

## Gender mainstreaming versus gender specific strategies

Workshop facilitators: Betty Lallie and Felicite Rwemalika

**This workshop focused on exploring strategies for women and girls' empowerment. Gender mainstreaming and gender specific approaches were compared. To discover existing perceptions and start from common ground the following questions were discussed:**

- **What is the difference between gender and sex?**
- **What is 'gender mainstreaming'?**
- **What is 'gender specific'?**
- **What is 'empowerment'?**
- **What is the goal of women empowerment?**

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Bettie Lallie has a strong understanding of gender issues. She worked in South African communities for the NGO SCORE for many years, coaching community leaders and developing the organization. SCORE is a South African community development organization that uses sport and physical activity as a medium of development. Gender issues play an important role in the programmes and projects.

Felicite Rwemalika initiated and developed women's football in Rwanda from scratch. She founded AKWOF (Association of Kigali Women in Football) and launched a tournament in which the First Lady participated, breaking barriers and creating social change. AKWOF aims at using sport to empower Rwandan women and girls to create a strong forum of advocacy on women's rights, HIV/AIDS prevention & management and issues of unity and reconciliation. Felicite has now been appointed as chair of the commission for women's football in Rwanda.

### **What is the difference between gender and sex?**

At the end of the 20th century, North American feminists tried to soften traditional biological patterns and to broaden argumentative scopes by introducing the clear linguistic distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'. Lorber defines gender as "a process of social construction, a system of social stratification and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives because its embeddedness in the family, the workplace, and the state as well as in sexuality, language and culture" (Lorber 1999).

Gender is an important structuring principle for social relationships and consequently is a way of dividing power. Gender lies at the basis of important power differences in society. This implies that the concept of gender refers to both men and women. During the conference the differences between the static concept of 'sex' and the dynamic concept 'gender' were explored.

*"You learn your gender and are born with your sex."*

### **Difference between equity and equality**

Equity and equality are often confused. Equity is synonymous with fairness and justice; to be equitable means to be fair and to attempt to be fair. Equity addresses many forms of discrimination including discrimination on the basis of race, gender, ability, age, national or ethnic origin, and religion. Equality on the other hand means "of the same quantity, size, number, degree, value, intensity" and "having the same rights, privileges, ability, rank, etc.". Equity does not necessarily mean that all persons must be treated exactly the same way.

Gender equity is the principle and practice of fair and equitable allocation of resources and opportunities for females and males. Gender equity eliminates discriminatory practices that are barriers to full participation of either gender. A primary goal of gender equity is to provide all individuals with access and opportunity to a full range of activities, thus enabling them to realize their human potential.

### **Gender mainstreaming and gender specific strategies**

A strategy to achieve gender equality that has gained worldwide acceptance is gender mainstreaming. This strategy ensures that attention is given to equality of men and women in all activities of an organization: mission, policy, strategy, human resources policy, as well as programmes and projects. The UN propagates this strategy. A definition of Gender mainstreaming is: *Organising, improving, developing and evaluating policy processes so that the perspective of gender equality is integrated into all policies by the people who formulate them.*<sup>1</sup>

If you want to address the theme of gender seriously and thoroughly, one must first take a look in the mirror: to what extent are men and women equal in one's own organization? There is a risk that plans value equality, while key positions in the organizations carrying out these plans are held mainly by men. NGOs need to ensure that all their activities are gender-sensitive.

In addition to gender mainstreaming, gender specific interventions are needed, especially in situations where there is great inequality between men and women. These interventions are primarily intended to improve and strengthen the position of women – for example, setting up a football competition for women and training female coaches. It is the combination of the two strategies that ultimately leads to equality.

### **Discussion**

Participants embraced both strategies and stressed that gender specific activities and actions aimed at gender mainstreaming should be complementary. It was suggested that gender mainstreaming can be considered the high road to the general goal of gender equity whereas gender specific interventions are a means to reach that goal. It depends on the phase in time, the momentum and the context which strategy will be effective: in the beginning gender specific measures are a must to spark change. It is important to focus on the root of the problem. In practice, religious barriers are common and should be addressed. In cultures in which religion plays a crucial role in structuring daily life, feminism is often perceived as threatening, anti-traditional, and anti-religious. Including religious leaders in the process is an essential element. Public perception needs attention as well. Social change starts with changing perceptions.

In general it is best to start slowly and to not force abrupt changes of norms and values. The importance of role models to initiate change was mentioned above. Other steps suggested in the discussions:

- Include all relevant stakeholders: community leaders, teachers, women's groups, sport organizations.
- Develop alliances with these stakeholders.
- Include attention for gender issues in curriculum and budget, check if budget available for men and women is equal.
- Ensure safe spaces and gender specific programs. Train female coaches, trainers and referees.
- Involve women from the local community and develop their capacities in order to create a sustainable infrastructure. Consider time constraints and responsibilities of women when designing programs.
- Create advocacy, raise awareness, speak to institutions, and involve mainstream media.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: [www.un.org/womenwatch](http://www.un.org/womenwatch), Council of Europe, 'Gender mainstreaming: conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practices'. Strasbourg, EG-S-MS (98) 2, May 1998.)

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion of the discussions was that both strategies – gender mainstreaming and gender specific interventions - are needed to achieve gender equality. One must be aware that gender always plays a role. In many situations there are barriers for girls and women to participate in sports. Sport is regarded as 'masculine'; women are expected to focus on household and kids. This is the prevailing opinion, especially in traditional communities. If this aspect is not taken into account when setting up programmes and projects, the participation level of women will be low. However, going to great lengths to recruit women for projects without having a long-term, sustainable strategy is not recommended either. As participation in sports can be in contradiction with norms, unwanted side effects might occur. Projects can only be successful if consideration is given to the way gender and sports are perceived in the local context. Moreover, clear and realistic objectives must be formulated in relation to gender equality. It is essential that men are involved too.