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Evolving the gender agenda – men, gender and development organisations

Prepared by
James L. Lang*

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James L. Lang
Jameslang@supermail.com
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Enhancing gender equality: the responsibilities and challenges for development organisations

Organisations in general play a pivotal role between the individual and their societies at large – and have the potential to be at the cutting edge of gender transformation. More specifically, development organisations have a unique mandate in overall efforts to achieve gender equality. On the one hand these organisations, especially multi- and bi-laterals, help shape policy discussions and create more gender equitable policy frameworks for governments. On the other hand, many development organisations are also implementing programmes and projects of their own, in cooperation with various partners and beneficiaries. Many organisations have a wide reach and influence in settings were there are still few examples of equitable public cooperation among women and men. They intervene in circumstances where people are living in poverty, are vulnerable and or in emergency situations – and can show how more equality and flexible gender roles and help alleviate these factors.

Development agencies have an obligation not only to help set the development policy agenda by connecting gender equality to other development goals – but they also have to "do it" – to nurture more equality through their programming and show their partners how this is possible. Charged with the task of advocating for and modelling gender equitable practices, development organisations must start internally with their own policies, staff and organisational culture.

For development organisations, one outcome of gender mainstreaming is to transform the organisation into one operating with the knowledge that development and its discrete goals such as poverty reduction or violence prevention are not possible without gender equality. Recognizing that these goals are inseparable also means acknowledging that gender equality is not a "women's issue" but rather an integral component of a comprehensive human rights and development agenda adhered to by both men and women. Consequently, gender equality becomes an imperative instilled within the thinking and behaviours of all staff (male and female), and a defining element of the 'culture' of the organisation.

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[1] This paper is based in part on the author's observations and interviews with staff of GTZ, Oxfam GB, UNDP, UNICEF, and WFP. Thus, the term "development organisation" used in this context is referring to multi-lateral, bi-lateral, and large international NGOs, not local level CBOs. The case study on the UN working group contains additions and edits from Alan Greig, Sarah Murison, and Geoffry Prewitt.

This focus on organisational 'culture' is important to note, given the role that organisations play in mediating between the macro and micro levels, between individual experience and structural conditions. The literature on the gendered nature of organisations suggests that, as organized sites and arrangements of power, they typically reflect and reinforce the social hierarchies and inequalities of power that structure the lives of individuals. In most organisations, as in most societies, such power is male. This is as true of development organisations as it is of any other type of agency

Some constraints to more men's involvement in gender work

Structural
Gender mainstreaming, then, poses particular challenges to development organisations, and especially to the men working within them. While their external - and often rhetorical - mandates commit such agencies to working for gender equality within a framework of human rights and human development, their internal functioning too often reflects the patriarchal norms and practices that serve to maintain gender inequality and hinder development. Individual male development practitioners may commit themselves to gender equality, but they work within organisations whose entrenched cultures and 'deep structures' too often embody male privilege.

Another structural issue has to do to with the attitudes and responsibilities of staff as determine by the instrumentalist/"pragmatic" approach vs. a rights-based/"principled" approach to development operations. Despite the rhetoric and commitments made to gender equality, development organisations have to get on with their work of implementing projects, intervening in emergency situations, and achieving objectives within short funding cycles. Managers are accountable for the results of their projects – often measured by tangible "outputs" such are numbers of people schooled, fed, trained, or accessing health care. With these pressures, project and programme managers and their staff may feel that a rights-based, gendered approach to implementing and measuring their work is too long term, difficult to show results and inadequately funded.

Organisational policies
For some development agencies, organisational and human resources policies do not yet reflect the flexible gender norms central to good development practice. For example, there are still cases where paternity leave, sexual harassment, and flexible work/child care policies for are not accepted corporate policies for development agencies. Additionally, "gender competency" is often not a hiring requirement for new recruits, nor are gender skills and attitudes systematically developed through longer term staff development programmes. In a few cases, the majority of senior management positions are still filled by men, and "affirmative action" for hiring women is an issue that can cause tensions among women and men staff.

Even when strong gender-informed policies do exist, they are often not implemented, or not taken advantage of, due to the prevailing cultural climate. For example, in an organisational climate that equates "hard work" with "being at your desk" – some staff may find it hard to take advantage of flexible hours, some men may feel hesitant to take paternity leave, or other staff flex time, as they perceive it may send the message that they are not serious about their work.

Personal and interpersonal

Related to the general issues of organisational culture and structures, there are personal and interpersonal constraints. Despite the fact the many women and men see men's involvement as a positive way forward for achieving equality - there is still resistance on the part of a few men and women to increased involvement of men. For clear reasons there are hesitancies on the part of some women to welcome men into the struggle for gender equality. For example, concerns exist that men will manipulate the gender discourse for their own agendas, or that resources earmarked for the advancement of women will now be diverted to a focus on men and boys. More tacit resistance may have to do with the nature of these new partnerships required by more male involvement. The realm of gender was once a sanctuary for women in a world dominated by men – and more involvement of men necessitates power sharing and compromise within this one area where women were once sole proprietors.

For some men resistance to greater men's involvement is rooted in the fact that it entails a greater focus on *their* gender and how their own privileges are maintained. One supposed privilege of gender inequality for men is the relative invisibility of their gender. This invisibility is a means for maintaining privilege by obscuring the mechanisms that construct and perpetuate inequality. If we do not talk about men and gender we will not understand men's positions and privilege – and thus be able to outline men's responsibilities in work towards gender equality. Also, some men may feel that women often are more articulate in and/or dominate conversations about gender. For some men gender is perceived as "women's space" –and thus they may feel intimidated discussing gender issues with women.

Furthermore, in circumstances when more men and women would like to increase men's involvement there are few opportunities, and few past experiences to draw from. Even within progressive development organisations, there are few opportunities for men to talk to other men about gender issues and/or for men and women to have an open dialogue about the positive and negative consequences of deeper partnerships for gender equality. For organisations, few lessons or "good practices" exist for increasing men's involvement while at the same time airing the concerns of both women and men instigated by such changes.

Partnership building for more gender equality is a process of negotiating more equal voice, participation and decision-making. It is thus a process of reconstructing power relationships for better outcomes. The term 'partnership' is used widely in development discourse, both optimistically and euphemistically. Such usage is usually accompanied by assumptions of shared goals and core values held among the partners. By unpacking the term partnership and understanding it as a process, it becomes clear that partnerships do not begin and end with perceived mutual interests. The starting point for partnerships is not an equal playing field. In their role of increasing men's involvement in gender equality, development organisations can be more explicit about this process and the consequences of partnerships.

A Case Study - the UN Working group on Men and Gender Equality

The "UN Working Group on Men and Gender Equality" was an informal working group that grew out of gender mainstreaming processes at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the late 1990s. The working group was comprised of both men and women – mostly staff from UNDP, UNICEF and other New York based UN agencies.

The working group attempted to enhance gender mainstreaming within UN New York based organisations by raising awareness around men, masculinities and gender, and by challenging men to think about the connections between gender equality and their personal and professional lives. The group was an advocacy and sensitisation effort that encouraged the UN entities to be more self-reflective concerning their organisational cultures. It also encouraged a closer look at masculinities to help understand the biases and barriers hidden behind policies and practice, so that UN bodies could get on with the work of achieving their development goals in a fashion informed by a more holistic and more widely understood and accepted notions of gender.

On the analytical level, the group advocated for the incorporation of "masculinities" into gender analysis and the incorporation of men into work towards gender equality to strengthen United Nations gender equality efforts overall. In practice the group primarily took shape as an advocacy and awareness raising initiative. At its inception, the group released a statement to all UNDP employees both at the headquarters in New York and its country offices throughout the world, reaching over 5000 staff. The key concerns raised in "*Gender Mainstreaming: A Men's Perspective*" consisted of:

> ***"Fear:*** *Men are often fearful when first presented with a gender mainstreaming agenda. The advancement of women may be perceived as a threat to men's personal and professional status. This may be buttressed by anxiety about ridicule or compromised masculinity if one is widely perceived as an advocate of gender equality.*

Lack of experience: Men recruited by UNDP, and a majority of those already working for the organisation, do not have experience -- whether academic or professional -- on related gender issues. Concurrently, it is frequently women who are recruited or appointed to handle gender concerns, regardless of their expertise. Therefore, any meaningful dialogue on gender equality and the role of men and women in gender mainstreaming could be viewed as disunited from a common agenda.

Organisational culture: UNDP's organisational culture is a product of accumulated legacies that can maintain inequalities between men and women. An absence of incentive structures for staff to view gender equality as integral must be confronted and institutional acceptance of a "zero tolerance" policy toward sexual harassment is imperative."

Through its awareness raising events, the group focused on the importance of delineating a correlation between gender equality, sustainable human development and poverty reduction. One reason why it was perhaps comparatively easy, at first, for men to discuss gender as development issue openly and with both women and men – was the professional aspect ("part of our job"), an institutional mandate and goal – but this was not necessarily challenging personal beliefs and behaviours. A basic question that inspired the formation of the working groups was: "If gender equality is necessary for human development and related development outcomes, why are so few men in development organisations working on gender issues?" The preliminary answer was a combination of the structural and institutional. But, the solution – a way forward - started with the personal.

Many of the men who formed the working group indicated that their commitment to, or interest in, gender equality arose from two related sources. The first was a commitment to human rights and equality as valid political principles on which development work must be founded. The second was their observation of the inferior treatment and consequent struggles of their mothers and sisters, and especially their hopes and aspirations that their daughters' lives would be different. Thus, men's participation in these discussions demonstrated the truth of the maxim that "the personal is political," and that potential for transformation exists within this connection.

To the extent that men in the group were able to generalize from the personal family experiences of individual women to the political reality of female subordination in patriarchal societies, they were able to comprehend the value of social action for change. For some it was also true that they were able to understand better how gender roles - modelled within their households for their own children to observe and learn from - were part of the arena for social change, as were the gender relations within their workplaces.

The women in the group were gender advocates who saw the potential advantages of more involvement of men – and were willing to experiment with working more closely with men. These women in turn became strong advocates for the group with other, more sceptical women. Overall the group's membership was primary men – but women in key positions were vital for the existence and financing of the group. The women who played key "behind the scenes" roles in the group from the various UN gender units saw it as strategic that men in the group play more pubic roles – as their shared messages were strengthened coming from a new, male messenger.

During key intervals, it proved vital for men to talk only with other men, and for each individual to feel comfortable in this space. For example, in initial conversations about attitudes and behaviours within the workplace, and the subsequent personal level/self awareness discussions, the group was more comfortable starting the discussion only with men. This enabled men to "let down their guard" articulating and affirming that they did not necessarily conform to dominant models of masculinity and did not condone sexist and patriarchal behaviours.

After these men-only discussions, and some level of self-realization, it was easier to discuss these issues with women. Another relevant point that emerged was the generational divide between younger and older men. The majority of men involved were from a younger generation, and the working group made some efforts to attract both older men and senior management.

Thus, over time both internal/personal and external/organisational issues were identified as priorities and challenges. The external issues involved the position of the United Nations vis a vis the outside world - and how it could better advocate for work towards gender equality with governments, bi-laterals, and other development partners. The United Nations and its agencies have mandates committed to gender equality and human rights. Yet staff behaviours do not always reflect the values to which the organisations for which they work are committed.

Staff members of development organisations bring to their organisations not only expertise in the development field, but also the legacies of diverse value systems and cultural norms that often are grounded in hierarchical systems of power and entitlement. Many staff, including senior management, are not only in positions of privilege within the UN, they also come from privileged backgrounds. Many of these backgrounds or cultural settings also enforce strict gender hierarchies. Thus personal reflection around gender issues can also lead to more reflection about one's one privilege and how that privilege is created and maintained.

Some findings

Over the course of two years during the height of activity, from early 1999 to December 2000, a number of lessons were learnt through the process of establishing the working group and thinking about gender transformation within UN organisations. Several of these are summarized below.

- Institutions are comprised of individuals, each of whom contributes residual norms and behaviours from their own life to the "culture" of an organisation. In addition, institutional cultures are shaped by the explicit mandates and governing principals.
- By changing attitudes of men and women at a personal level, perceptible shifts in organisational culture and gender relations can emerge.
- Gender reflection on the personal level can inform the professional, and vice versa. Both internal and external analysis and reflection are necessary.
- Greater gender self-awareness and shared professional goals both lead to partnership building between women and men. Exploring concepts of gender equality and development in terms of achieving goals and also deconstructing personal gender behaviours, beliefs and constraints encourages deeper partnerships among and between different groups of men and women.
- Within organisations, safe, comfortable and at times separate spaces are needed for both men and women to discuss the political, personal and organisational dimensions of gender.
- Although the working group may have increased understanding concerning institutional constraints and how men and women fit into the development process, it lacked the scope and resources to function at the hands-on project level. Thus, there are still many programmatic issues to be addressed to add to this learning. Another way to mainstream men into gender mainstreaming is to design, implement and monitor better development projects based upon a gender analysis that includes the particular needs and positions of both men and women. This is the work that development organisations are created to do, the reason for their existence, and potentially a strong complement to the efforts of the working group to encourage organisational change.

Recommendations

To evolve the gender agenda by including men and boys continued work is needed on a number of fronts within development organisations: conceptual clarity, enhanced programming, and modelling more gender equitable behaviours and partnerships among women and men. For development organisations, with their unique positions as mediators between societies and individuals, advocating for more equality through example – in addition to words – is a crucial way forward.

Conceptual clarity
There are at least two areas that deserve greater conceptual clarity within and through the work of development organisations: the uses of masculinities, and what is meant by men's involvement.

In the past ten to fifteen years there has been a lot of talk about masculinities. More and more men are understood and understand themselves as gendered beings and "masculinity" is understood and discussed as something dynamic. Understanding men's gender – their expected roles, relations and positions as men – can help engage them more naturally in efforts to achieve equality and reduce poverty.   The differences among individual men and the disjuncture between dominate masculine messages and the reality of men's lives is a basic starting point to begin to discuss what gender has to do with men – and how more options of behaviour and relations for men and women will be beneficial for individuals and societies.

Simply put, mainstream notions of what it means to be a man in many societies are often in direct opposition to those behaviours, ideas and beliefs that are more gender equitable and beneficial for women and men. This holds true for male staff of development organisations as well. However, in the struggle for gender equality explorations of masculinities are not an end but part of a process – eventually the goal is to make gender automatically understood as both men and women - and to programme accordingly.

Exploring masculinities is an informative exercise for development practitioners on a personal and professional level, but in the end it also has to be put into practice. To inform programming, the gender and men conversation may start with understanding masculinities but should progress to a focus on the gendered outcomes, structural inequalities and how to overcome them with the inclusion of men.

In addition, today there are many example and opportunities for men's involvement in gender equality, but still some confusion about what "men's involvement" actually means. In short, men's involvement does not mean working with men in lieu of the empowerment of women, or working with men to suppress the voices of women. For simplicity's sake, men's involvement in gender equality can be categorised into three broad areas:

- *Working with men as decision makers and service providers* - for example, working with male policy makers and community leaders around violence against women, or working with male staff in development organisations to become more active in gender mainstreaming activities.

- *Integrating men into the development process with a "gendered lens"* - including project design, implementation and evaluation.   As opposed to

working solely with women, "gender" projects that focus on the empowerment of women may be strengthened by the inclusion of men - taking into account their relations and positions within families and communities.

- *Targeting groups of men and boys when and where they are vulnerable* - the lack of a gendered analysis of men and boys causes some problems to be overlooked by development organisations that are specific to men. These include, for example, young men in conflict situations, or men and boys dealing with unemployment, drug use or sexuality issues.

Enhanced programming

There are several arguments and assumptions for involving men more systematically in the gender equality dimensions of development programming. For example, in most cases, decision-makers in project communities are mostly men. Some project experiences indicate that men can subvert development efforts focused on women's empowerment if efforts are not also made to engage men in the process. In poverty/vulnerability analysis, investigations into the household economy, common resources, markets, social capital and social networks quickly reveal that men's economic roles, beliefs and behaviours have as much to do with the change process as do the livelihoods skills, knowledge and opportunities for women. The mutual interests of both men and women are at stake.

A framework for working with men within development programming can be outlined in a multi- stepped approach.

1) Starting with an engendered social/economic analysis with an emphasis on both women and men's roles and behaviours.
2) Designing projects with an iterative sequence of activities that builds the gender competence of partners, with attention to the pre-existing gender dynamics, and with outcomes that reflect both enhanced gender equality and other concrete changes.
3) During implementation, project interventions and interactions can be used as an opportunity for modelling behaviours of equal participation and decision-making among women and by men.
4) Measuring impact in terms of changes in knowledge, attitude and practice

The process begins with bringing men more fully into gender analysis by looking at the positions, privilege and vulnerabilities of men and boys in addition to those of women and girls. It requires a better understanding of masculinities and how they are used to both privilege and constrain men and boys. Secondly, better programming is informed by an understanding of why working with men and gender equality will improve people's lives. How can the incorporation of men make programming better and reaching development goals more attainable? This involves an exploration of the benefits for men and women of greater

equality and options for behaviour – including the economic, social and personal benefits.

Furthermore, better programming requires and understanding of how to work with men, and which men. There is wide variety of entry points and opportunities for working with men – both in terms of thematic areas of intervention (health, violence against women, work, parenting), and with different men and boys as allies and partners. This requires a strategic assessment of which men or boys may be vulnerable and which men may be potential allies in the development process.

Modelling equitable behaviours
Another way development organisations can help in the gender transformation process is through modelling gender equitable behaviours at institutional and project level, and by sharing with partners the benefits of these behaviours and policies.

Organisational policies
Development organisations have long-term relationships with governments, civil society partners and individuals. Through these relationships, they can set the standards for how an equitable organisation is structured and behaves, and how gender equality can be encouraged in societies in general. As the standard bearers for rights and equality, development organisations show by example, through partnerships, how to "walk the walk" not only "talk the talk".

One way to do this is to implement and publicise organisational policies that nurture more gender equitable norms – such as gender competencies for staff, paternity leave, flexible work hours, child care facilities, and enforced sexual harassment policies.

To have these policies take hold in organisations is important that more senior management, particularly men, become involved to champion the cause of gender equality. In institutions that have a historical legacy of risk aversion, staff tend to avoid embracing new causes until supervisors or top management support these processes and initiatives. Male managers as positive, gender self-aware role models are critical to changing attitudes of those that may be unsure or ambivalent about new policies.

For larger international organisations, gender-teams, units or gender focal-point networks should be comprised of both women and men – and the personal gendered dynamics of these teams should be discussed in different arenas. Thus, these organisations can also establish venues for men to talk to other men about gender issues, in addition to men and women discussing together. Both men and women need their own spaces to discuss what can be very personal and difficult issues.

Project implementation
Considering the changes project and programmes bring to the lives of individuals, it is clear the "project site" can be a space of gender transformation. Yet, examples of gender equitable behaviours and participation do not necessarily occur often in project locations. Thus, project implementation is a strategic moment for modelling gender equitable behaviours.

Throughout the project cycle, project mechanisms and interactions - such as initial appraisals and assessments, project officer visits, partner contracts and memorandum of understanding, training sessions, project oversight boards, and monitoring tools - can be further refined to instil more equal participation in activities and decision making among women and men, and also in the longer-term to transform gendered behaviours ideas and beliefs for more lasting changes.

In short, project intervention can be an excellent opportunity for learning, modelling and partnership building for gender equality. Equitable principals can be instilled into the processes, documentation, and monitoring of the project and sequenced in an iterative fashion by men and women staff of development organisations. Thus, programme officers, trainers, extension officers, etc, need the gender training and awareness to conduct every interaction as a behaviour modelling exercise. Ideally, teams consisting of women and men will visit with project partners and beneficiaries to display flexibility of gender roles, equality of voice and decision-making, and the benefits of partnership.

In the end, the key for development organisations is evolving men and women's choices and roles, making them more flexible to reduce poverty and vulnerability. Development organisations have a role, and responsibility, to set the standard.