its community work, Vive Žene has increased its focus on developing a better regulatory framework in assisting and protecting victims of domestic violence. Since 2009, Vive Žene has successfully initiated the development and adoption of a "Protocol

for interventions in domestic violence cases» in Tuzla and Posavina Cantons of BiH. The objective of the Protocol is to establish multidisciplinary teams at the community level composed of representatives of the police, centres for social welfare and organizations such as Vive Žene with a view to improving the protection of and assistance to victims of domestic violence. These achievements positioned Vive Žene as a good partner to local government, which was further strengthened through the organization's engagement in drafting new legislation on domestic violence in the Federation of BiH.

The work of Vive Žene represents continuity in rehabilitating torture survivors and in supporting the recovery process of BiH society. Besides the empowerment and rehabilitation of direct torture victims, Vive Žene have been engaged in a network of NGOs in BiH dealing with torture victims, fostering experience exchange, cooperation and coordination between NGOs in BiH, and acting as one of the main advocates for the recognition of the rights of this unique population group. The organization was closely involved in a policy dialogue that led to the adoption of comprehensive legislation in BiH for the protection of the rights of over 200,000 victims of torture in the past war. In another NGO network, Vive Žene created Safe Net, a network for the protection and assistance to victims of torture and domestic violence across the country. Cooperation with other NGOs also includes interventions aimed at increasing the societal awareness on the importance of women's participation in BiH's political life, especially in rural parts of BiH, as well as at providing gender sensitive education for young politicians from political parties. These activities are being implemented as part of the larger project "Contribution to the Constitutional Reform in BiH", financed by the Swiss Cooperation Office in BiH.

Strategic thinking, a multidisciplinary approach in the response to beneficiaries' needs, engaging entire communities, and networking with other NGOs and institutions are a few of main reasons that today Vive Žene is a well organized and experienced NGO in BiH with 36 employees whose work is respected and appreciated in entire BiH. Since its establishment, the Center for Therapy and Rehabilitation «Vive Žene» provided assistance to over 20,000 persons, mainly women, children, and elderly men.

Finally, the good work of Vive Žene was spread beyond the borders of BiH. The organization was in a position to share its experiences in dealing with the universal problem of supporting victims of violence in conflict internationally. Thanks to the assistance of Amnesty International's "16 Days of Activisms against Gender Violence" last December, Vive Žene exchanged experience with the Indonesian NGO KontraS (The Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence). Both organizations found that they have much to learn from each other in dealing with the long-term consequences and challenges of violence in conflicts.

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Small Steps for Women's Rights

Pia Lignell

For over three decades, continuous war and conflict have resulted in economic, physical, and psychological suffering for all Afghan people, especially for women. Women have been systematically refused their rights and have been widely bound to the house with little or no participation in public life, especially in the rural areas. In the domestic area, women often become victims of violence. The eminent violation of their rights over the last two decades indicates a lack of awareness and insensitivity to gender equality among both Afghan men and women. Over the last ten years changes have occurred and women – especially in the urban centres – gained opportunities to reclaim their rights as active participants of society. These achievements are the fruits of men and mainly women who – despite Afghanistan's past and present barriers – have fought for the improvement of their country.

One of these women is Jamila Afghani, mother of three children and director of the Noor Educational and Capacity Development Organisation (NECDO). The dedication to her country is reflected in her name, Afghani. Jamila adopted this name ten years ago when she became an activist and did not want to be associated with an ethnic group, which is usually mirrored in the last name, but rather with her country itself. Since then she has been working for a better situation for women in the society. While many other organizations working for the same goal work towards strengthening women at the right holder's level, Jamila has chosen a different way: Education of women, awareness raising and human rights education of Imams (as local stakeholders) through Islam.

Education has played a crucial role in all her life. Born with a polio-induced disability Jamila's family thought that it would be very difficult to find a husband for her and therefore let her get a good education – as a kind of compensation for her handicap. In a refugee camp in Peshawar where the family fled to escape the escalating violence of Afghanistan, she felt the most urgent need for women in the camp was education. With this, however, she faced a lot

of resistance by the mostly conservative leaders. Through providing Islamic education to the women, Jamila found a way to overcome the opposition and an entry point to education and later to health education and literacy classes. When she returned to Afghanistan, she saw the same urgent needs as in Peshawar: the need for education for women and the need to make this education possible from the side of the local leaders or family elders. What she found were women who were in her words "treated as second class citizens in a male dominated society, discriminated by law, their fate with regard to education and work in the hands of men."

Jamila sees the reason for this gender based discrimination in the cultural patterns and the tradition which are predominant in rural areas. Cultural practices which have no religious roots but which have been attributed to Islam and are legitimized and justified through Islam, or through a particular interpretation of Islam.

To break this pattern, NECDO, a non-profit organization, whose goal is to support the people within the frame of Islam through education and community mobilization for a just society based on gender equality, has been working with Imams, the local religious leaders. Imams are highly respected figures in the communities and are closely involved in the life of the people as with marking the different periods of life (birth, adulthood, marriage and death) the Imam is involved. The opinion of the Imam is widely accepted and people tend to listen to what the Imams tell them. Being such crucial stakeholders, NECDO has been working closely with Imams over the last years with a twofold aim: Firstly, the organization is convinced that only a change of mentality can break the prevailing cultural practices justified through Islam. Secondly, in order to promote such a change in a community, the mentality of the respective Imam has to be changed. Therefore, Jamila and her partners adopted an approach initiated in rural, conservative areas of the Philippines which aims at raising the awareness of Imams with regard to the assumed gender inequality through repeated

debates on specific topics relating them to the Holy Quran, while at the same time educating women in different topics and working closely with the Ministry of Women Affairs. It is important to note that the work with Imams is an entry point to the community and not the goal in itself. NECDO is currently working with 150 moderate Imams in 7 provinces in Afghanistan. The organization works towards raising the Imams' awareness of human rights, women's rights and gender through an understanding of Islam which means peace, unity, love and transparency. Thus, NECDO is working with the religious leaders to ultimately foster a change in the behavior of members of the family and community to create more space for women, while at the same time strengthen women's capacities and capabilities.

The chosen approach does not only require an in-depth knowledge of the Holy Quran and International Human Rights Law but also a long breath to follow up on small achievements and not to give up when facing resistance. Yet, success happens and Jamila sees visible changes in the communities NECDO is working with. In several communities, daughters of the Imam were not allowed to go to school. After debates and awareness raising sessions conducted by NECDO, some of the Imams let their daughters go to school – a practice, which other members of the community copied. In another village, all Imams are now refusing to issue a marriage certificate for couples if the young woman is under 18 years and if she does not agree to the marriage. Jamila also experienced that women, men and elders who have primarily refused her attitude and activities are now supporting her work and act as women's advocators in their families or even communities. These achievements give hope to continue. Hope that is needed since her approach is often criticized by different parts of the society: civil society leaders criticize her of being too religious because NECDO is training women in the framework of Islam. Conservative elements in the society in turn criticize her of introducing a new Islam. In addition, the unstable security situation, the uncertain political environment and possible development after 2014 when the

foreign troops will leave the country are challenges that make the work and the life difficult. "Sometimes, I am really disappointed and think, all this is a waste of time", Jamila says, "but then I tell myself, this is our country. If we are not doing it, who else will do it?"

Since not many human rights and gender activists work in the field of human rights and Islam, SDC Afghanistan supported NECDO in 2012 to establish a network bringing the organizations and individuals which are active in that field together to work for advocacy and human rights. The network "Karama" (meaning "Dignity") organized the first national education conference on Human Rights and Islam, addressing human and women's rights from an Islamic perspective. Imams from different provinces in Afghanistan, religious scholars including two women, from Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia and Iran, representatives from the Government, the University, as well as more than 90 women from various human rights and civil society organizations participated in the conference and debated on different topics around human rights and Islam from an Islamic perspective with comparative family law reforms in other Islamic countries. At the end of the conference, all participants issued a statement emphasizing that the Islamic teaching must be differentiated from local and tribal customs, that women must be supported from an Islamic perspective as dignified individuals of the society and that different measures need to be taken to improve the situation of women. The network, which is currently seeking ways to become self-sustainable, will conduct a follow up conference in 2013. "What we do are small achievements, but they are small steps towards the betterment of the situation for women" Jamila says.

Indeed many small steps have been taken by Jamila and many other women. Jamila's approach is an alternative way of awareness raising and education which is highly context sensitive, especially in rural areas. Her small achievements are a contribution to all the efforts made to improve the situation of women in the country.

Women fish retailers: Last but not least in the aquaculture value chain

Sally Yacoub

The women of Shakshouk—a sprawling fishing village on the banks of Lake Qarun in the Upper Egyptian governorate of Fayoum—bear the greater part of the burden of managing household affairs. Most women in this village are married to fishermen who have to seek work elsewhere during the time of year when fishing in the lake is banned by the Egyptian General Authority for Fish Resources Development. So for several months of the year the men head off to far-flung locations such as Aswan and the Red Sea seeking other sources of income. Meanwhile, the women are left behind to care for their families, manage the household and find other means for supplementing the household income.

Rasha Abdalla El-Sayed, 35, is one such woman. She lives with her husband and four children in a simple brick house with dirt floors and which lacks a solid roof. Rasha's husband, Khaled, is a fisherman who travels annually to Aswan—which is 800km from Fayoum—to seek other means of employment during the fishing ban season. The amount of time he stays away varies from year to year depending on the type of work he finds there. During these long months, Rasha is both mother and father to her children, and essentially the sole breadwinner

as she will not have access to any money Khaled makes until he returns. Thus, Rasha works as a fish retailer in the local markets. During the fishing season she will sell her husband's catch. During the off-season she will sell farmed fish bought through a wholesaler with ties to the fish farms, which abound in Fayoum.

Previous development projects in this area have focused on the fishermen, with their families as indirect beneficiaries of project interventions. However, the SDC-funded project, Increasing Employment and Incomes through Developing Egypt's Aquaculture Sector (IEIDEAS), which is jointly implemented by WorldFish and CARE Egypt put women fish retailers—an integral part of the aquaculture value chain—at the forefront of the project. Shakshouk was selected as the first target area for the project, and Rasha emerged as one of the community's women leaders. A member of the Shakshouk Community Development Association—one of the project's local implementing partners—sat down with Rasha to discuss how the project, which kicked off in January 2012, has affected her life so far.

How did you first learn about this project?

Rasha: A woman who is involved in one of the local NGOs came one day with a man [CARE project supervisor] and they started talking to us about the problems we face as women fish retailers. They came several times and did a questionnaire with us, explaining that once they understood the big issues we faced they would help us come up with ways to solve those problems.

So what did you tell them about the biggest problems you face?

Well first of all I have to buy my fish from a wholesaler, who sells me the fish by the box. There is no scale to weigh out the amount, so the wholesaler sells me a standard box which supposedly contains

25kg of fish. But really the box probably contains 22–23 kg of fish. But the wholesaler sets the price for 25 kg and I have to pay it. Then there is the problem of getting the fish from the wholesaler to market. I sell my fish both in the local market in Shakshouk, which is close to my home, and also in markets around the city of Ibshaway. This is further away and I have to take several forms of transport to get there. Also, the driver and passengers often complained of the smell of my fish, since I used to carry it in an open container—a large aluminum tray. The problem with this tray, other than it makes it difficult to transport fish, is also that it means my fish are exposed to the sun and dirt once I get to market. This makes it spoil more quickly. The marketplace is another problem on its own. I have to pay a few pounds in order to sit on the ground and sell my fish. A lot of times shop owners will get upset when they find me in front of their shops so they will chase me away, spray water on me to get me to move, or sometimes dump my fish out. It is very humiliating.

What has the project done so far to help you?

Well, as I mentioned they sat with us to really find out what problems we face as women fish retailers, and the special circumstances of our situation. They then made us sit with them and participate in coming up with solutions to our problems. Some women felt that the marketplace is a big problem, while other focused on transportation issues. But we all agreed that the biggest problem facing us is how to store and transport our fish safely and how to preserve it for longer. The problem is as the fish quality goes down over the course of the day we have to lower our prices in order to make sure we don't have to throw any of the fish away. Some of us had seen the fishermen and other retailers using iceboxes, which keep the fish protected from the heat and dirt and keep it good for longer. So that is what we wanted. And that is what we got. They had a big ceremony a few months ago, and they distributed iceboxes to all the women who paid a small con-

tribution towards the icebox. Some of the women also suggested getting motorized tricycles to help us transport fish from the wholesalers and transport us to the market. I know that our community is supposed to receive two tricycles soon, though we haven't gotten it yet. I know that the local NGO is also going to start acting as the wholesaler for us. Instead of us having to go out every morning to different locations to buy our fish, we will be able to go to the NGO which is close by and buy our fish there. They will have a scale so they can weigh out the fish they sell to us, and they will only put a small markup on the fish when they sell it to us. This will make things easier for us. Also, for the women who mostly sell their fish in the local market, the project and the local NGO are going to work together with the local government to build a paved and shaded marketplace that is just for us fish retailers. That will be nice.

So what do you think of the icebox? Have you benefitted from it or not?

I have really benefitted from it. I used to put my fish in a dish to display it in the market. Because I had so much fish on display, and it was in the open air, it would be exposed to sun and dirt. Also, customers would pick up and handle the fish and this would lead to more bacteria and germs being transferred onto the fish which speeds up the decay of the fish on display. So it would spoil more easily. But now with the icebox I put all my fish inside and close the lid to protect it. I will only take out a few fish at a time to display to customers. This has reduced the amount of fish that goes bad, because they're not left out in the open for anyone or anything to touch. Also, because the icebox keeps the fish at cooler temperatures, I can store the fish overnight on those days when I can't sell the whole amount. This has meant less waste of product and a better daily income for me. This has been really important for me and my family. In our situation every piastre counts. I look forward to the rest of the project interventions.

Why girls belong in school

Gouna Sambo Isiba

Céline Goropoui, a girl from Gora Gbata, finished her local primary education before going on to secondary school in Sabanski in 2010, after having passed the entry exam. In fifth grade she fell pregnant during the school holiday, and because of this she refused to come back to school after the holidays in October 2011. The mediator noticed her absence after speaking to the “at risk”-girls from the school and informed the members of the local education committee. Together they looked into the matter and found out that Céline had decided to leave school for two reasons: firstly her parents had forbidden her to attend classes because of her pregnancy, secondly Céline believed that as a pregnant student she would be ostracized.

After the true reasons for Céline’s absence came to light, awareness-raising measures were taken. Under the guidance of the mediator, the members of the education committee began negotiating to change Céline’s mind and bring her back to school. Apart from Céline herself, her parents, the school administration, the baby’s father and his parents were also present.

The discussions led to the following results: Céline decides to go back to school, her parents will help her with this step and also with childcare after the birth, the parents of the baby’s father will help out financially during the pregnancy, the director of the school will take Céline back and draft a decree to protect her from stigmatisation by her fellow students and teachers, and finally the members of the education committee will make sure that everybody keeps their word.

After two weeks of negotiation everybody was happy to welcome Céline back to school. Thanks to the support of the mediators from the ASPEF-program

Céline was able to go to class right up to the birth and then came back only a few days later.

In spite of this challenge she will finish the school year successfully and go on to the next grade. She goes to school regularly, and in the meantime her mother looks after her child.

This commitment of all the people concerned basically, promoted by the ASPEF-program, shows how important it is to know the rights of girls and women in order to reduce inequalities and discrimination against women in our socio-cultural environment. Girls must have the same chances in education as boys.

The happy ending of this story leads to reflection on how to deal with pregnant girls. They have to be supported and get the permission to stay at school, so that they can finish their education successfully – or should they be expelled, so as not to set a “bad example” for other girls, as some people from the education system think?

In this report the issue is reproductive health, especially concerning young women. Keeping pregnant girls at school is a challenge that goes beyond the education sector. A holistic approach to young people is therefore essential and requires appropriate strategies.

Interview with **Saka Issa**, director of the Sirarou school in N’dali, Bénin

After the courses on gender equality for the teachers, what was implemented?

Saka Issa After the courses where we were able to benefit from LARES (Laboratoire d’Analyse Régionale et d’Expertise Sociale), we started to organise things differently. Up to then it had been the girls’ task to clean the classrooms and keep the director’s and the teachers’ offices in order. During the break they had to buy snacks for the teachers, which was sometimes an annoying chore because the girls didn’t get any break for themselves. Added to that there was the problem of sexual harassment when the girls were alone with the teachers.

After the courses with LARES we accepted that we had to change the conditions. Today the school is organised in such a way that female and male pupils can or must do the same things. Boys and girls sweep the classrooms, clean the director’s office and buy food for the teachers. Today the two heads of class are a girl and a boy, and statistics are gender disaggregated in order to allow a deeper analysis of performance at school.

What were the difficulties you encountered while implementing gender equality at your school?

It’s a balancing act, because if you encourage the girls and pay special attention to them during class, rumours that teachers are harassing the girls can arise quickly, and this can then become a reason to pull them out of school. So you have to be careful how you support the girls so as not to be misunderstood. But precisely because girls are sometimes very insecure and shy and don’t talk much in class, it’s important to take enough time to explain things to them. Because boys are often quicker to ask questions, teachers sometimes pay more attention to them.

Are there still inequalities in the classes?

Existing inequalities are at the expense of the girls. If the boys are discussing something at school, it’s enough for a girl to want to take part in the discussion for the boys to threaten her. Socio-cultural norms don’t allow a woman to speak up while men are talking. Added to that girls are over-burdened with housework while boys do their homework or can play with their friends. Often girls are not accepted in work-groups, because the boys believe that they won’t have enough time or aren’t intelligent enough.

The awareness-raising campaigns and the appeals of the NGOs, LARES among them, have improved the situation a bit despite everything. Today women and men speak together about necessary measures to be taken for local development, even if instances of violence against women and girls still occur.

Which measures have you taken at community level to eliminate inequalities?

In all communities taking part in the ASPEF-program there is an education committee and a parents-association who support each other. At the meetings and trainings of the committee experiences are shared and various topics discussed. The point is mainly to divide housework between children of both sexes, take action in instances of violence against girls and ensure the financial independence of mothers with school children.

Today the members of the CVE are equipped with the necessary knowledge to raise awareness of gender-based inequality in the population. With the strategy they have developed, members of the CVE were able to save ten girls, victims of forced or arranged marriages, sexual abuse or physical violence. CVE promotes healthy extra-curricular activities and encourages women to commit to the education of their children – girls and boys.

Nobody is expendable in the fight against gender-inequality in our society. Enhancing the abilities of everyone at community level is an essential factor for the successful outcome of the national strategy to promote gender equality.



Global Cooperation

Food and nutrition security: Women's role in agricultural innovation systems

Markus Bürlü

more and overall agricultural production would increase. The FAO (2011) estimates that yields on women's fields could increase by 20 to 30% which in turn could reduce the number of hungry people by between 100 and 150 million.

To understand why agricultural productivity is often lower for women, a broader understanding of the obstacles women face is needed. Women have limited access to a wide range of agricultural inputs including seeds and fertilizer, technological resources, equipment, and land. In addition, women often lack the capacity to deploy these resources. For example, women may have access to land but lack access to the fertilizer required to farm the land in a productive way or lack the knowledge of how to apply fertilizer properly. Furthermore, many non-tangible assets, such as social capital, human capital, rights, and decision-making power, are even more difficult for women to access. To improve women's access to land, water, inputs, markets, financial services, education and information has therefore to be a priority for all actors in agricultural innovation systems with the aim to improve food and nutrition security. Women should, however, not be considered as passive receivers of support says Willi Graf, Deputy Head Domain Regional Cooperation of the Swiss SDC. We know that they are essential carriers of knowledge for food systems and have a higher level of expertise than man. Knowledge on the adaptation of different crop varieties to different conditions, culinary and cooking properties of plants is an example. This knowledge is often underused because of discriminatory attitudes.

Increasing women's education and access to resources is a key way to reduce their constraints and increase agricultural production, which can improve food security at the household and higher levels. Making agriculture gender equitable will require a serious commitment to critical issues throughout the agricultural innovation system (IFPRI, 2011). If we look for example at the Consultative Group on Inter-

national Agricultural Research (CGIAR) with its 15 research centres around the world, it is possible to see how gender-sensitive research has developed over the past years. In the 1980s gender was addressed by a few projects only. Understanding gender relations, collecting gender disaggregated data and integrating gender sensitive indicators into research monitoring systems was the priority in the 1990s. Towards the end of the same decade, the CGIAR launched its Participatory Research and Gender Analysis and the Gender and Diversity Programmes. In the past 15 years, these two programmes demonstrated how crucial it is to involve women farmers in the research on improved varieties and how this increased the adoption of new varieties by women.

In SDC's support to the CGIAR, gender has always played an important role. In the years 2007/08 SDC contributed to the elaboration of the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) programme. AWARD is a professional development programme that strengthens the research and leadership skills of African women in agricultural science, empowering them to contribute more effectively to poverty alleviation and food security in sub-Saharan Africa. To date, 250 African women scientists from 11 countries have benefitted directly as AWARD fellows. More recently, in 2012, SDC was involved in the development of the gender strategy for the Aquatic and Agricultural Systems research programme. Based on the realization that past efforts to integrate gender into agricultural research and development practice have failed to address the inequalities that limit women's access to resources, a Gender Transformative Approach is used as the centre piece of the programme's gender strategy. This new approach seems to be promising as it goes beyond just considering the symptoms of gender inequality, and addresses the social norms, attitudes, behaviors and systems that underlie them.

Alongside its strong and gender sensitive support to agricultural research institutions, SDC also supports

rural advisory services (RAS). RAS play a critical role in terms of providing information to the users but also in providing innovation platforms that include all the actors of the agricultural innovation system, farmers, extension workers, researchers, private sector people – women and men. In 2011 the SDC network Agriculture and Food Security produced a brief on Targeting Women in Rural Advisory Services (RAS) based on the various experiences of SDC and its partners in the sector. It is understood that in general female clients are more comfortable in receiving information from other women than from men. However, globally only 15% of extension agents are women (in Africa 7%). The obstacles for an increased percentage of female extension workers are many. They include problems with the necessary mobility, cultural and social non-acceptance of advice given by women or just the traditional role models that do not allow women to work outside the household and their own farm. Nevertheless, the publication identifies approaches that allow overcoming this major constraint in reaching women with agricultural advice. Among them are the use of women's networks to spread information and knowledge material, or training married couples as extension workers to work together in providing information services to rural households.

Despite many efforts to better integrate gender issues into agricultural innovation systems, women are still heavily underrepresented and female producers still face strong disadvantages in terms of access to resources, input and output markets as well as information and education. In an era where food insecurity is tackled by a growing number of women smallholder producers, it is time for them to have equal access to these resources. Continued efforts to allow these changes are therefore needed in all spheres of the society, in research, politics, the private sector, civil society and in our thinking.

Of the total agricultural labour force, women account for between 20% in Latin America and 50% in Sub-Saharan Africa and East and South-East Asia (FAO, 2011). Particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa this percentage has increased in recent years due to conflicts, HIV/AIDS and migration and led to the so called feminization of agriculture with an increase of female-headed households. At the same time, many studies show that yields on plots managed by women are lower than those managed by men. This is not because women are worse farmers than men. Indeed, extensive evidence shows that women are just as efficient as men. They simply do not have access to the same inputs. If they did, their yields would be the same as men's, they would produce

Gendernet Face2Face

Fraubrunnen opens its doors for gender experts from the South and East

Evelin Stettler

In May 2012 Gendernet organized a f2f on Regional Development and methodical approaches. Which questions should be asked in order to get to know the situation of women and men in a community? What does the community offer to ease everyday life and care-work in households, are young people prepared for gender-specific challenges on the job-market? Are there any measures taken so that women can find work locally, maybe even open their own business, and children are taken care of? How can we find out what the needs of women and men in agriculture are? During a day SDC's gender focal points from over 30 countries observed the dynamics in the community of Fraubrunnen. The mayoress organized meetings with key people from the administration, the municipality, from associations and public services. The case study "Fraubrunnen" was interesting for the SDC-staff not only on a methodical level. Together they drafted projects on how gender equality in Fraubrunnen could be promoted through school projects, gender-sensitive budgeting and childcare, and then presented their findings to the community council.

Three participants recollect:

If you think of the Face-to-face (F2F) in Fraubrunnen now – what comes to mind? (Atmosphere, Impressions, Dialogues, Feelings, Highlights) Was there a moment of surprise for you during the F2F?

Zayasaikhan Dugeree (Mongolia): As a participant I much appreciated the very pragmatic approach and the way of organizing the F2F. We could see the reality from up close and gain insights into the specifically Swiss environment – mills, hairdresser etc. The surprising fact for me was that private-sector representatives were not gender sensitive, to the extent I had expected. The perception on gender issues in a Swiss farmer family was almost the same with that of a Mongolian herder family.

Habiou Koanda (Burkina Faso): Visiting the territory and the interview with the responsible person from the parent-teacher association and the impact of context on gender relationships impressed me a lot. Women's participation in politics is weak in Switzerland, the community we visited was an example for that, it's quite difficult for women to participate, like in Burkina Faso, but for different reasons. Issues on housework and social work don't arise in the same way.

Graciela Morales (Cuba): I consider that F2F is a very important tool for networking. As compared to people living on mainland, being a Cuban and living on an island maybe makes me need more exchange, more dialogue, more sharing with colleagues aspects related to strategies, purposes and factors that are necessary to be taken into account to attain gender equity. I would like to highlight the presentations made by the Offices on the first day, in which we discussed the diversity of problems in our countries, how the local frameworks are influencing the gender relations, and it was an excellent opportunity to learn together about methodologies for qualitative case studies as an important basis for gender sensitive cooperation.

How did the F2F add value to your working methodologies orland way of thinking in relation to development?

ZD: The most added value I see in the combination of theoretical inputs and practical sessions within the network event. The important change of F2F organization in 2012 was bridging common aspects covered by different networks at the same time: joint events of SDC Knowledge networks on Market for the Poor (M4P), Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) and Micro-insurance in agriculture. That confirms that the gender topic as transversal theme comes across all levels, geographical regions and different approaches, and we had the opportunity to explore cross-sector dynamics and interfaces in a community as a live context

HK: The f2f always reinforces my self-confidence and my commitment, because sharing experiences on case studies for instance allow me to revise the tools I have used so far and sometimes discover new ones. The f2f confirms the variety of entry-points to cover the issue of gender and the results and effects on the actors are always well defined. We're moving ahead, if only in small steps.

GM: It was very intense. We worked hard on methodologies and new instruments. For me it was a value-added aspect to my qualification as a National Programme Officer. Having the opportunity to talk to experts from the Central Office on topics related to the quality of credit proposals, and exchange ways to measuring equity, made a big difference in my work in the Cuba Office, and it was good to have the opportunity to "test" qualitative instruments in a Swiss rural community, although the realities are quite different.

Do you have a specific example where you could link the F2F experience/learning to your work?

ZD: The main outputs for me were the vigorous information exchange and social networking based on personal and institutional interactions. As a National Programme Officer having a portfolio composed of different projects and subjects, it was a unique opportunity to gain deeper knowledge and experiences in the topics covered during F2F events in one place at one time and even life in a community, where we could investigate gender realities in different fields. It was a kind of unique one-stop-shop for me!*

HK: This encounter helped my to better assimilate the requirements of quality management for the following monitoring in general and also for the gender monitoring. It also shows the complexity of having gender-sensitive tools and showing gender sensitivity in the final record. Case studies are an indispensable tool for better understanding of context and showing development in gender issues. Progress and changes concerning inequalities are not yet statistically significant enough.

GM: I had several learning experiences. The program was very well devised, including the sharing of our specific experiences, field visit, and sessions with experts and exchanges on the topic of public policies in other countries. The field visit was a very interesting learning experience for our country programme. In fact we try to deal with topics such as violence in schools, changes of roles in education, in employment, the topic of social security faced by senior adults in which women under very unequal health and economic conditions survive men. It was important to realize that in other countries, these same topics are dealt with as part of gender inequalities. Therefore this was an incentive to greater commitment in favour of equity, which in many occasions is not related to economic development, but to a cultural heritage and the institutionalization of a strong patriarchy imposing an ideology that raises male hegemony and minimizes women's role and masks (makes invisible?) its economic, political and social power.

* Explanation: The One-stop-shop provides the citizen/business an access to different kinds of public administrative services from a single entry point which helps save time and money to obtain a service. www.swiss-cooperation.admin.ch/mongolia/en/Home/Governance/One_Stop_Shop.

A big step in a long process

The founding of UN Women

Ursula Funk

The first important steps the UN took towards the equality of women and men – apart from the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 – happened decades ago.

In 1975 the UN proclaimed the “International Women’s Year” and organized the first UN World Conference on Women in Mexico on equality, development and peace. The UN general assembly takes on the conference’s world action plan to improve the position of women and declares 1976–1985 the U.N Decade for Women. As a consequence of the conference UNIFEM is established in 1976 to further the standard of life of women in developing countries. Three years later, in 1979, the U.N general assembly adopts the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW. At the World Conferences on Women in Copenhagen in 1980, in Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995, civil society organisations play an ever-bigger role. The U.N. declaration of the Goals for the Millennium distinctly demands the implementation of gender justice, and the promotion of women. Three out of eight millennium goals are especially relevant to gender equality. But the implementation of these efforts is progressing only slowly.

The U.N’s reform process brings a new dynamic to the situation. In 2004 the high-ranking group on U.N reform recommends strengthening the institutional structure of the U.N regarding women’s and gender equality, in order to present itself more consistently and to act more purposefully. After years of negotiation, in which Switzerland takes a very active part, and worldwide lobbying by women’s networks, the members of the U.N decide to create a new entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in July 2010: UN Women. The former president of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, becomes the first Undersecretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women.

By founding UN Women, resources and mandates are pooled in order to have greater effect. UN Women merge with 3 other UN entities: 1. Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), 2. Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI) and 3. International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

UN Women has a three-part mandate:

1. Supporting intergovernmental bodies like the Commission on the Status of Women CSW in formulating strategies, global standards and norms;
2. Supporting programs to reduce discrimination and gender-based violence as well as promoting laws on equality;
3. Coordinating measures for gender equality throughout the whole UN system.

UN Women has a mandate to hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality, including regular monitoring of system-wide progress. They work with Member States and civil society and provide suitable technical and financial support to help implement these standards.

Grounded in the vision of equality enshrined in the UN Charter, UN Women, among other issues, work for

- _ Empowering leadership of women and their political participation in decisions concerning their lives
- _ Economic empowerment of women, namely the most under-privileged
- _ Prevention of violence against women and girls and improvement of access to public services for victims and survivors
- _ Increasing the proportion of women in leading positions in areas such as peace, security and humanitarian action
- _ Taking into account of gender issues in state finance planning and accountability of state institutions concerning their commitment to gender equality.

Switzerland supports UN Women and is in constant dialogue on their institutional development as well as on strategic, financial and operative planning. To achieve the biggest possible impact, Switzerland also influences concrete projects and the procedures in the field, mainly thanks to SDC’s know-how.





The Men's Point of View

Temporarily unavailable...

Jacques Mader

In the country where I work, there is a “Ministry of Community development, Gender & Children”. How this “ménage à trois” does fit together provides some food for thought.

Gender sandwiched between community development and children, two “traditional women spheres”. Is gender here to reassert the value of what women contribute to the society and to the continuity of our species? Or is it to encourage the males to do their share in ensuring our common future? Or has it been placed here because it didn’t fit anywhere else, without deserving to be a fully-fledged separate Ministry?

Instead of speculating further, I decided to look at the Ministry website. It said: This website you were trying to reach is temporarily unavailable.

In a recent meeting chaired by a Representative of another Ministry, we discussed the process to define a new Health Care Financing Strategy. Nine different studies have been commissioned and are expected to propose options for the definition of this strategy. I asked how the gender impact of the different

options shall be assessed. In order to illustrate my point, I mentioned that we all know that women are the main clients of health services, but have often little say in decision-making about these services, less access to and control over resources and suffer from many different cultural barriers to access those services. On the other hand, males have less opportunities of contact with health services and a tendency to delay seeking care until it is critical, which results in less chances of detecting health problems and increased morbidity (e.g. on non-communicable diseases). So I concluded that we must make sure that the financing and payment options we propose are thoroughly analysed in order to prevent gender imbalance, and ensure that women and men get access to the service they need.

The bright young Chairwoman of the meeting told me that this issue would be taken care of, vulnerable groups would be considered anyway, and didn’t mention any concrete way of achieving that. Just waffle.

Where was the Gender Desk Officer, trained by the Ministry of Community development, Gender and Children, and posted in each of the Ministries of the Government? He or she was also temporarily unavailable.

It’s still a long (and crooked) way to gender equality.

„One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”

Simone de Beauvoir

Jean Michel Jordan

then became an active and genuine champion for change in gender relationships. Could it be that the beginning of an idea on gender and the pursuing of same makes us grow, and leads from indifference to active commitment? Could it be that one is not born a feminist, but can become one? I adopt Lamarck’s quote on the development of species – function creates the organ – and stand up for affirmative action, so that institutions on the whole and especially SDC engage fully in awareness-raising and further training – and why not compulsorily for the men – on all aspects of gender equality.

We actually often tend to regard measures promoting gender equality as feminist. We, committed and unconditional defenders of the Declaration of Human Rights, and especially its first article “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights,” are reluctant to reflect on our context and the functioning of our society, and to question the allocation of gender-based roles. Freedom and equality for all will only be effective at the end of this renewal.

At the beginning of 2009 I had the pleasure of joining the Gender Net in my capacity as program officer of the Africa Division, in order to represent the Humanitarian Aid section. This role offered the opportunity to acquaint myself with a set of issues, enlarge upon them, share ideas and experiences, and above all to commit to areas which I had previously often neglected. Distancing myself from these issues had not been intentional and not because of a lack of interest. It had more to do with hierarchic order, and it mirrors the conditioning of a man. My acquired maleness is surely decisive for setting priorities and choosing criteria for steering the programs in humanitarian aid. Gender aspects were not neglected in my work, they just weren’t part of my primary considerations.

This attitude has changed in the course of my commitment to the issue. At the beginning there was the readiness to learn. I began advocating the issue and

In the course of our work for SDC in Switzerland and elsewhere, we often operate in contexts that are characterized by injustice and inequality by which women are often strongly affected. We can and must take action. It is not for the discriminated and the victims to claim their rights, but for all of us to guarantee them!

Gender-awareness makes the difference

Felix Fellmann

10 years of gender strategy are cause for celebration. I think so too, as one who has always been closely linked to the issue, on the one hand in my Masters' studies in New Zealand, where I focused on this exiting research area, and on the other because gender equality is one of the most powerful factors for the impact of investments in development.

As a development practitioner I have committed and devoted myself to this issue for 15 years. During this time I noticed how difficult it was to awaken interest and commitment with women and men in the three contexts – Switzerland, Central America, Mongolia – where I worked. I scarcely encountered passion for this key issue, highly relevant to actors in development cooperation. In development-cooperation administrative tasks often dominate, so that gender issues are marginalized.

The breakthrough for a mainstreaming that deserves the term has only been achieved in Central America. The following elements made this possible:

_ High willingness on the management side, as little or nothing happens optionally! So "leadership is the key" a certain measure of pressure on all operational employees.

_ Financial resources to structure a process over several years, and enough time to introduce all staff, including the bosses, to the issue in an appealing way.

_ A modular format which is not limited in time as a process, and an exiting choice of methods that are used by passionate facilitators, whereby methods used playfully and a the spirit of "healthy competition" appealed the most, things should never be too abstract or boring.

_ Pressure is needed to achieve gender mainstreaming in all projects and to make the project management focus on indicators that inform us about change in gender relationships.

The process over four years began with a quota of enthusiasm of about 20 per cent and rose to eighty per cent in the fourth year. The capacity for enthusiasm was the same among women and men. Those who let themselves respond on an emotional level were better at implementing the development programs. Very clearly the issue of equality always has to be dealt with intensively – wherever – if we don't want to fall back into old stereotypes. But as promoters of integrative development we cannot afford a relapse!

Creating space

Giancarlo de Picciotto

In 1995 the President of Bolivia decreed administrative decentralisation and the opening of a well-stocked bank account for the council administrations. But the decisions about the use of this blessing had to be taken democratically, meaning women included. This was at a time when studies, approaches, demands and plans for integrating the gender-dimension in development cooperation were numerous, but did not produce much more than statements like "you know how it is, the whole world is changing, it will need time".

ProRural, a Bolivian NGO, facilitated functions on negotiations between the women and men in the villages of the Altiplano.

First all together on the village square (the women on one and the men on the other side), then a group debate (yes, the men amongst themselves and the women amongst themselves), and finally the negotiation, in which the concrete and measurable results – smart, aren't they? – should be worked out. 20 years later this experience is still with me: create a space in which all voices are heard, where all decisions are taken in the interest of the majority but the individuals don't miss out. This has stayed in my mind. In the office, in the exchange with our partners, in dialogue with my partner.

Insights into places of empowerment

Adrian Maître

What came to mind when Annemarie Sancar asked me to write something about Gender? My thoughts went back to some stages of my work and I remember the following:

Cusco 1988. We had arranged to set up an agronomic experiment involving maize and beans in a field the day before with Justino Currasco, a young Quechua farmer in the Valle Sagrado de los Incas. We – a Peruvian agronomist, two technicians from the “Los Andenes” research station, and myself as “associated expert” – drove to the edge of the field to start work. Then Justino came towards us and informed us calmly that we could not set up the experiment, as his wife wanted to plant quinoa in this field. We could carry out the experiment the following year.

For Justino this change of heart was nothing unusual, not even that he had to go back on his agreement. This event was equally unsurprising for my Peruvian colleagues, even though they would hardly ever have admitted that one of their shifts of opinion came about through talking to their wives. The campesinos and campesinas quechua share the responsibility for the family economy, even if “the speakers” to the outside are the men.

Cusco 1989. Genoveva Rodriguez Huamàn, a widow from the same hamlet as Justino, was unsettled. Her sons had advised against using the old varieties of beans, of which she had kept the seeds so meticulously. There was no reward for this work, they said, these varieties met with no demand in the market and one could eat the commercial varieties too. By an act of providence Genoveva then met Miriam Gamarra, a biologist from Cusco. Miriam was very interested in old domestic varieties and information on wild varieties of beans from farmers. She told me about Genoveva and we visited her together. Genoveva was visibly moved and proud to have a gringo as well as an ingeniera talking to her about her old seeds, and decided to plant the seeds again and to renew them.

In many places around the world where there are smallholdings women take care of the seeds and are, apart from the men, knowledgeable informants about the characteristics of seeds. Considering all we know, keeping old kinds of seeds is a wise decision, as well as renewing them from time to time. I was impressed to meet the wise Genoveva Rodriguez Humàn from the hamlet of Macai and will never forget her. The knowledge of farmers became the knowledge of a female farmer.

San Gil (Columbia), 1992. Several thousand farming families have adapted their production to altered market conditions. The acquisition of tobacco by the local industry has declined. A merchant from Medellín brought beans and asked the farmers if they could cultivate them. Somebody experimented with chicken manure for cultivating and ameliorating the soil. It worked. Suddenly 3000 hectares of land, which had never been cultivated before, could be used for the production of beans. The price for the beans was good, and there were

two harvests a year. A kind of “bean rush” set in. But then labour force became scarce. This was the actually scarce factor – not land, not credits, not seeds. Then the young, still unmarried women discovered an opportunity: cultivating beans. The model was to lease land at the same conditions the men did, get credit from the local cooperative, buy equipment and ...pay for lessons on the tractors as well as for labour for planting, weeding and harvesting. But what kind of labour? Their brothers’, brothers-in-law, cousins, neighbours’. The young women could then, as far as I saw, dispose of the net profit (return on sales minus credit and lease) themselves. According to reports, the profit was spent on education, nice clothes (sic!), travel, CD-players etc. The favourites were expenditures for education and savings accounts in the cooperative.

Because of economic possibilities and constraints, role models that were stable over a long period of time can change quickly. Young women don’t just do the housework and the unskilled agricultural work any more, they become entrepreneurs who take decisions and hire male workers. This is totally accepted in this societal context. But when I visited a farm and asked after the conditions of cultivating beans, the women still said that their husband/father/brother wasn’t at home at the moment and that he would be the one to know about these things, not they

Chinandega (Nicaragua) 2003. With the support of SDC a NGO working in the region had set up drinking-water-systems. A lot of this had been well planned and calculated, as was the consumption of drinking water for a family and the amount of water required. On the day of the inauguration of the systems the vegetable and fruit gardens had been smartened up and extended considerably. Drinking Water? Yes, but for the women it was also for watering their gardens. The family gardens surrounding the house can be cultivated safely and intensively and are grateful for additional water. They are a central element of the “economía de patio”, which is practised by women in rural Nicaragua and allows for a small but continuous income the whole year round, and continuously covers a part of the household needs. The women succeed in mobilizing their husbands for certain tasks (weeding, chopping) and do all the rest of the work themselves.

The “economía del patio” is not a spectacular discovery, but it is vital for rural families. And it is an expression of the economic role of women. It is a very visible sign of the invisible role of women. As a development agency we aim to have women profit from our work at least as much as men. Maybe we don’t effectuate this goal enough in all places. In Chinandega the women are taking it on themselves.

Bern, Central America Division, 2003 to 2007. The Division had defined reduction of poverty, empowerment, sustainability and gender equality as its four main goals. As part of the monitoring of the erstwhile regional strategy it was planned to make a statement concerning each of these aspects and then proceed to a meta-analysis. I had looked at all the reports, maybe 60 in all. I don’t remember individual ones. But the tenor across practically the whole period was the following: It was not possible to make gender-disaggregated statements on the impact, because the project was too new, the gender-approach had to be reinforced, statements on impacts were not easy to make, there was no adequate monitoring or description of a starting point etc. It was possible, on the other hand, to make statements about the inclusion of women in the project teams, at population level, in the use of sophisticated instruments (education, access to public services).

Several points were made in the course of the discussion. Expedient dealings with Gender need a plan and resources; some of the colleagues in the division, Ursula Läubli for instance, campaigned for that. An evaluation could not do much in the way of stating impact if the issue hadn’t been anchored in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the project. The omnipresent and eloquent resistance to effectiveness analysis might have been an expression of the discomfort that sets in when no effectiveness can be proven and this could be seen as a failure of the management, with all the negative consequences. But still many of us were aware that good and unfavourable changes for women and men were taking place, certainly for different reasons, but that assumptions had to be made on how SDC projects influenced this process. Therefore there is no other way than the monitoring and periodical assessing of gender disaggregated impact.

Dealing with gender-differentiated impact is a lesson for dealing with impact in general and accounts for quality in all development cooperation programs: looking at the population and the organisation, cumulative measuring of impact over periods of time, differentiated views on changes, understanding elements that are important for the steering of our programs, insights concerning the complexity of impact. We do this in order to contribute to positive change, to promote equality and to keep gender-inequality in check. That is a huge claim. That’s why we’ll be keeping up the energy to contribute to equality for a long time.

“Lesser Humans”: scavengers, cast and gender: “ultimately, it comes to the women”

Philippe Besson

When I saw the film, in 2000, I was dumbfounded. In Bangladesh, where I stayed from 1994 to 1999, we had tried to introduce gender analysis into our programming and the way we interacted with local partners. In Bangladesh, we would explore how to empower women in their household through microfinance, or social forestry. But this was different: there is a scene in the film in which an upper cast woman explains why it is only natural that “Bhangis”, as they are called, would clean her latrine. Later, a Dalit husband explained why and how he forced his newlywed wife into scavenging. Manual scavenging in India is a story of cascading discriminations, with a gender element: “Bhangi” wives are forced into scavenging by men, who compensate for their own humiliation by humiliating their wives. But there are also the upper cast women, who may themselves be discriminated in their own way; however, they show no sign at all of reflecting on what they impose on other women. Not a glimpse of solidarity or compassion there!

I know about the basic argument that gender discrimination is essentially different from other – exclusively social – kinds. But frankly, the day I saw the film, I was convinced that both sexes are capable of the worst, and the best, depending on where they sit on the social ladder, how they have been socialised. What saved me from total despair after seeing this film is that the “Bhangi” women interviewed actually practice a sort of dark humour; they are smart and impressive and analyse their situation very well. They’ll seize their chances, if they get any!

“Lesser Humans”* is a video on manual scavenging published in 1998. The producer is Stalin K, a human rights activist. He is the Co-Founder of DRISHTI-Media, Arts and Human Rights, Convener of the Community Radio Forum-India.

Manual scavenging is a caste-based and hereditary occupation for Dalits that is predominantly linked with forced labour; it was abolished by law in India in 1993, but the practice remains deeply entrenched. It is estimated that around 1.3 million Dalits in India, mostly women, make their living through manual scavenging – a term used to describe the job of removing human excrement from dry toilets and sewers using basic tools such as thin boards, buckets and baskets, lined with sacking, carried on the head.

* <http://video.ahrchk.net/lesser-humans.html>

“We are not interested in the average...”

Peter Sulzer

“We are not interested in the average, we’re interested in you.”

This slogan by a Swiss health insurance company encapsulates the main achievement of SDC’s Gender Strategy from my point of view. Fighting poverty effectively cannot remain at average level, but we need to question how it works on the level of each individual. Poverty does not concern the average. It is first and foremost the individual who is affected by poverty. Usually this is a consequence of discrimination and unequal chances for economic, social and political development. This is exactly what SDC’s gender strategy is targeting. It commits all staff to taking a close look and to ask themselves why two thirds of the poor are women. We must scrutinize the respective balances of power between women and men, rich and poor, and observe closely who is benefitting from SDCs projects and how they are doing so. The consequent claim of the principles of the gender strategy has contributed significantly to the effectiveness of our fight against poverty in the last ten years!

„Looking closer to home first...“

Peter Tschumi

«Gender equality is about the equal enjoyment by women and men of socially valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards with the aim that life chances of women and men became and remain equal. This calls for gender awareness in analysis and measures for mainstreaming in all interventions, for sex-disaggregated outcomes..“ is what a young female colleague said in a self-confident manner at a workshop for our new Myanmar country-strategy. Her speech was received with applause and sympathetic comments by the participants.

I am amazed at the institutionally practised routine with which the issue is treated by the staff. Even my critical inquiry after possible difficulties in implementation were answered almost unanimously with “there are inequalities in our society, but we have no problem to request and impose to our partners and we will get the information» .

Well, the theoretical knowledge on how to deal with the issue seems to be there – but my uneasy feelings linger: firstly because I see here in Myanmar how insufficient our monitoring-data from the projects are, and secondly because I know that gender equalities can not be dealt with by expert knowledge alone, but that changes in our personal attitude are also required. Are we, concerning this issue, as advanced as our institutional values and aims demand of us? Hardly, I think, when observing and reflecting on the daily goings-on in our office in Myanmar. Persistent, deliberate “keeping-at-it“ and continuing the work remain important. Setting an example yourself as a senior executive is probably just as important or maybe even more relevant and effective over time than being the “preacher“ of expert knowledge and supervising well-founded project documents – I still have to look closer to home first.





Institutional Changes and Experiences

Gender-equal development cooperation – a permanent challenge

Annemarie Sancar

In 2003 SDC's new Gender Strategy was published. Among other things, the following was stated: "The unequal balance of power between men and women and their unequal participation in decision-making are counted among the structural causes of social and political instability, which in turn lead to poverty. Reducing inequality between the sexes can contribute decisively to social justice and sustainable development." (Gender-Politik 2003, p3). Gender-equality is established at all levels of Swiss legislation. SDC can only fulfil its legal obligations if gender equality is a fundamental principle and goal of all interventions. Equal participation of women and men contributes to sustainable development as much as gender-budgeting does.

The latter corresponds to a measure of the National Action Plan of the fourth UN Women World Conference in Beijing (1995). It recommends clarifying to what extent women can benefit from public finances and what measures could be taken to make public funds equally accessible for women. The reasoning was that the access of women to financial resources plays a key role. In Switzerland women contribute 50 billions (Swiss francs) in unpaid household work. But still any claims of women which have consequences on state budgets are rejected because of the cost, as the argument goes. "Transparency about the application of funds by and for women or men is an important pre-requirement for the equal access to financial resources, which can best be guaranteed by non-discriminative state budgets." (Federal Office for Equality of Women and Men, Bern, 1999). In 2005 SDC launched a gender-budget-initiative, with which their own expenditures are now

analysed on gender-specific impacts. The annual progress report provides regular information on the gender-sensitivity of the planning and implementation of the projects. The Gender-Net discusses the report first and identifies weak points as well as measures to be taken. Projects which stimulate local economies and should give women a chance to participate in the labour market or in a value chain always have to keep an eye on the burden of women time-wise, and support appropriate measures in the area of care-work and helpful infrastructure. It is known that time can be a scant resource, that although women like to be gainfully employed, they are still held responsible for feeding and caring for the children and elderly members of the household, that women are more affected by any cuts in public services in the health and education sector and that the cutbacks in public services amplify poverty in low-income households. But the courage to implement, the political will to campaign for better conditions in the care-economy even against the general public is lacking. Gender mainstreaming has brought a lot, but with these instruments there is little change in the structures which make life hard for women remaining in precarious situations. Today it is clear that economic growth strengthens many women in their rights. But this does not automatically lead to more equality, because to achieve that the distribution of money and work especially in unpaid care-work would have to change.

SDC has repeatedly initiated useful developments by enabling a broad view which sought the causes of inequality. There are always setbacks, which is why gender mainstreaming is never finished, because gender is probably the most widely spread category of exclusion and discrimination. 10 years of conscientious implementation of the SDC Gender Strategy has achieved much, acquired knowledge is rooted in the Gender-Net and the sharing of experiences has led to a gender-sensitive society. On this basis SDC will continue to commit to the idea of the strategy, which is perceiving equality between women and men as a core task of its mission and implementing it accordingly with all due earnestness.

Gender equality – where are we today?

Four women from SDC in conversation

Annemarie Sancar
in conversation with
Marylaure Crettaz
Lisa Magnollay
Alexandra Sagarra
Nathalie Wyser

What happened to the insight that gender issues can only be addressed if there is useful information about women and men? Why is it so difficult to get across that the systematic implementation of the gender-strategy also leads to better results and higher impact of our interventions? What gets in the way of the claim to refer our goals to good gender analysis and gender-disaggregated data? Systematic is lacking, often knowledge as well. Or is it just a symptom of fatigue, in the sense of "many years of Gender-Mainstreaming without success?" Maybe men still don't feel affected enough, maybe it's because so many complex correlations come to light when seen through the gender lens that they make us recoil.

Often the understanding of Gender, of gender-specific equality remains too abstract, too ideological and not based enough on the relevance of effectiveness. Because actual fact is that the economic benefit is better if women and men are equal. Gender equality serves a balanced development of society. But there is a lack of knowledge, of quantitative reflexion on the conditions of what equality means and what changes when we progress with it. So it's all the more important to collect relevant data in order to understand what's going on and to bring actions in line with these findings. But reflexion is usually not encompassing enough, because there is actually enough data, but the connections are not made. There is not enough practice. Gender-projects can be useful, because one is forced to understand gender-specific realities. But we must be careful when we use women as key persons, as "door-openers" into communities or groups. It is

often easier to gain information through women, they have a lot of knowledge on everyday life and often describe the goings-on more precisely than men. But this can become a trap, at times when we heap more work upon the women, rob them of their precious time which they need so urgently for care-work, for self-subsistence, for the upbringing of their children. Experience shows that gender-projects are compelling us to work with local organisations, which are committed to equality between women and men in their society. The awareness which is generated by this kind of projects gives us deep insights and understanding of gender-specific balances of power in situ. This understanding improves the quality and the effectiveness of all of our projects.

Concerning operational equality a lot has been achieved, for instance the flexibility of working hours and of work models. But we have to communicate the advantages more clearly, because it is still mostly the women who work part-time or work from home one day. Men should also do this. With this flexibility the organisation can promote the diversity of life circumstances, so that it will become normal that women and men combine their responsibilities at work and at home to their full satisfaction.

Without the pioneer work of our female predecessors we wouldn't be where we are today. They have achieved much from with our generation is now benefitting. Now we need to go on. There is still room for improvement, and the remaining challenges – also those of a structural nature – must be met by women and men together. It's important that men participate just as much as women, that they too choose different models of working hours, different goals and do not shy away from spreading gender-expertise. We need new forms, new vigour, more work with men as partners, as informants on the daily life of women and men, on gender relations and how they characterize the context. This can happen in the field, but also in the organisation or at home. There is still much to achieve – let's do it!

Knowledge on gender as a resource

An expert from Bénin reports

**Yvette Onibon
Doubogan**

For ten years I had worked in an office that specialized in decentralisation and market analysis in the region of South-western Africa. I acquired Gender competencies in research, but always questioned what politics was going to do with our research results. I had the feeling of doing unfinished work, which spurred me into action. So I grabbed the opportunity when the Swiss Cooperation Office in Bénin was looking for local staff. My entry point was Gender, but I had the opportunity to work in other areas of development cooperation and to acquire new skills. The years I spent with SDC, implementing SDC's Gender Strategy, have convinced me that equality between men and women in development processes improves the living conditions of households permanently and thus contributes to poverty reduction.

I had already been part of the team at the cooperation office when we devised SDC's Gender Strategy in 2002. We were supposed to be flexible and contextual and above all we wanted to include the local partners in order to develop approaches and instruments which would do justice to the big challenge of promoting gender equality. Until 2003 we worked on appropriate conditions to enable an efficient implementation of the gender strategy. We started the process with a gender-training session for our staff and that of our partners, with two important results: on the one side a common un-

derstanding of the gender-concept and the steps towards its implementation was achieved. On the other, everybody involved gained more sensitivity for the necessity of reducing inequality between men and women.

We then developed the strategic lines along which we were going to approach challenges in areas like education of girls and women, craft, agriculture, communication and decentralisation.

The instruments for implementation were adapted to the context-specific features concerning gender. Three aspects took main stage: Gender as a transversal issue should be applied everywhere. But specific action is needed if the inequalities are great, especially concerning the education of girls, participation of women in decision-making processes or illiteracy. Finally political dialogue at every level is necessary to be able to meet the challenges of development cooperation. During my work as coordination officer for the Gender Group in the West-Africa-Division of SDC I had the opportunity to compare the various gender strategies. Generally this group was a niche where we learnt together, shared experiences and developed our ideas.

In 2010 we took stock and were able to ascertain that inequalities between women and men in education, health, craft and local governance were reduced. SDC also committed to more juridical gender equality at national level, to the integration of gender-aspects in the country-strategies of the nationwide and sectorial fight against poverty. Many challenges remained. Many questions linger. How can we measure the impact of our actions concerning the reduction of inequality in qualitative and quantitative ways? Which influence do these changes have on the social paradigms, which define the relationships between women and men? Does the status of women really change with their access to education? What do they actually gain from economic independence? Which real influence do women have on national and local politics regarding equality, when they take part in decision-making processes? During my time with SDC I learnt three fundamental things. The implementation of the gender strategy depends on the one hand on the commitment of the directors of a cooperation office, on the readiness to delegate and to provide the necessary finances, so that this approach can be brought to bear. On the other hand it is vital to understand Gender in a context, based on the lifestyle of the people who should benefit from the projects, on their difficulties and experiences. The social context, economic and political circumstances in which we work are the frames of reference, and it's important to conduct actions together. Finally I realised how important cooperation between partners, various actors in development cooperation, government agencies and local groups is, in order to avoid working along two lines or having interventions create conflicts rather than improving the conditions of life.

Gender equality in SDC – a long road

Chrystel Ferret

in cooperation with
Anne Zwahlen and
Françoise Lieberherr

At the end of the 80s SDC decided to do more against the inequality between women and men. Development cooperation was then characterized by two trends: on the one hand by "Women in Development" (WID) an approach going back to the European women's movement, which expressed itself mainly through the Convention on Women's Rights, on the other hand by the "Gender and Development" (GAD) – approach, devised in the USA, which put the relationships between the sexes at the heart of the Gender issue. SDC decided on a concept based on the latter, the goal being the integration of this issue in all the activities of the organisation through an appropriate strategy: a mixed working group, in-house trainings, developing concepts and finally support from the sectors in order to align programs to the reduction of gender-based inequalities. The first reference document was released in 1993, a small flyer with four pages, purple writing on grey paper titled "For a balanced Development between women and men". This title had been proposed by the erstwhile director, because one wanted to avoid the term "equality"; the term should be innocuous, not provocative but still precise. The document should be short, so that it would be read – by the most curious as well as the most sceptic among us. It showed the rough outline of the gender-strategy, which related to the principles and values of SDC's work and its identity.

Ten years later, at the beginning of 2000, there were still in-house trainings, but the implementation of the programs advanced but slowly. The issue had become politically correct and nobody dared criticizing the approach openly. "Copy-paste" became omnipresent, all documents contain a sentence about Gender and its meaning, but there is rarely information on what this would mean specifically. It was clear that only a handful of committed people promoted the issue inside SDC – mainly women – but luckily some men as well. But the question, how exactly equality between women and men should be promoted from planning to the final report remained pressing. Because of all the difficulties it was tempting to leave the question aside and hide behind expressions like "the choice of partners" or the "cultural context".

Staff and partners needed the means to react to this question. This was finally the reason for deciding to devise the "Equality in Practice"-toolkit: simple, concrete, an answer to all questions at all levels. SDC was able to draw on the technical and methodical competencies of the gender-experts from the Development Planning Unit of the London University College.

Editing the guideline offered the opportunity to reinforce and specify the principles of promoting gender equality at institutional and operational level. In 2003 the second strategic document, the "Gender-Strategy", was published. With this strategy another breakthrough was achieved, because thereby responsibility for the implementation of the gender-strategy could be established. The responsible places have been liable to report their actions in promoting gender equality regularly for ten years.

In June 2003 SDC organized an encounter for the launch of the gender strategy, a gender-face-to-face, where around 50 people from the central office met with about 20 people from the field. The diversity of experiences brought out a lot of energy, but at the same time the same difficulty – how to defend an issue that got so little estimation – arose. So the representative from Bhutan was one of the few men... and he was wearing a dress.

At the public event at the end of the meeting the former federal councillor and then director of the department, Micheline Calmy-Rey, formally launched the Gender-Strategy of SDC. We had scrupulously prepared a speech, which should point out the key importance of including both sexes in the fight against inequality. All the bigger was our disappointment, when she began her speech with "Dear women..." and this after we had put so much effort into having 30% men in the audience.

Even if we have many positive examples of progress in the fight against gender-specific inequalities, the gender-strategy – another ten years later – is still a red-hot issue, and the commitment to its implementation is as necessary as before; everywhere and always, in Switzerland and in the world.

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