In Their Own Idiom: Reflections on a Gender Action Learning Program in the Horn of Africa

By Michel Friedman and David Kelleher

gender at work

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Program in the Horn of Africa

December 2009

INTRODUCTION

From 2006 - 2008, Gender at Work worked with PACE (Partner in Cross Sectoral Engagement), an Oxfam Canada capacity building program in the Horn of Africa. The work was to deliver a capacity-building program for gender equality with six civil society organizations in the Ethiopia, Somaliland, and Sudan.

The GAL Program[1] – a two-year, a multi-stage, non-prescriptive, collaborative process with these organizational partners – focused on enabling them to improve their capacity to deliver services and programs in a gender-equitable manner. This process often means focusing on the organization itself, i.e. its process and structures.[2]

Our Oxfam partner, PACE, aims to strengthen the relationships within and between civil society, state structures, and the private sector, enabling them to support their own process of development, and to more skillfully navigate change and crisis. PACE was interested in working with Gender at Work because we offer a non-prescriptive process that enables participating organizations to define and develop their own change agenda. As Habesha Nigussie, an Ethiopian participant in the program, said, "*It [the program approach] is allowing us to work on gender issues in our own way*." In the global gender and development context, enabling organizations to work within their own culture and develop their own solutions is an important consideration, especially given developing-world feminist critiques of dominating western paradigms.

PACE and Gender at Work share an approach to capacity building that aims to build participants' conceptual understanding and critical thinking, practical confidence, and ability to reflect on practice. Our shared approach facilitated a seamless interweaving of both our teams and approaches. As such, the GAL program was conceptualized as an integral part of PACE's capacity building work and not an extra or add-on.[3]

The Organizational Partners
Six partner organizations from across the region participated in the GAL program. Admas, a network of seven CBOs from Dire Dawe; Ratson, a large rural development NGO based in Debre Zeit; General Assistance and Volunteer Organization (GAVO), and a fairly large community development and mobilization NGO; and two relatively young and small NGOs from the South: The Women Development Group (WDG) and the Upper Nile Youth Development Association (UNYDA), and an old, well established organization from the North: the Abu Hadia Development Association.

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1 GAL (Gender Action Learning) was the program name used in the Horn, but it draws from Gender at Work's approach and methodology in our Civil Society Organization (CSO) Strengthening Program http://www.genderatwork.org/civil-society-strengthening-cso-program.
2 For more on the Gender at Work action-learning process, see David Kelleher's Action Learning for Gender Equality, http://www.genderatwork.org/action-learning-process
3 In the "In Our Own Way" paper, we outline in more detail how we think the PACE program itself contributed to the impressive outcomes of the process.

The Horn Papers

The two papers that came out of the Horn program share each organization's story and discuss the changes the organizations realized, as described by the participants in the workshops, as well as by our Facilitators from their observations during site visits. "Culture, Change and Gender Relations," outlines the organizational context of each partner and explores in some depth their stories of change in their organizations and communities, and as individuals. "Working on Gender In Our Own Way," reflects on the program and how it supported the six participating organizations to affirm and cultivate change processes "in their own idiom."[4] The "In Our Own Way" paper also describes a theory of change as developed by participants based on their experiences, and articulates what made the program unique. "Culture" focuses on the changes themselves, while "In Our Own Way" reflects on the regionally specific factors that enabled the organizations to make changes at the depth that they did. The papers are companion pieces that are meant to be read together as they elaborate and complement each other.

The Program Process

The PACE/GAL Horn program began in late 2006 with consultation with potential participants and a site visit to each organization by one of the Facilitators in the program. In the spring of 2008, we traveled to each of the organizations (but one) to carry out what are called "Hearing the Story" meetings. These two-day meetings allowed us to meet with the three people in the organization who would be part of the program, and to reflect with them on the history, culture, and program of their organization. We reflected together on how women and men live in their region and what may be done to improve gender relations. The program then unfolded with a pattern of three peer-learning workshops and one-to-one consultations with organizations as they developed and implemented their change projects. In between workshops, each organization received one-to-one consultations with a GAL Facilitator, who provided the necessary resources, tools, mentoring, and training to support each organization's specific needs and interests. Each organization developed a change project to address a particular organizational or community barrier to transforming existing practices that exclude or diminish women.

In the GAL program, Gender at Work used a process called "action learning." Action learning emphasizes learning through *doing*, i.e., the learnings do not come from external experts but from each organization's own experience of *doing* – a dynamic process of setting goals, allowing for the unexpected, changing course if necessary, refining goals and plans, and getting ongoing support from peers and facilitators *throughout* the program.

Unlike gender training, which can impose a list of goals and values, Gender at Work's approach is non-prescriptive. It's a collaborative process in an enabling environment that provides structured reflective space, peer and Facilitator feedback, and ongoing support so that organizations can safely surface their own particular issues and find culturally appropriate solutions.

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4 "Idiom" here refers both to local dialects/forms of expression as well as local ways of doing things

Outcome Highlights

The GAL program produced changes at three levels. The following papers describe changes at:

- The individual level – learning new knowledge, skills, and capacities, as well as counter cultural behaviors, such as men treating their wives differently, doing jobs previously thought to be women's work, and challenging longstanding community norms regarding gender roles
- The community level – engaging cultural and religious leaders in discussions of gender relations, building networks of change agents, bringing action research findings regarding violence against women to community fora, and challenging community practices regarding gender relations
- The organizational level – giving women voice in their organizations, strengthening the volunteer base, building organizational understandings of gender equality, and developing programs to further women's rights in communities

These papers were written for a wide range of audiences. But we think they will be of particular value to practitioners in the field of gender and organizational change, professionals or students interested in working on gender mainstreaming within diverse organizations, and people interested and working in the Horn of Africa.

Change, Culture and Gender Relations in Six Organizations in the Horn of Africa
David Kelleher and Michel Friedman[5]

December 2009

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Who is in this story?

This paper tells the story of change in six organizations in the Horn of Africa. The organizations were partners of PACE, an Oxfam Canada project in the Horn. The Gender at Work team members were consultants to the organizations and to PACE. In the paper, participants are referred to by the names by which they were known in the program. Generally, these are first names. The primary people in this story are:

ADMAS:
Habesha Nigussie (the vice president of Admas)
Demeke Bogalle (Chairman of Admas)
Tsehay Agaz (Finance manager)

Ratson
Mogesse Gorfe (Executive Director)
David (Rural Development Program)
Johannes (Health, HIV program)
Wubayehu Mulugeta (Media)
Phoeben Abate (recent graduate working as an intern, later became a program officer)
Tigist (intern)

GAVO
Farhan Adam Haibe (the Executive Director)
Ayan Mowliid Ibrahim (an electricity instructor)
Abdiaziz Hersi Warsame (PACE liaison Officer)

UNYDA
Chol Gaj (Coordinator)
Sabit Akatir (an EC member)
Bonnie John Mayer (member)

WDG
Rabha Elis Bandas (Program Coordinator)
Lina Elis Bandas (Program Coordinator)
Regina Edward (Assistant Director)
Luka Mauro (Coordinator of the food security program)

Abu Hadia Society
Ayesha Ahmet (volunteer in the Gender and Human Rights Program)
Mohamedeen Mohamad (office manager of Port Sudan project office)
Achmed Tamim (volunteer on the Technical Committee)

PACE
Raymond Genesse (Project Coordinator)
Mahelet Hailemariam (Deputy Program Manager of PACE, also served as a facilitator in the gender action program (GAL))

Abnet Kassa Debay (Project Officer)
Andrea Lindores (Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning specialist)

Gender at Work
Michel Friedman (Gender at Work Program Manager, South Africa)
David Kelleher (at the time, Co-Director of Gender at Work)

Consultants
Amel Aldehaib (a Sudanese consultant who worked in the GAL program as a Facilitator)
Asha Abdel Rahim (a consultant who worked as a Facilitator for a short period in 2008 while Amel was on study leave)

Introduction

This paper is a reflection on the process, accomplishments, and the associated capacity building of six organizations in a Gender Action Learning project (GAL)[6] in the Horn of Africa. The program took place over the period of late 2006 to December 2008. All six organizations were partners in the PACE program, an Oxfam Canada capacity building program[7]. The paper tells the story of each of the organizations and discusses the changes they accomplished as described by the participants in workshops and as observed in site visits. This paper focuses on the changes themselves; an associated paper, *"In Our Own Way,"* reflects on the factors that enabled the organizations to accomplish as much as they did.

The GAL is a multi stage, non-prescriptive, collaborative program that works with cohorts of organizations, helping them take steps to improve their capacity to deliver services in a gender-equitable manner. This often means focusing on the organization itself.[8]

The objectives of this particular program were:

- Increased capacity of staff and volunteers to organize and manage in a more effective, efficient, relevant, and viable manner.

- Enhanced ability of staff and volunteers to seek and apply knowledge and skills in responding to development obstacles faced by women and men.

- Enhanced ability of staff and volunteers to understand, articulate, and integrate differing needs of women and men within their organizations and programs.

- Increased capacity of CSOs, government, and business to form and manage productive relationships among themselves.

- Enhanced capacity of CSOs to influence other CSOs, the private sector, and government on development issues.

This program began in late 2006 with consultation with potential participants and a site visit to each organization by one of the Facilitators in the program. In the spring of 2008, David Kelleher and Michel Friedman (Associates at Gender at Work) and the program Facilitators traveled to each of the organizations but one to carry out what are called "Hearing the Story" meetings. These two-day meetings allowed us to meet with the three

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[6] GAL was the name given to the process in this joint project. We use a similar process at Gender at Work in our Civil Society Organization Strengthening Program called the action-learning process.

[7] PACE aims to foster intersectoral relationships among state structures, civil society, and business in order to increase stability and development in the Horn of Africa.

[8] For more on the Gender at Work action-learning approach, see David Kelleher, "Action Learning for Gender Equality," http://www.genderatwork.org/action-learning-process

people in the organization that would be part of the program and to reflect with them on the history, culture, and program of their organization. We reflected together on how women and men live in their region and what may be done to improve gender relations. The program then unfolded with a pattern of three peer-learning workshops and consultation with organizations on a one-to-one basis as they developed and implemented change projects. The Facilitators who "accompanied" the organizations were, Mahelet Hailemariam (also the Deputy Program Manager of Pace), and Amel Aldehaib (a Sudanese consultant). Asha Abdel Rahim worked for a short period in 2008 in Sudan.

The paper first tells the story of the six organizations,9 which were:

- Admas, an umbrella organization of CBOs in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia
- Ratson, a rural development NGO in Debre Zeit, Ethiopia
- General Assistance and Volunteer Organization (GAVO), a service-delivery and community-mobilization NGO in Somaliland
- The Upper Nile Youth Development Association (UNYDA), a youth organization in Malakal, South Sudan
- Women's Development Group (WDG), a peace-building organization in Wau, South Sudan
- Abu Hadia Society, a development and educational NGO in the Red Sea region of Sudan.

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9 The organizational "stories" make use of PACE partner profiles and reports, materials from workshops, and documentation from our own site visits.

Admas Network of Seven Community Based Development Associations

We first met the Admas team in an old colonial house in Dire Dawa, which they had acquired from the municipality. At the meeting, there were about twenty Admas members and leaders. The change team was comprised of Habesha, (the vice president of Admas), Demeke (Chairman of Admas), and Tsehay (Finance manager).

Admas described itself as an umbrella network of seven community based organizations, each of which has its own members in Dire Dawa (eastern Ethiopia). At the time, it was a woman-dominated association with around 3,000 members (2,136 of which are women and 814 are men). The association evolved out of *Idirs*, funeral associations primarily organized to provide money for burial. Later, the CBOs established themselves as a Savings and Credit Association.[10] Most members of the *Idirs* are poor and represent the most disadvantaged segment of the community (women, elderly, street kids, orphans, and HIV-positive people). Recently, due to the savings and credit activities, most members managed to improve their living conditions, send their children to school, eat better, and have their own savings. The Association employs about 25 finance officers, while the rest of its activities are undertaken by volunteers.

The Association's initial focus was on providing credit and savings facilities and managing their community services. Thus, most of their activities provide access to resources such as income, material, legal and emotional support, information, and vocational training.

Their core business involves income-generation activities, which provide saving and credit services to non-members who are organized into cooperatives. In addition, the Association supports others in need. For example, street children and elders are provided with food and clothing and homeless youth are provided with foster homes. Some member CBOs provide support to orphans in terms of covering basic needs and support with schooling.[11] Members provide home-based care to AIDS patients, as well as voluntary testing and counseling services. Some CBOs provide a paralegal service to women and children in need of legal support because of rights abuses. Vocational training is provided to unemployed youth and those who failed 10th grade.

They make creative use of mini-media (local public address systems) and local radio to provide their members and the broader community with access to information of various kinds, including HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, and the accomplishments of voluntary grassroots organizations. The programs also provide responses to questions raised by the community members and help to sensitize government offices to provide services that can fill the gaps CBOs are unable to fill.

Organizationally, Admas is a membership organization. Each of the seven grassroots organizations conducts its own meeting. People represented from each CBO in the

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10 With the help of a donor organisation, ACCORD.
11 There are an estimated 22,000 orphans in Dire Dawa.

network then participate in a General Assembly organized by the umbrella association. The umbrella body is involved in building relationships between member CBOs facilitating sharing of experience and learning from others. They also catalyze awareness raising among members through organizing dialogue and discussions that help people better understand their roles and responsibilities in changing their situation of poverty. Some of the association members are paying visits to families to encourage them to educate their daughters.

In his organizational profile (written in 2005), PACE staff, Abnet Kassa Debay, perceived the Admas poverty-alleviation model based on individual welfare and behavioral change, and confined to household-level initiatives, as being limited and not sustainable.

In her first visit of the GAL program to Admas (Jan 2007), Amel Abdehaib suggested in her report that

> *They showed considerable awareness and consciousness and realization of gender/injustice problematic issues in their area. The Association is to a large extent, however, working on addressing the consequences of social injustice, but are yet to challenge the root causes as well as the structural causes that underline the injustice. The Association is hoping that the action-learning program would assist them to break through cycles of injustice, and try to address all the factors that contribute to the circles of HIV, Poverty, Violence.*

The Gender Action Learning Project (GAL) at Admas

We think the following quote speaks volumes about the changes Admas undertook over the period of the program.

> *I want to share with you my encounter with my Muslim neighbour. We lived together for many years and we call each other for a coffee ceremony. One day coffee was prepared and I was invited in their house. Soon I started talking about gender equality. I was telling the man about my experience regarding my role in the household chores and the need to help in the house. However, the wife was not happy and confronted me ... she said "a woman is created to serve a man, what on earth are you trying to teach my husband?" and asked me to leave the house. She said, "by telling him to help me you are trying to convince him to leave me because I am not good enough to manage the house." I left the house and we didn't see each other for the next few days. Then neighbours tried to settle the situation. After a week I organized a coffee ceremony at my house and invited the same family. The same issue was raised and I quoted a verse from the Koran, which says "a man should help his wife." I managed to convince them that Allah will be happy if a man helps his wife. Now I see the man taking children home from school and sometimes washing clothes while the wife works on other chores. This makes me believe that people can change. It gives me hope that we can change many more people.*

This story, told by Demeke, the treasurer, sums up the core of the Admas strategy – face to face dialogue with great respect and understanding of cultural factors.

At the first peer-learning event, Admas decided on the following goal: to create core change agents and a critical mass of people who believe in the education provided by the association. Their image of the effect of their work after 18 months was: seeing the core change agents change themselves, their families, CBOs, and neighbours.

At the second workshop, they reported on their approach:

> *We went to our members and discussed about why we need gender justice and who needs it, if equality does not prevail who will be disadvantaged… We organized a discussion among our members on the impacts of partial justice/ imbalance. We organized discussions to identify the root causes and classified them in terms of cultural, religious and social norms. We also discussed the source of the problems in gender relations. We found that it is the cultural influence and misconceptions (traditional sayings and religious influences) and we got members to discuss on the issue amongst themselves.*
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> - *We decided that misconceptions around gender are the source of the prevailing practice and needs justice and equality should prevail.*
> - *We provided an educational forum in the seven Association offices*
> - *We facilitated learning forums to 245 members (35 members from each of the seven Associations)*
> - *We collected and discussed on traditional proverbs, folklores, stories and songs ... that influence gender relations*
>
> *Initially we started with 'gender equality' but we changed our strategy to identifying the misconceptions and their root causes. We did this because Dire Dawa is a big city and is exposed to a number of media influences. People are already exposed to the issue of gender equality and it didn't work much in terms of changing the behaviour of the people. So we shifted our strategy towards identifying the root causes and decided to working with people in changing their hearts and minds.*
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> *In order to find the solutions to the causes, we identified 35 members from each of the seven CBOs (245 in total) and held seven meetings. We decided to work in such a way that we are not going to expect an outsider to teach us but we will use the potential capabilities within ourselves to do it. We then started discussing misconceptions and collecting proverbs. We decided that these did not only hurt women economically and socially but men and children also.*

Ultimately, they trained 140 change agents and then supported their work by regular meetings and dialogue.

Admas organizes a coffee ceremony once a month for all 140 change agents – for them to exchange experiences and learn from each other. They report back on what they have learned, what resistances they face. They can download their own anger and frustrations and it is a place for the Admas board to learn more about what is happening. Change agents are asked to record how many people they have reached, what resistance they faced, what tools they used and what frustrations they have.

Interestingly, Admas has chosen to give the change agents freedom to go off and facilitate 'change conversations' in whatever way makes sense to them and then discuss the experience at the monthly meetings.

Individual conceptual/consciousness shifts

Change-team members appear to have changed their understanding of themselves, their context, and how gender relations work in their context and their capacities. Their change strategy reflects an understanding of gender that is not only about women but they also talk of an expanded commitment from men. Involvement of key religious leaders in debate on different interpretations of religious texts has influenced individual members' views and begun to cultivate a capacity for critical thinking and reflection. The extent of their outreach and the consistency with which they seem to be applying what they are learning with themselves and others demonstrates a very deep commitment to change.

During the first peer-learning event, after exposure to the Gender at Work Integral framework,[12] Admas members began to alter their own self-perception. They started to realize and articulate how many cultural changes were already visible. Examples cited include a shift in perspective about how to deal with the "*Haram*" (forbidden) nature of interest on credit savings for Muslim members and how more women are becoming increasingly active participants in the CBOs. The change-team members had already learned that women's membership does not always lead to a meaningful contribution due to lack of self-confidence. They had already developed ways of growing such confidence by encouraging exposure and experience exchanges with active women role models.

As the Admas team worked on developing their plan for their change project, they also shifted in their conceptualization of *what they were doing*. In the early meetings, the change team focused mostly on what was visible, the symptoms or what they could see as effects or consequences of underlying gender inequalities. At the Hearing the Stories meeting, the team said they would like to focus on addressing gender-based violence. Their initial thinking was to use a paralegal model with a focus on developing advocacy with policy makers and government and increasing access for individuals to lawyers and the justice system.

What is worth noting here is how the Admas change team shifted from focusing on the Association providing access to paralegal services (access to courts, law, justice) to developing a critical mass of change agents who, through discussing and educating

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12 This framework is described at http://www.genderatwork.org/gender-work-framework

members and their families about underlying misconceptions, would address the issue on a different level, through individual consciousness raising and collective action.

Another crucial shift worth noting is how the team moved from an expansive plan focused on using external resources, books, women lawyers, and expert facilitators, to using their own skills and resources, thus cultivating a much greater sense of independence and confidence. Mahelet, the team's facilitator, prompted this shift but nevertheless the Admas team rose to the challenge.

Their experience in designing and running the training sessions on their own appears to have shifted the organization's perception of, and its practical dependency on, a need for outside experts. They show an increased capacity for facilitating change processes and difficult learning environments themselves. Through their integration of reflection meetings for all their change agents into their activities and organizational practices at different levels, they show an internalization and strengthening of this peer-learning practice as part of their organizational culture.

As facilitating leaders, they learned the value of openness and collective leadership.

> *We learned to be true to ourselves – when challenges appear we are able to open them up to dialogue and not always say 'we know' and 'must do it this way.' There is openness to listen to different opinions – if our leaders were like this we would live in a different country.*

In her image of leadership, Habesha (change team member) wanted a new picture of leadership to be drawn – one that shows giving and receiving because they are giving to the community and receiving from it. *"In this image, the leaders are more than one. They are a group."*

Finally, the role of Capacitar exercise has been striking.[13] From the first meeting, Admas members were enthusiastic about what they called the "sports." Some of their members have integrated regular use of various Capacitar practices, which have helped them maintain high levels of hope, well being, and an ability let go of difficult and traumatic emotional experiences.

Organizational changes and developments

The most significant change has been the development of 140 change agents who are capable of engaging with themselves, family members, association members, and the broader public in discussions on misconceptions about gender. These 140 change agents have become active members of the Association and are demonstrating commitment and

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[13] Capacitar is a set of physical/psychological exercises developed initially to help people living in regions of conflict deal with trauma. The exercises can be used in all contexts to revitalize. See, www.capacitar.org. This is discussed in a companion paper, Michel Friedman and David Kelleher, "Working On Gender Issues in Our Own Way." See also Michel Friedman, "Becoming The Change You Wish To See," (forthcoming) at http://www.genderatwork.org/approach-and-methodology

responsibility.

Other organizational changes have included increased capacity to work with diversity, dialogic facilitation, building relationships in the broader community, and organizational leadership of Admas itself.

Although Admas always worked with difference and diversity (e.g. Christian and Muslim, Ethiopian, and Somali members, etc.), they have now also internalized the importance of working very consciously with gender differences and diversity. By ensuring that their change teams contain both women and men (started off with more women, now have more or less equal numbers), and by having both women and men present when discussing gender difficulties, or misconceptions, they have broken through a barrier that focused them only on women. Because different change agents work in the monthly action-learning spaces, they break down fragmentation and isolation between members from different CBOs, thus building relationships and learning from each other across different parts of the city.

As Habesha explained,

> *Previously training was arranged in such a way that it was an expert telling us what to do. This time we are learning from each other. Previously it was usually a man who was driving it but now both men and women are taking responsibility in leadership.*

As a methodological practice, the organization appears to have developed the capacity to create facilitators and learning spaces in which the 'dialogic' approach is practiced – that is, where multiple views can be expressed, argued with, and challenged; where facilitators do not impose their own views and where everyone can speak. Demeke (change team member) put it this way,

> *People have confidence to speak out and to tell their own stories. They have confidence in themselves and each other and trust in self and each other so there is no fear. This process helps participants to be open to telling their stories. They become deeply attentive to and interested in the issues raised. They listen deeply.*

Most importantly, the nature of power and the relationship between the Admas board and its members in the various CBOs has been changed by the role of the change agents in the process. This is a healthy development, even to the extent that Demeke said, "*we've learned that with freedom comes responsibility.*" Having given the change agents freedom to facilitate how they wanted to, the agents have in turn become much more responsible network members. It appears that this work has given the network (which had been losing members) a whole new lease on life and has inspired some deep organizational changes with respect to internal culture. The board has grown its capacity to manage the complex negotiating between control, freedom, and responsibility.

Externally, Admas is being more recognized as a valuable player in the development

sector in that they are beginning to engage more as an 'actor' rather than 'receiver' or 'beneficiary' with other key institutional role players who are also involved in gender work, such as the Government Women's Bureau. This Bureau invited Admas to facilitate some educational sessions for other citizens in the city. The other government agency that Admas is having some impact on is the legal system. During the GAL process, Admas developed a commitment to working with married couples to mediate their issues before couples resort to divorce.

Admas's capacity has been acknowledged and their services are being requested. Government actors requested Admas to facilitate events (100 year celebrations) and young people and others have asked to become members. Admas is speaking in schools, engaging neighbors, family members, and many non-members in conversation, suggesting that an organic growth has been unleashed and is unlikely to stop.

At the end of the third peer-learning event, the change team recognized the need for a gender policy for Admas. They are currently working on one which would include their policy intentions for their work with members, as well as a workplace policy that would outline women's and men's rights, as well as organizational values and visions with respect to gender equality. The experience of working on the GAL process assisted Admas in developing capacity to make these policy changes. Their facilitator said the group had consolidated their learning in organizational development and that this experience was helping them to learn about the process of policy development: i.e., how to do it in a way that reflects their own findings and learnings. She also said that, over time, the group would require less help from her.

Cultural/community shifts

At the workshop, the Admas team shared examples of norms being challenged and new norms beginning to be created amongst the larger membership. For example, entrenched practices were giving way to new norms (such as husbands sharing domestic responsibilities, men being less violent with their wives, women starting to get some property and other rights when divorcing, and more parents sending their daughters to school).

Members were challenging and holding each other to account when they use derogatory terms, proverbs, beliefs, and sayings. They were encouraging each other to use more positive expressions. There is collective support for women members when men are abusive. We heard of the community boycott of a man who took his wife's money, which she had received from the credit program.

RATSON

Background and context

Ratson works in Debre Zeit – the location of the Ethiopian air force headquarters. Many of the families in the town are military families. The organization was started by Mogesse, the current Director, just after the fall of the Derg government.[14] At that time, many air force pilots were demobilized, causing a shocking livelihood crisis for the town's residents. After seeing two wives of former air force pilots who were trying to sell their husband's coats in the market, Mogesse and other civilian residents were moved to raise money to provide support to their neighbors.

They realized, however, that the problem could not be solved through individual handouts, leading to the establishment of Ratson in 1996. Ratson derived its name from a Hebrew word meaning helping people to help themselves. At its heart, Ratson started off being concerned about income generation and families suffering under conditions of unemployment. After registration as an NGO, Ratson expanded its activities to include the wider communities living adjacent to Debre Zeit town and began to include a much wider range of development activities in its ambit. The strong attachment and deep sense of obligation of the founders towards the plight of their town and their fellow residents are the primary driving forces behind Ratson's establishment. Mogesse decided from the outset to involve professionals from the town with a view to using their collective efforts to solve community problems.

Since its establishment, Ratson has attempted to meet the basic needs and rights of children, women, youth, and other disadvantaged groups in Debre Zeit and its rural environs. Its initial focus was on access to services in relation to income, health, and education. Many destitute residents were able to secure their livelihood through its saving and credit services. It constructed a number of health posts, latrines, and other hygienic interventions to improve the health situation in rural and urban Debre Zeit. The organization also established a number of youth centers to enable young people to discuss reproductive health issues and to develop skills to support their livelihoods. Many disadvantaged children have also received regular school fees, school supplies, basic health care, and clothing. Ratson has also constructed a number of schools in rural Debre Zeit and is significantly enhancing the school enrolment, especially for girls.

Ratson considers facilitating social opportunities such as education, health, environmental protection, and other social services as instruments of freedom to empower the community. Ratson's women's empowerment program is largely built around accessing resources and education for poor women and girls, as well as encouraging girls and their families to avoid early marriage.

Ratson's intervention in these areas helps the community to articulate and mobilize

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14 The Derg government was military junta that came to power in Ethiopia following the ousting of Haile Selassie I.

around specific social problems, such as HIV/AIDS, early childhood development, sexual abuse and health insurance, and access to basic education.

Recently, Ratson is inclining more towards using information and communication technologies as community-empowerment tools. Through its women's empowerment and early childhood program in rural areas, Ratson has been establishing village information and early childhood development centers side by side. The centers have become an interesting focal point that attracts the young mothers and schoolgirls to come together and discuss their "shared visions" and "shared problems." Ratson is also in a process of establishing a community radio as part of its information communication initiative.

After two years of implementing these programs, Ratson decided to shift its development approach towards a comprehensive village-based, community-development-centers approach (VBCDC). They consider this approach as a major breakthrough in their development endeavors. This approach is intended to empower the village through transferring most of the "development power" to the specific village. Taking the information and early childhood centers as a focal point, the village will establish a community-based structure (CBO) around the centers. The CBO will become the smallest working unit for development initiatives to be undertaken at the village level. The CBO will have a general assembly and board members and will be accountable to the village community. The members will be drawn from different constituencies, such as *Edirs* – people living with HIV/AIDS – youth and children representatives, and others. The CBOs will be registered in the appropriate government department. The centers are expected to have different desks, such as health, education, economy, media, youth, and children and gender. Voluntarism is expected to play a major role in running the day-to-day activities of the CBO/centers.

The Gender Action Learning Program at Ratson

We met first for two days in Debre Zeit and explored Ratson's history, culture, program, and its orientation to women's rights. Attending the meeting were Mogesse (Executive Director), David (Rural Development Program), Johannes (Health, HIV program), Webayheu (Media) and Phoeben (recent graduate working as an intern).

What was interesting to us was their commitment to rights, such as freedom from violence, education for girls, economic empowerment, and avoiding early marriage. Their conception of gender equality was a combination of women's rights and a term new to us, "gender complementarity."

At the meeting, Mogesse, expressed his views about this:

> *We don't want to adopt the tradition of the white man in which women are separate. We are not trying to create liberated women external to the family.*

As we talked further, it became clear to us all that there was little space or time to conceptualize or discuss issues related to gender equality, and there was no structured

way to share knowledge. Although Ratson had a women's empowerment program, field staff lacked experience in understanding gender relations. Mogesse was also concerned at the lack of assertive women in positions of leadership. At that point, most of the work was being done with and for women but led by men.

Staff felt that they lacked capacity and knowledge to facilitate dialogue on cultural influences and they felt they neglected the issue of women's rights, which kept women silent. They felt they had a lack of literature on the subject, a lack of funds to support discussions and a lack of convenient time – people are too busy. Finally, they had no written gender policy.

At the first peer-learning workshop, Ratson developed a goal focused on their organizational capacity: *Staff will have developed a better understanding on gender sensitivity/complementarities.* They also developed a plan for a variety of training-related activities.

At the second peer workshop, the Ratson team reported on their training, which had involved work on exploring gender complementarity. The program had explored the personal, organizational, cultural, and even religious aspects of gender relations. They also reported on some of the changes that were emerging.

> *After the training, we observed some changes in behaviour (e.g. whenever there is an electric interruption around the office, a female staff was not allowed to turn off the fuse box, now she is allowed to do so because it is gender complementarity). In the organizations, some female staffs are now promoted to a leadership position. For instance, previously, female staffs' role was confined around the head offices and urban areas, and they are paid less than the male staff because of that. The main problem was that female staff were assumed to be unable to go to the rural areas with a motorcycle, and endure hardship that comes with working in remote and rural areas. However, now with their promotion to leadership positions they are trailing to those remote sites and they are being paid equally as their male colleagues.*

After the second peer-learning workshop, they held further training programs and developed a broader understanding of gender complementarity. As the team described it in the third workshop:

> *The basic idea is that everyone has a unique reason to be created. We need to respect our mothers, sisters, friends for her unique characteristics given to her by creation. Through accepting our uniqueness, we learn to relate respectfully with each other. GC is thus the basis for gender equality – it brings the humanity and consciousness out of the equality issue.*

The following sections describe the changes in individual and organizational capacity that resulted from the action-learning work.

Conceptual/consciousness shifts

In the beginning, there appeared to be considerable confusion in relation to what gender complementarity (GC) actually meant, and the change team took some time to develop a succinct plan to achieve it. However, by the end of the 18 months, Ratson succeeded in developing its own language around gender complementarity. They were now clearer about what they were aiming to achieve with respect to transforming existing oppressive gender relations. Before, it was primarily Mogesse who was identified with the concept; now all sixty staff had a better idea of how it links to gender equality both in their personal and organizational lives.

GC is perceived to provide a humanistic aspect to gender equality because it recognizes the need to respect the uniqueness of each individual. Before, gender was seen primarily as a woman's issue, now it is seen as something affecting everyone.

> *GC requires a personal decision to respect one another and see one another as a human being. It is not about being told by someone else or the law.*

Early work showed the change team the level of knowledge in the staff.

> *When we started the training with the first trainer, we understood that the knowledge among the staff is very shallow. From the responses (to questionnaires), we understood that many do not understand gender well. By gender most perceived very poor/ disadvantaged women who have no education and ...Most of them did not understand it in terms of social norms and values.*

However, after the workshop, there has been a change in how men value the work. As the team reported:

> *The issue is being taken more seriously now and greater personal commitment is being shown – for example, at the beginning of GAL people were thinking that this is a joke; you can have a good time without being required to change yourself. Now they know how serious an issue it is and what it brings to themselves as well as to the organization – is seen as a meaningful learning process. At the individual level, staff are showing more personal commitment to make programmes more gender sensitive (this is not yet at the level of the organization).*

There is also some indication that male staff are changing their personal behaviors toward women. As the team said,

> *Men staff at Ratson have started to appreciate their wife's labor more and slowly starting to help in the home and also recognizing how much easier it would be if there was better technology!*

> *Everyone respects each other's uniqueness. Before men used to think that women are there because donors require it, now they're there because they are needed and*

can make a unique contribution. Now a sense of value is given to each other and to our uniqueness.

As well, staff are beginning to see the programmatic implications of GC.

> *... staff are more familiar with how gender equality issues are raised in the Ethiopian Constitution and more able to recognize the importance of the need for girls and women to have equal access to services.*

Organizational changes and developments

Although the group at the Hearing the Stories meeting felt that the organization was democratic and had a culture of openness and discussion, gender issues had previously only been discussed in informal spaces. Now, the organization as a whole (all staff), formally made time to discuss and debate their perspectives, issues, and fears of gender complementarity and gender equality. As a result, women's experiences and voices are being heard more, and their talents and skills are being more valued within the organizational hierarchy. As Webeyu told us,

> *... organizational culture is being changed through this process – before women were not recognized at all – for example before when staff heard that the change agents were going to facilitate the training, they were mocked. However, women change agent capacity was noticed during the training sessions. This led to their skills being used more in the organization and them being given greater responsibilities. Now they are being paid equally to men, some have been promoted to program officer and there is talk of restructuring so some women can become part of the management team.*

> *Through creating space to talk calmly about a sensitive issue, a sense of belonging, respectfulness and unity has been created.*

New norms are beginning to be cultivated in the organization in that a culture of accountability is starting to grow. Change agents and staff are more careful with their speech and challenge each other when they use degrading or derogatory statements towards each other. Employees who are committing violence against their partners are not being tolerated. Staff have been disciplined and one person guilty of such offence was fired.

For their first training, Ratson hired an experienced female gender trainer (who they thought could also serve as a role model). Now, Ratson has much greater capacity to use internal resources for such training and no longer needs to rely on outside experts as much. They are also becoming their own role models. Their most recent plan (developed at the third peer event) demonstrates their increased confidence in transferring what they have learned for themselves into program development. Their silos have been broken down and internal communication between different programs has improved.

There is a much greater sense of awareness of the relationship between what goes on inside the organization and how this in turn affects their capacity to deliver their programs within communities. From the beginning, Ratson always focused on outside the organization and worked primarily with women "beneficiaries," with men managing all the work. Now, more men are involved in the communities where they are engaged and they are also looking at themselves and their own practices within the organization.

Capacity of the change team

One of the most striking and visible changes for us was the confidence and skills of the Ratson change team. At the Hearing the Stories meeting, they were very shy and unassertive. At the final peer-learning meeting, they spoke with confidence, asked challenging questions, and appeared to be more fully present. There also appears to be a greater capacity for seeing each other as equal human beings, and not being intimidated so much by organizational power hierarchies. For instance, as Pheoban put it in the final peer-learning session,

> *... this initiative helped not only to work on ourselves but also capacity to work with others. I have been sleeping but now I have woken up. I consider it my alarm. This made me wide awake... The first time we did the Capacitar during the hearing the stories session I was totally shy. My hands were not even moving. It was the first time that Ratson was exposed to this. To do it with my managers was difficult for me but you have changed this.*

In meetings with their Facilitator, the new change team leader was not afraid to offer her insights into the organization and spoke up confidently during the final peer events, asking very good questions that demonstrated she had really internalized the core issues.

Tigist described another important capacity change. She explained how she grew up in a family with a strong mother and there was no gender segregation in her home. She thought this was normal. Later, when men treated her in a degrading fashion, she would challenge them aggressively. Now she has learned to challenge in *"a more understanding way so both people can understand each other's point of view"*

Way forward

The next steps in the Ratson change process include the development of an internal policy, and to align the strategic planning committee and the management teams so that all ten programs can utilize the ideas they explored and developed during the eighteen-month action-learning process. Each member of the change team's individual confidence, capacity, deepened understanding, clarity, and sense of ownership within the organization make it more possible for this process to be undertaken systematically and coherently.

The new plan also recognizes the need to specifically build the individual capacity of women staff further. Ratson's strategy for this capacity building includes space for a women's day. Webeyu explained how,

… in the past months while we were conducting the GC workshops, almost all the women staff didn't speak. They would look at the floor and all the participation came from the men. All the men talked. Women did not know how to speak. We want to make sure their voices are more visible. This space helps them find their voice and challenges invisible power. They also need a place to plan.

GAVO

Background and context

GAVO is a well-established organization having started at the end of the civil war in Somalia and the independence of Somaliland in 1993. A group of 25 young men, on the advice of their Imam, decided to support mentally challenged people who were forgotten and were not able to get any kind of support. The men started this intervention in collaboration with Berbera Hospital and with the support of clan and religious leaders. The founders did not include any women. As Farhan (the Executive Director) told us,

> *At first we didn't believe that girls could contribute towards development. Times were hard, it was a time of great instability and much mental illness.*

The focus was on men, as they believed that the number of mentally ill women in the hospitals were few because "*the women are less aggressive and it is therefore less important they be treated. They are treated like a donkey.*"

GAVO originally provided community-based mental health programs to help people who were being assisted at home. They have since established community centers where professionals provide medical and psychosocial services. Gradually, GAVO'S activities expanded and included children who are living under difficult circumstances.

In the early years, they worked mostly at a local level on mental health and street children (child rights) issues by providing information (e.g. setting up a reading library) and services, such as caring for and rehabilitating developmentally challenged persons and supporting their families.

From 2002, GAVO has continued to work on these issues, but also expanded to address:

- Urban issues (market rehabilitation, solid waste management, and house-to-house land management survey)
- HIV/AIDS issues (awareness creation, counseling and training)
- Water and sanitation issues (accessing water, rehabilitating water infrastructures, setting up and training community water management committees)
- A multipurpose youth development center (library and information service, recreation facilities, cultural activities, internet café, etc., Non-formal youth education package provided to those who missed normal schooling opportunities and provide vocational skills training for the youth)
- Democracy-related issues (voter education and election monitoring)

At the same time, GAVO's target groups expanded from mentally handicapped and street children to urban poor, farming communities, the youth community, and municipality officials. GAVO also expanded its local level operations to a national-level agenda and is now working in five regions of the country.

GAVO's predominant service delivery role has further broadened into capacity building and community mobilization activities.[15] It also plays an intermediary role between citizen and local government and started advocating for community issues.[16]

In the early 2000s, GAVO's status shifted from a volunteer, community-based local development organization to a recognized and credible national development organization, administering sizable multi-year and multi-sourced funds, opening two new offices and employing fifty staff. Administrative guidelines on various issues had begun to be developed, and by 2005 it was engaging in a more comprehensive constitutional review and policy-development process.

A key principle of GAVO's approach involves mobilizing local resources and enhancing active community participation in local government issues. Their motto is "*helping people to help themselves.*" Additionally, GAVO believes in working closely with the traditional leaders and the government of Somaliland. They chose to collaborate with government and business people to help sustain their efforts and activities when GAVO withdraws from the area. GAVO's vision is to alleviate stress, poverty, and avoidable suffering throughout Somaliland and to expand to other countries in the Horn.

GAVO has benefited from its exposure to previous PACE capacity-building programs. The director attended the 2003 Gender Encounter in Khartoum, and this meeting began a process of consciousness raising in him at least four years before the GAL process was initiated. This encounter, together with GAVO's inclusive-oriented approach to doing their work, as well as their existing commitment to ongoing reflection, had already made them open to addressing issues of women's access, representation, and role diversity. GAVO had already started experimenting with supporting women as role models in non-traditional capacities (e.g. Ayan Mowliid Ibrahim is their electricity trainer). Their work on a water project with the women market vendors taught GAVO to see the importance of women's role and their contribution, leading GAVO to open its doors to young women. At the same time, illiteracy among girls is high. Somaliland has few if any gender experts, and most young girls don't go to school.

GAVO's previous experience and capacity to bring together religious and cultural leaders, and to facilitate discussion on difficult issues, was a strength they were able to build upon in the GAL project. GAVO's approach is to identify issues based on contextual analysis, and to provide space for people to influence each other so that they don't tell people what is wrong and right.

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15 This is particularly visible in its water and sanitation projects, i.e. through facilitating the formation of community water management committees and providing capacity-building trainings for members of the committee.
16 This is particularly true in its market rehabilitation project in Berbera. It facilitated smooth relationship between market vendors and Berbera municipality authorities. It also convinced the municipality to shift the market rehabilitation fund from chat vendors to other market vendors.

The Gender Action Learning Project

In our first meeting in Hargeisa, we met with Farhan, (the Executive Director), Ayan (an electricity instructor)**,** Numo, an administrative staff member, and Mahmoud (the PACE liaison officer).

In the meeting, Farhan explained that gender equality work faces resistance in Somaliland because of the powerful role of culture and tradition and certain conservative interpretations of Muslim law. Men, for instance, believe they will lose some of "their" inheritance. We heard about existing stereotypes and beliefs circulating in GAVO:

> *When we started, we accepted and believed the social norms, we were boys and liked to dominate. During the war, women contributed and did what men had done before and they also actively supported the fighters, but they were not appreciated and their role, power and positive contributions were not recognized. We in GAVO also didn't empower girls or listen to them. At some point we began to recognize women's resourcefulness while at the same time as boys we wanted to keep them back. This is what we learned from our fathers – cultural beliefs that actively discourage women from participating.*

Through their work, GAVO men were learning that they needed to listen more to the girls and women, and were hearing about the injustices that women faced. For example, they knew of a woman whose mental health was affected by cultural demands, which required her to stay with her dead husband's brother. This led to her being depressed and traumatized.

Farhan was also learning about the limits to gender equality strategies focused primarily on access to more resources.

> *When we learned that we should listen to the girls and women we realized that there are barriers you can't see and that these invisible barriers are supported by culture.*

Farhan discovered that even if girls/women get trained and have skills, no one will give them jobs. So, *"GAVO also has to intervene in the broader job market."* They knew they needed to move toward more gender equality but without violating culture. The director felt that not everyone on the staff thought like him*,* so, he reflected,

> *… there needs to be space and time for such awareness about his approach to grow.*

At the first peer-learning workshop, GAVO set itself an ambitious goal that covered changes both within the organization and with the communities of people they work with.

They aimed to:

Promote gender equity by empowering women access to resources, equal employment opportunities and increase community awareness and knowledge on gender equality through capacity building.

In particular, they developed three core objectives to help them realize this goal:

- To enhance organizational capacity on gender work through capacity building in exposure visits, training, and action-learning approaches
- To increase the role of women in leadership and their access to equal employment opportunities by educating illiterate women and young girls in leadership, providing skills training and psychosocial support
- To engender and evolve a space of dialogue on gender rights for fifty key community cultural leaders in Hargeisa and Berbera through discussion and consultation meetings

After the peer-learning workshop, GAVO developed a multi-pronged approach of working simultaneously within their own organization and with their constituencies. GAVO didn't see themselves as separate from the community, rather they recognized that they had to learn together. At the second peer-learning meeting, GAVO participants were clear that, "*If you don't change yourself, how can you tell others to be gender balanced?*"

Inside the organization they organised two planning sessions – one for the gender change team and one to develop a plan for organizing an organizational policy. They hired a male project manager to manage all GAL project activities. To learn from others, they started collecting information on gender and gender policies from other women's and youth organizations. They also organized an experience-sharing session for staff to understand their own ways of working within GAVO, and to tackle any tensions and misconceptions about gender among their members.

With their constituencies they organised three different consultation meetings to begin building a basis for conversation and dialogue.

The first was a one-day meeting held with sixty youth participants (including twenty GAVO members). This meeting was documented on video so that GAVO members and others outside could reflect on the issues coming out of the meeting. The second was organized with 15 local NGOs (30 people attended), and the third was organized with traditional leaders.

Then, as part of their attempt to challenge local beliefs that assume enrolling girls in school makes them useless, GAVO conducted a leadership-training session for thirty young girls, mostly from poor and marginalized families. Apart from the more formal activities, the GAL team engaged others in informal discussions whenever and wherever they could (e.g. in teashops, at bus-stops, when shopping, etc.).

Between the second and third peer-learning events, GAVO once again organized

meetings both within GAVO, with their direct constituencies, as well as with a broader constituency. They continued to have various gender-planning meetings within their staff team, and a number of informal departmental sessions to develop staff consciousness and to mainstream gender equity at work. Their reflection and learning sessions used the video material from the meetings with, and with the help of, traditional and cultural leaders to stimulate debate. They also hired more women staff and upgraded their skills so that they could take on different roles in the organization and the community. They trained an additional sixty young girls in leadership skills.

GAVO also began to ensure that the young girls were receiving training in skills that would be marketable for girls. At the same time, they began to ensure that 50% of their trainees are female. GAVO organized three more consultation meetings with one hundred cultural leaders, creating a space of dialogue on gender to reduce misperceptions, to learn from each other, and to improve working relationships between various cultural groups and GAVO.

In addition, GAVO had two meetings with religious leaders who ended up participating in a number of their activities, including providing lectures on different interpretations of Islam. GAVO also organized three community-discussion sessions for general community members to discuss gender in the Somali context, and for women to identify their needs. Sixteen local NGOs participated in an assessment survey, which developed a baseline understanding of the prevalence of HIV and women and men's attitudes, knowledge, and practices with respect to gender and health-related issues. The survey led to various gender-training sessions with these NGOs. Ten cultural leaders and ten young people were formed into two gender change teams with the aim of creating space for dialogue in universities, colleges, schools, tea shops, markets, youth centers, and other places where adults (and youth) meet. These teams go into the community and conduct unstructured sessions on topics such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and guardianship and inheritance.

Finally, GAVO organized a gender coordination team for all organizations working on gender issues in Somaliland, including with the Ministry of Family Welfare.

Conceptual/consciousness shifts

GAVO entered the PACE/GAL process with some experience and a strong awareness of how cultural space for women to exercise their rights can be blocked by norms. They were also clear that gender equality faced strong resistance in Somaliland by men, traditional and cultural leaders, and even some women. Yet, Farhan later said,

> *Before we started, our understanding and skills on gender was limited. We did not have tools to analyze gender disparity in Somaliland. Now there is an improved staff consciousness on gender injustice in GAVO's interventions and in the community.*

We believe that what shifted most for GAVO conceptually was a deeper knowing of the

depth and difficulty of the resistance they were dealing with and a recognition that in some respects they had as much to learn as the cultural leaders.

However, GAVO staff now have a better understanding through listening to what women staff and community members have to say, and through discussing the videos that document discussions between community, cultural, and religious leaders.
In May 2007, at the first peer-learning event, GAVO's initial focus was on women insofar as they articulated their goal as to *Promote gender equality in Somaliland by empowering women, increasing their access to resources and increasing their knowledge through capacity building.* By January 2008, we saw a conceptual shift in that their revised goal also included the need for awareness raising at the community level, as well as a need to change the rules of access to the labour market. Their 2008 goal aimed *To promote gender equity by empowering women, increasing their access to resources and equal employment opportunities and to increase community awareness and knowledge on gender equality through capacity building.*

Organizational changes and developments

A big change for GAVO is the increased access women have had to training, employment, and leadership. Within GAVO, more women staff were employed, and a number were promoted to senior positions (after having had the requisite management training). Senior project staff have made commitments to respect gender equality in the implementation, designing, and planning of any project.

At the community level, GAVO has instituted a new practice whereby they aim for a 50% gender balance in all vocational training and educational opportunities. Young girls from the poorest communities have now graduated from GAVO's vocational training centres in Hargeisa (90) and Berbera (77). One third of these trainees found employment in different business centres and organizations.

There appears to be a significant change in the way GAVO "does business" internally. At the first Hearing the Stories meeting, we had to separate the men and the women participants to make sure we heard all the voices. At the final peer-learning meeting, the director reflected:

> *At the beginning, the girls in the office would keep silent in the meetings but now members of the staff raise issues and concerns, identify changes that are needed and can recommend new ideas. At the beginning, it was difficult to hear what the women have to say but now we encourage them to participate actively. That is why there are more women than men on the staff.*

From our own observations, we noticed that in the beginning with GAVO, there was an openness and willingness to participate and be honest about how things were. At the same time, old behaviors died hard. There was a tendency for the men to exclude female members of the team.

For example, the men and women in the change team did not interact much in social and

informal spaces. A conversation with one of the program leaders at a peer workshop revealed that new habits were not easy to build. As one of the GAVO men remarked, "…*we don't know how to have supper with a woman."* But, by the end of the process, there was much more ability to work together.

GAVO appears to have succeeded in changing the norms about what gets discussed in social and public space. By involving large numbers of community members in discussions, and as part of the NGO and CBO conversations, and creating the youth and cultural-leader change teams, GAVO is making inroads at a community-wide level.

As Farhan explained,

> *Men can easily discourage women and speak badly about them. With the involvement of the Ministry of Family Affairs something is changing. One of the hardest questions we shared with traditional and cultural leaders is that GAVO is doing something against the culture. They are the customary law makers and we are opposing it. They asked how can we respect their rights if we are developing these laws. GAVO said that if they are developing laws why don't you at least listen to the women. They said you are right.*

With respect to their vocational training programs, GAVO was challenged in the third peer event by one of the Ethiopian woman participants. She felt that the kind of training that GAVO was making available for girls, such as tailoring, beautification, baking, computer, accounting, and secretarial skills was reinforcing gender stereotypes not challenging them. GAVO's response was that they have to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the program to the community and look at what kind of behavior will be acceptable so that the leaders will support it.

Perhaps in such a context, it might be that simply getting girls access to the vocational training centres is in itself a challenge to existing norms. GAVO's experience with making Ayan the electricity trainer led them to be more cautious with respect to training many women in non-traditional work as the girls would then struggle to get employment.

GAVO in the Community

Young girls among GAVO's constituency have increased their knowledge and leadership skills and show greater willingness to become leaders. They have improved their skills in terms of decision-making, conflict resolution, and peace building. There is evidence of these young girls contributing to resolving conflicts in the home rather than being part of it.

The local youth NGOs and CBOs that have been part of GAVO's training, assessment, and discussion processes are actively working towards exposing current misconceptions about gender in Somaliland and are promoting more gender-sensitive programs. They are learning to deal with some fierce resistance: for instance, a young man in the youth change team reported about his experience of interviewing women and men, young and

old, in preparation for a community meeting:

> *When I shared my questions about gender, they were notoriously opposed to even talk about it. The only response given to me was go to hell and never come to talk with us about NGO's issues to mislead people from their culture… but what I noticed is that people only resist change which is imposed on them by others but if space, time and openness is given, it is quite evident that everybody likes to participate in a change process which is not undermining his with his/her culturally prescribed goals and values.*

Abdirisak Mohamed Abdi, an eighteen-year-old university student, said in a GAVO evaluation interview:

> *"First time I heard the word Gender, it was a consultation meeting which was organized by GAVO, a local NGO. In that meeting we discussed gender issues though my stereotyped beliefs on gender was that it is against Islamic principles. I did not contribute any single word to the discussion flow but was just listening. After hearing GAVO representative advise the importance for everybody to learn about gender so that we can better understand and avoid false information on gender mainstreaming. In that moment, what comes to my mind was to rethink since that words cracked space into my heart and time was given to analyze and find new ways of looking and understanding the real meaning of the word gender. At the end of the meeting, I forwarded my request of being a member of the youth committee on gender and I insisted my desire to know more about gender. ...The gender trainings of GAVO have changed a lot my behavior because previously to talk about gender was an insult against Islamic religion and given that, it's something unspeakable. My other belief was that woman are hostages in our hands and their ideas and views are unaccounted in the decision making processes at family and community level. From that stage and becoming a gender activist was one my greatest turning points in my life. I write articles on women and their rights in the local newspapers.*

GAVO also managed to expand its internal change team by creating further change teams among the cultural and religious leaders, the youth, and various local NGOs and CBOs who have all, in turn, worked extensively in their own communities. GAVO is also involved with the Ministry of Family Welfare in developing a National Gender Policy.

Personal Learning Associated with the GAL

Five GAVO female staff gained different skills and capacity in relation to project management, leadership, various aspects of office, and financial management, computer skills, and English-language competence. They are also taking on greater responsibilities within the organization.

Ayan, one of the change team members, reflected at the second peer-learning meeting:

I gained a lot of experience as a result of participating in the workshop. I feel like I have changed. In my class I try to explain gender and I see students changing slowly. One of the challenges is my own brother. When I talk about gender equality he resists. He says, "what is this gender…" But slowly he has started to understand and change. I hope slowly we realize the change we would like to see.

Men in GAVO are feeling more confident, informed, and able to challenge traditional views and practices within their own families and in the wider community. According to Farhan, at the beginning, men in GAVO found it difficult to hear what the women had to say, but now they have learned to hear and are encouraging women to actively participate.

GAVO staff members are more aware of, and better able to take account of, women's and men's realities in the planning and implementing of programs and projects. The research and assessments carried out by the youth and cultural-leader change teams have taught the GAVO staff about community perceptions, beliefs, and also ways of challenging them. In exploring the contradictions that exist between Sharia, traditional, and customary laws, they have found a way of raising gender-equality issues that is suitable for their context. Through the various dialogues and discussions, they appear to have overcome the fear among many of the traditional and cultural leaders that if gender equality is accepted in Somaliland, women will get the power to raise issues that will lead to more conflicts in the families.

The UNYDA Story[17]

Background

Upper Nile Youth Development Association (UNYDA) is a youth organization in Southern Sudan. It has been striving to act as a convener for youth from various ethnic backgrounds in the Upper Nile state capital, Malakal. Upper Nile is an environment characterized by traditional ideas and strong resistance to change. It is very difficult for youth to adopt new ideas that have not been approved by elders. This attitude appears to be anchored in the cultural norms and political culture of the state.

Since 1983, the citizens of Upper Nile state have been living in an isolation and a mindset framed by war and ethnic tensions. Youth have often been manipulated and mobilized by various warring factions to advance their cause and inflict destruction on communities across the state.

Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on January 9, 2005, people in Upper Nile state have regained their freedom of movement and association. Youth are now more willing to come together in facing some of the development challenges faced by the region. The local context, which prevailed during the war, is also changing with the influx of young returnees from Khartoum, other African countries, and the West, including Canada. They bring with them new cultural norms that are reflected in the way they dress and interact with people.

UNYDA's leadership is made up of young professionals who have had access to education and opportunities that exposed them to more enabling environments. Almost all the members were men. The awareness of the contrast between their situation and that of youths roaming around Malakal served to ignite their engagement. The founders became conscious of their "privileges" in comparison to the dead-end in which their less privileged counterparts found themselves. This compassion was instrumental in a decision to act and to persevere under what has often been a hostile environment.

In recent history, youths have seldom experienced attention and concerns free of political agendas. Hence, UNYDA has had to overcome deep mistrust with regard to its own inner motives – i.e. what were *their* own political agendas? Mistrust was managed through self-confidence and what appears to be a fair measure of humility, which enabled the organization to navigate prevailing uneasiness among youth in the region. One of its members noted that "*hope will lead you to accept challenges, and those challenges will lead you to achieve things.*"

The progressive recognition of its work by elders also contributed to the commitment of its core membership.

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[17] The stories of UNYDA, WDG, and Abu Hadia Society include material taken from the organizational profiles done by PACE staff.

The organization aims to create a network for youth organizations across Upper Nile state. The setting up of youth centers in each locality is regarded as pivotal for the achievement of its vision. Initially, the organization created a youth transformation and development center in Malakal, which would serve as a pilot for future district youth centers across the state.

UNYDA described its work as:

- Implementing a peace-building program where they bring together youth from different tribes
- Developing an anti-poverty initiative, which focuses on creating job opportunity for youth through provision of credit services
- Helping women to access information through the media
- Helping women with special needs
- Supporting internally displaced people to reintegrate back to their communities

UNYDA's approach was largely centered on bringing people together for information sharing and collective reflection on issues of relevance for youth. When we first met them, their work was largely with young men, but they wanted to bring more women into the organization.

The Gender Action Learning Program

We arrived in Malakal late in the morning and began our meeting that afternoon, feeling fortunate that the mud had dried sufficiently to allow us to get to the building. We met with Emmanuel, an Executive Committee (EC) member; Josef, member and finance officer (employed in Government taxation department); Chol Gaj, a local government administrative officer; Coordinator, Sabit Akatir, an EC member; Jemmy, a member and teacher; and Charles, Secretary General and Upper Nile University teaching assistant. All of the UNYDA representatives were men.

As the meeting unfolded, it emerged that they believed that women needed to be involved in development of Upper Nile but that for a variety of cultural and political reasons, UNYDA was unable to attract women to their work or their organization. The men at the meeting were all convinced that UNYDA would be much stronger with women's participation and that it was also "fair" that women received a good education and were part of the development process.

At the first peer-learning workshop, UNYDA developed its understanding of gender equality and built plans for their work in Upper Nile. Their plan was to build the capacity of UNYDA in order to work on gender issues. At the same time, they would respond to women's practical needs in the area. The activities they envisioned were:

- Media campaign
- Training of trainers on gender issues

- Gender awareness building at the community level through community conversations
- Exchange visit to a relevant organization
- Advocacy workshop with local government officials responsible for health and education of women/girls

Their image of results after 18 months was:

- Twenty young leaders (male/female) from Malakal and counties of the state were well equipped to facilitate gender-awareness building within their communities
- Increase in community awareness on gender injustice and how it affects women and girl's lives
- Both education and health policy makers in the state were sensitized on current situation of women/girl's access to both education and health services
- Increase in number of young female membership in UNYDA

After the peer-learning workshop, UNYDA developed a radio program on gender issues. They also identified a Sudanese trainer and developed a seven-day training of trainers (TOT) program for themselves. It included gender and development, gender mainstreaming, gender perceptions, gender and leadership, gender and reproductive health. They also identified the traditional leaders as targets to be addressed in dealing with gender issues.

The TOT program ultimately attracted ten men and ten women. Six of the young women were willing to travel to communities outside Malakal to conduct "conversations" with traditional leaders and community members.

Attracting women to be part of this work has been quite a challenge. As Chol stated at a peer learning workshop:

> *The most important challenge has been the culture and traditional belief in Malakal. Men and women cannot even sit in the same room. We had to work with the families of the youth to convince them so that more girls can join the group. We did it in such away that members can bring their close friends. We built trust among families to send family members. We managed to get three members to bring friends. We needed only educated women to teach but we believe that it is better if we use women from the community (who can be role models).*

The motivation for UNYDA men is a mixture of belief in equality because it is "right," and a more instrumental realization that economic and cultural development are dependent on women's empowerment. Nevertheless, they have learned that they need to speak of equality in a way that resonates with traditional men. As Sebith put it,

> *We have a technique… we tell parents " if you give your daughter to a man today you get few cattle, but if you send her to school she will bring an even wealthier husband and the dowry will increase by 90-100%"!*

At the same workshop, the UNYDA team described their personal learning about gender relations. Sebith told the following story:

> *I am staying with my brother, his wife and sister. All women do the cleaning and cooking. After the training I started to think 'why shouldn't I help my sister-in-law as I have now learnt about gender equality and teach others by example?' However, since it makes a woman less valued and look lazy and may cause a man to divorce her, I decided to take it slowly. I started washing clothes, which took people by surprise for a while. Then after a month I gave my clothes to my in-law to wash them. But she asked me why don't you do it yourself?*

Chol described his family life:

> *I live with my sister and her three kids. I started to divide work between the boys and girls. As part of the family members are living in the rural areas, they find it strange when they see the boys fetching water…*

At the third peer workshop, UNYDA described the work they had done over the past seven months.

> *We started working on gender in the cause of peace. We began with training for UNYDA members. We held a training for 10 women and 10 men. This was a first for us. We realized that we needed to bring these ideas to the people outside of Malakal because they are isolated. The training made us very sympathetic with women—we felt the injustice, realized how cultural traditions are unfair to women.*
>
> *We reached out to five counties. When we went to rural communities we met first with male leaders—many of them were afraid that their rights would be taken away. We said, "No, we are here for everybody—including children."*

Later, we were told that these were significant journeys. Some counties take up to four days to reach and required a number of boat trips, not to mention a risky security situation.

The workshops were quite successful. As described by UNYDA:

> *In the workshops, because of the facilitation we used, everybody realized women were most subordinated. In marriage, because the man pays a dowry, he feels he owns her. In education girls are not sent to school because she will be with another family. Women's health—men said that mothers and grandmothers had to give birth without any medical help. On inheritance, there were two views: customary law says that women don't inherit but the state law says women should inherit.*
>
> *We were very moved by the response from the community. People were very involved.*

In reflecting on their initial goals, they were particularly pleased that they were attracting female members.

> *… females are now approaching us to join. We have 10 female members. Six active female members participated in the community outreach. At the counties level, people are so moved by the concept of gender that men and women are joining us to work specifically on this issue.*

The workshops not only raised consciousness but also have led to the development of a network of chiefs, teachers, and other government workers and youth that are focused on gender issues. The workshops are also bringing new members to UNDYA and have solidified their female membership.

When asked why they thought the workshops were successful, Sebith described their approach:

> *Our approach—we didn't go there to tell people what's wrong, they identified problems; its what they said. Also, the constitution says a lot about gender equality and politicians feel responsible to do something. People have been suffering a lot, it's a new time, they see how educated women can work to change our country.*

During the peer-learning workshop the UNYDA team also described their continuing personal learning about gender equality,

> *I have been greatly transformed since last year. After being exposed to the gender concept I have been able to do gender awareness at home and in 3 counties. My family asked me what I was doing and they have been engaging themselves in the process. Andrea was there a few months ago and shared a reporting tool. I was able to document my experience using the tool that Andrea provided.*

> *Since joining UNYDA and the GAL, I am happy because my father and mother are very supportive. I have been able to join the awareness raising work in the counties and am able to do something for my community. I have been able to get to know people inside an outside UNYDA and I am proud of what I am doing for my community.*

> *Two things happened. In my house we have a water source. A group of ladies came to collect water and found me cleaning the house. They asked why. I asked them what was wrong with it. I also asked what would happen if there was not a woman around. I feel I was able to influence their attitudes about it.*

Capacity developed over the program:
Three sets of increased capacities can be seen from discussions with UNDYA and GAL Facilitators.

1. Community: the combination of the radio program and the community visits process has begun a discussion of gender equality, as well as broader cultural pluralism in five rural communities and in Malakal itself. This discussion is focused on the instrumental value of women's equality (increased value to the family of an educated girl), as well as on the fairness of inheritance rules, girls' attendance at school, and access to health care. This work has resulted in a new set of networks that includes chiefs, government, and UNYDA.

2. Organization: UNYDA has developed and tested a process for engaging very traditional communities in discussions of gender equality. Part of this is an approach to facilitation – *we didn't go there to tell people what's wrong, they identified problems; its what they said.* They were also very clear about engaging traditional leaders. This approach certainly grows out of their knowledge of what is required in their culture, but we also imagine that the example of other organizations in the PACE/GAL program, particularly GAVO, would have encouraged this approach. As an organization, UNYDA have also developed a solid understanding of gender equality – their discussions have included the benefits to women and their communities, questions of fairness and justice, the need for individual learning, and the importance of culture, as well as the legal frameworks that affect women's rights. The organization has attracted women leaders for the first time and is building networks that are bringing a variety of resources to the organization.

3. Individuals: early in the program, we were struck by the number of stories of male UNYDA members changing their home behavior, washing clothes, cooking and challenging norms within their families. UNYDA members described some of their learning as:

- Learned new techniques to convince the community how to be flexible and send girls to school
- Learned the importance of personal change – James (a teacher) started doing things differently at home, and because he was a teacher, it built awareness among his students.

As the UNYDA team related,

> *I came to believe that I can make a change. Before, I thought change for gender equality was impossible but I realized it is possible. The experience of poor people is that violence is a way of resolving conflict, I realized that change can happen in non-violent ways. But you can't impose this.*

> *When we started changing individuals, we realized individuals are influenced by culture so we are trying to work with culture. This way we can support individual change.*

The Women's Development Group (WDG) Story

Background

WDG is a women's organization in Wau, Southern Sudan. Wau was a garrison town during the last segment of the long civil war in Sudan and was practically sealed off and deprived of any significant external influences. Today, Wau has no public transport, no water supply, and no electricity.

Tribal tensions among the three main ethnic groups in the Wau district (Dinka, Fertit, and Jur) have been running high since 1985, and are yet to ease up, even after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

WDG emerged from this tension to foster a space where women from Dinka, Fertit, Jur, and other ethnic backgrounds can come together around issues affecting their life and their communities.

Following 22 years of civil war, the women of Southern Sudan had hopes for peace in their country, their communities and in their families. It was not to be. Tribal differences persist and, sadly, domestic violence has increased in both quantity and intensity.

The crossing of those tribal lines was the seed that gave rise to WDG. Ms. Mariana Biri Felbert, one of the nine women who founded the organization, wanted to attend the funeral of a friend of hers that was to take place in a Dinka area. As a Fertit woman, she was aware of the risk of attempting to cross the dividing line, known as the red line between the Fertit and Dinka areas, by herself. She persuaded a few other women to accompany her, and together they walked through the red line. The women were able to pay their last respects to Ms. Felbert's friend and to return safely back home. Ms Felbert later described the beginning of WDG,

> *We also realized that if two or three of us came together we might be able do something about these tensions.*

This founding experience, and its concern for peace building, was to lead to a particular approach to working on gender equality.

When we first met the members of WDG, they had added income generation (handicrafts, goat rearing, tailoring), food security, and family education to their services. The education piece included discussions about women's rights and decision-making.

The Gender Action Learning Process

Our first meeting was in Wau at the office of WDG. Amel, Michel, and David met with Rabha Elis Bandas, a Coordinator based in Khartoum; Lina Elis Bandas, a Program Coordinator; Regina Edward, the Assistant Director; and Luka Mauro, who coordinates the food security program from Khartoum.

At this meeting, WDG reflected on their organization and their community. One of the decisions they made was to do something about domestic violence. We analyzed the causes of domestic violence in their community and identified some of the things that would have to change if WDG was to have an impact on the problem. According to a later comment by Luka, this was where WDG learned how to analyze a problem with sufficient depth to design effective strategies. However, WDG started with a lot of strong orientations that would later inform the project. For example, it was clear to them from the beginning that they had to include men and that they had to work with the community in a way that wouldn't contribute to tensions and alienation.

At the first peer-learning workshop, they developed their plan in more depth. According to the WDG team, their plan was enriched by two factors – one was the discipline of making a plan, developing objectives, activities and outcomes; the second was the deeper understanding of gender equality that the team absorbed at the workshop.

> *WDG used to work on gender but used to deal with very limited issues mainly about sex and gender… After the training, our workshops started to cover wider issues like gender, culture, violence…*

> *I found the [integral] framework helpful to reflect on my practice and to see where I can distribute my efforts and how to move between the boxes when needed. It is a more holistic way of working on problems. I found it useful talking about change at different levels. I always thought about change at community level but now I realize personal change is also important.*

Following the workshop, the WDG team developed an action research project with help from Michel and Amel. The research examined the causes and consequences of violence against women. The participatory methods used in the research were new to Wau and led to considerable discussion and learning. The project was carried out over the summer and fall so that the team was able to arrive at the second peer workshop with lots of data but it was not yet organized.

Following the second workshop, a facilitator (Asha) worked with the team to write up the findings. When Amel returned from her studies, she helped the team develop a series of workshops to bring the findings to the community.

The research didn't stop, it continues as victims are continuing to come to tell their story. According to Rabha, there is a confidence in the community that WDG will not embarrass them but will support them.

The next step was to disseminate the findings with three primary groups.

- Civil society – 25 women's groups and Ministry of Women representatives. It was a very powerful sharing experience. Many talked about their own experience of being violated, including the Ministers' wives
- Social and religious leaders, including government representatives
- Customary chiefs – WDG shared what women were saying about customary law and what women were saying about how that law discriminated against them. Some of the chiefs were touched by what the women said, some denied it. Eventually, they agreed that 25% of seats in their council should be held by women and said to WDG, "*You bring us women leaders.*"

One of the chiefs said, "*A thousand people should be at this workshop.*"

Step three has been working in the community. WDG has formed a group out of the workshops to start a campaign of Home Peace Education. They are developing a guide to non-violent conflict resolution, third party intervention, dialogue, controlling anger, and use of empathy. They are reaching out through the church and in residential areas, conducting workshops and creating leaders who will in turn work with their communities.

Currently, the program has a number of directions:

- Working with Home Peace Makers: the 55 participants in the two workshops who committed themselves to change the lives of at least ten individuals around them
- Community dialogue on non-violent ways of solving conflict in homes, reaching out to different residential areas through social clubs, churches, schools...etc.
- Sensitization of artists – Home Peace' song competition (the successful song to be broadcast through local radio and cassettes)
- Lobbying the government of Southern Sudan to change laws governing family relations
- Working with chiefs to ensure that customary law is enforced in a way that is gender sensitive

Capacity developed over the period of the program:

First and foremost, the development of the Home Peace Education Program stands as the primary example of capacity built. The program has engaged the community in this issue, opened up a dialogue with the chiefs, and enlisted the aid of government ministries and the UN. WDG is clearly "capable" of doing something it could not do beforehand. It now has a well-developed program for bringing Home Peace to Wau and the surrounding area.

Along the way, there were important realizations and skill development:

1. Using the discipline of analysis and planning tools to understand the problem in its complexity, and to build plans to target key areas of leverage

2. Reinforcing the belief which existed before that men have to be part of the change, and that the project has to be led in a way that does not create divisions in the community

3. Developing considerable knowledge and skill in the area of participative research

4. Building a much more complex view of gender equality into the practice of WDG, although the bulk of their work had been with women. Previously, their work had been focused on making resources available to women. The new approach is focused on consciousness change, normative change in the community, policy change at the government level, and structural change in the Council of Chiefs.

5. Renewing the human energy in their organization. When we first met, the group talked about how there were fewer and fewer volunteers, and how it was difficult to carry the organization with existing volunteers. The Home Peace Education Program has brought many new volunteers with real commitment and energy to the organization.

As the WDG team put it,

> *Before, I didn't think I had the skills to make change. Now, I have built my capacity and I know I can make a real change.*

> *Our last workshop with Amel took us from seeing the problem to having the skills to deal with it. Realized also that it's a long process, requires continuous work and that new understandings and new issues arise that didn't come through earlier.*

> *Came to learn the importance of scientific evidence, also that domestic violence can't be tackled by one organization, needs a network*

> *Very important to include men—men listen to other men who transform their life. In a chief workshop, one was very rigid but listened to other men. It's not a threat to masculinity to listen to another man.*

In our last communication from WDG, we heard about the continuing work with government ministries, and at the community level of training the women who have been invited to become part of the Council of Chiefs. We have also heard about Rabha and Amel leading writing workshops in Arabic, based on the work of Louise Dunlap.[18]

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18 Louise Dunlap is a writing teacher who has worked with community groups for more than thirty years. At the end of the formal GAL process with G@W, PACE brought Louise to the Horn to lead a writing workshop with PACE partners.

Abu Hadia Society

Abu Hadia Society works in Eastern Sudan where the population is largely Beja. The Beja society is conservative, and its culture is characterized by strict gender segregation and inequality. Women are rarely seen in public. Decision-making at both village and household levels is considered the responsibility of men. Those cultural norms have undermined women's socio-economic status and increased their vulnerability to poverty. Illiteracy is very high among Beja women. Girls' access to education is limited and harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation, are wide spread. Women suffer unequal access to health services, education, and productive assets.

The environmental deterioration in the Red Sea state since the early '80s has caused the emigration of men (largely pastoralists) to Port Sudan, leaving women alone to fend for their families in a very harsh environment. The collapse of social services across the country has further increased poverty and vulnerability, leaving women with additional burdens and responsibilities at the household and community levels.

Those inequalities between men and women prompted the activism of Abu Hadia, a Beja man from Sinkat, in a town located 120 km from Port Sudan. Abu Hadia started challenging unequal cultural norms by sending his own daughters to school and encouraging his relatives and neighbors to emulate his action. His commitment to girls' education extended over the years beyond his family and his immediate neighborhoods. In 1974, he established a charitable organization in Sinkat to support girls from poor families to continue their education. In addition to financial support, his organization organized training on handicrafts and first aid and sensitization on harmful practices.

The society's activities are meant predominantly to benefit young girls and women from the poorest families of the communities. Hence, benefits to men are indirect. As an Abu Hadia change team member pointed out, "*Men benefit from projects identified by and for women.*" For instance, men benefit from group health insurance policies even though the women are the holders of the insurance policies. Men also gain from the setting up of water stations and the sensitization of the *Zakat* Chamber on local development priorities.[19]

The Gender Action Learning Program

Our work with Abu Hadia began with a two-day meeting with Ayesha Ahmet (ex-beneficiary, currently a volunteer in the Gender and Human Rights Program based in Port Sudan), Mohamedeen Mohamad (current office manager of Port Sudan project office), and Achmed Tamim (volunteer on the Technical Committee, also works as team leader for the livelihoods program). We had to meet in Addis Ababa as we were unable to get visas to go to Port Sudan.

During the meeting, we discussed the work of Abu Hadia, why it is successful and how it

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19 The Zakat Chamber is responsible for collecting a special tax paid by all Muslims in Sudan. AHS is trying to influence how those monies can be invested for the development of rural communities.

could extend its work so as to benefit women and men in the Red Sea area. We learned about the four main program areas – Education, Food Security (both in Port Sinkat), Land Conflict Resolution, and Gender and Human Rights in Port Sudan. Each program has an officer leading it, along with volunteers and beneficiaries. The beneficiaries elect representative committees to guide them. Abu Hadia staff sit with the leaders of the tribe in a particular community and ask them for a committee of between seven and ten people. The leader negotiates with the community to select appropriate people.

What was most interesting to us, however, was the deep respect that the team had for Abu Hadia, how often when they spoke of him their eyes would mist up and they would tell stories of how revered he was.

> *He lived and role modeled a basic respectful attitude to people - he showed how to relate to others without any kind of differentiation based on religion, gender, or tribes.*

> *He belonged to all parts of Islam and helped all communities. He is a guide for us. In all the meetings we remind ourselves about him and his principles.*

The Abu Hadia team found the meeting very helpful, and in particular commented on learning, "*new skills in relation to data collection and analyzing our work, helped us realize how much we do, and learned how to listen carefully to others.*"

The Capacitar exercises were also an important new learning for the team.

> *The 'SPORTS' exercises are connected to real problems in our lives, they help us to learn with our whole bodies and how to live in peace with oneself and with others and to be focused in the discussion. They're also useful for me to use as icebreakers and how to 'power the engine'!*

As Facilitators, we were struck by Abu Hadia's personal influence was. We also noted the complex way they work on issues and how important the quality of relationships is to the association. For example, rather than simply condemning FGM (female genital mutilation) they realised they needed to create alternative employment for the midwives who did the FGM operations, otherwise they would keep doing them. We were also interested in what would become an ongoing theme for them during the action-learning process. That is, the strategy of engaging men in talking about gender equality in a way that creates space rather than closes it down.

Following the meeting, the Abu Hadia team joined the other organizations for the first peer-learning session. At this session, they developed their plan to strengthen work on gender equality in their organization. Although they began with the idea of building a resource centre, ultimately, they realized that the first step would be to understand and consolidate the approach of their founder, Abu Hadia, to gender issues, and to use this approach to extend the work with volunteers, decision makers, and other NGOs in the Red Sea context.

The activities for the change project would be:

- Develop a training manual for the society
- Document Abu Hadia stories of changes
- Conduct six basic and advanced trainings on gender awareness and gender planning

The team highlighted the following gains from their participation in the first workshop:

- More familiar with the situation of women in Ethiopia and Somaliland
- Internalized new methods and techniques, such as Capacitar and drawing, which they will use in their own work
- Clearer understanding of differences between Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD)
- The "Hearing the Story" meeting helped build more self-confidence through the opportunity to reflect over their organization's work on gender
- Learned how to conduct research and collect information
- Situated the work of AHS with respect to a vast array of gender approaches
- Re-affirmed the relevance of AHS's commitment to gender issues in the Red Sea

After the workshop, the Abu Hadia team met with their Executive Committee and organized work on the manual and the collection of Abu Hadia stories. Although the work did not proceed as quickly as hoped, the team held a number of important meetings and demonstrated how the involvement of local officials was central to their plan.

As Achmed explained,

> We invite the officials to the meetings and tell them about the project and show them that the work we do benefits to the community. Then they contribute ... in terms of transport, providing permission to work and lift the bureaucracy to help us to do the work. The government offices support us by organizing others to help us to gain acceptance. They will feel part of us. Their presence makes our work more acceptable.

The second peer workshop allowed the Abu Hadia team to deepen their understanding of gender issues in the region. For example, one team member said,

> I discovered different categories of domestic violence. I thought domestic violence is beating children and wife and not related to gender. Now I understood that there is a social, psychological, physical, economic ... I will go back and teach my community.

The team also learned more about the cultural dimensions of change. As Mohamedeen said,
> I learnt yesterday that people have managed to mainstream gender in their work according to their context (traditions, culture...).

Respect for culture, and the dialogue required to bridge differences, continued to be an important theme. One Abu Hadia team member, for whom touching a woman not his wife was definitely taboo, commented,

> *Dialogue is the most important thing in achieving change regarding gender discrimination. I want to mention one example, when we did an exercise in this room one of the female participants asked me if she can hold my hand and it gave me learning on how we can achieve better if we learn to respect each other's culture… the issue of working by example from the different cases helped me to learn about the role of role models.*

Change team members were also bringing their learning about gender relations into their personal lives. Mohamedeen told the following story,

> *I experienced different incidents but want to share what happened in the family. … I tried to transfer what I gained in the workshop from Michel especially the massage to practice communication with the hand. The exercise broke the ice between me and my wife.*

At the third workshop, the team shared their success of completing a draft of the manual. What was interesting to us was the continuing "dance" of change and cultural respect.

> *We tested the manual with staff from the Ministry—they were so pleased they gave us 30 scholarships for girls. There is lots of acceptance by politicians because it is done within the culture.*

"Within the culture" is not exactly an unchanging condition. Mohamedeen explained,

> *When Abu Hadia was first working he was seen as too liberal; fundamentalists disagreed with him. Over time they changed and now there is a Koranic school named after him. So, Islamic teaching will be part of the manual. We are trying to separate negative and positive aspects. From Abu Hadia, we know there is a heritage of positive things that support women's rights. We want to bring it to the surface.*

Again, the team continued to bring these ideas to their private lives. As Ahmed explains,

> *…after we finished the first draft of the manual, Mohamadin brought a copy to my home... My wife read about gender roles and read that reproductive roles are not just women's responsibility. She shared this with other women. The women were very happy to hear this. Each one told their husband and they asked who told you this. They told him Mohamedeen! They weren't very happy about this. But somehow we are making change in this area.*

Mohamedeen also had a personal story,

I tried to share domestic responsibilities at home and tried to cook. The first time I did it I burned the cooking. But we are having a lot of fun at home and my wife understands now.

Looking back over the experience with Abu Hadia, we would say that the key learnings for their team were

- Technical – writing, analyzing data, facilitation
- Conceptual – deeper understanding of different approaches to gender equality and how inequality is experienced in different parts of the region. We think the experience allowed them to understand many things they already knew from Abu Hadia's example
- Personal – bringing these understandings (including Capacitar techniques) to their own lives and to those of their neighbors and families
- Cultural – deepening their understanding of bringing deep cultural change in a way which was "within the culture"

■

Conclusion

After reading these stories, what stands out? First, we were deeply impressed with the willingness of the participants to go as deeply as they did into their organizations and themselves. In part, this energy for change grew out of their commitment to community. For most, the time given is voluntary and unpaid. We heard over and over again comments like, *"we are educated, it is our duty to be involved in the community." Or simply, "It is our responsibility."*

The second thing that has been of interest is the place of culture, community, family, and relationship in the work of these organizations. They all understand how culture and traditional norms have held back the movement toward women's equality, and they want to engage with those aspects of their culture. However, throughout the region, we were struck by how change agents were respectful of the culture, worked "within" it, and keenly felt the need to maintain and strengthen relationships in the community. They did not see themselves as outside the predominant culture as so many change agents do in other parts of the world.

We think this "within the culture" approach allowed the organizations to dramatically increase supportive networks of community people, chiefs, religious leaders, and government officials.

This engagement with community was also seen in how participants in the program took the learning personally. They looked for ways to apply it in their own lives with their families and their neighbors. In some cases, they took the responsibility to hold themselves and their colleagues to account, reminding colleagues if they used sayings or behaved in ways disrespectful of women.

We are also keenly aware of the importance of the PACE team to the success of the program. As we have written in the companion paper, "In Our Own Way," the "container" of values, skills, and dedication to learning of the PACE team was a key factor.

Overall, we feel deeply enriched by the opportunity to work with the inspiring women and men who participated in the program. We carry their stories and their spirits in our hearts.

"Working On Gender Issues in Our Own Way"
(Description of the program by an Ethiopian participant)

Michel Friedman and David Kelleher

December 2009

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INTRODUCTION: working in support of the PACE regional program in the Horn of Africa

It is very striking for us that the GAL (Gender Action Learning) program clearly touched the deepest core of people's hearts and minds. It went way beyond producing only measurable and quantitative outcomes, such as more girls gaining access to training opportunities, or more women becoming capacitated to be leaders (examples from GAVO, UNYDA, WDG, Ratson). It affected the way participants, women and men, began to think and feel about themselves, and how they live their lives. Examples include men doing more domestic work (UNYDA, Ratson, Admas, Abu Hadia), women gaining access to traditional authority structures (WDG), a reduction in domestic violence in Dire Dawe (Admas), and an increased consciousness about the meaning of violence (Admas, WDG, Abu Hadia, Ratson).

Admas, UNYDA, WDG and GAVO have all opened doorways into deeper and stronger community development, dialogue, interaction, and transformation. The community and organizational-level processes they initiated, catalyzed discussions, and a level of meaningful relating between women and men, staff and managers, even family members, that was not present before. This is fascinating to us because what it means to be a "woman" or a "man" in our different cultural contexts gets to the heart of who we are as humans – a core aspect of our identity, our sense of self. And because the change project processes have all been engaging broader community members on culture, identity, and tradition, it has truly struck a nerve. Previously unasked questions about gender, culture, traditionally accepted social norms and practices are now on these organizations' and their communities' agendas.

In the meanwhile, UNYDA's and Admas' membership bases have both grown. WDG has massively expanded its reach and influence and also gained more volunteers. GAVO has begun a closer collaboration with women's rights groups and the minister of Social Welfare, and gained new women staff and women students. Ratson has enabled discussion between staff that was never there before – so much so that Phoeben, one of the change team members, said at our last meeting, "*I've woken up*".

These experiences are showing how a different approach to "development" can enliven and enrich it and transform unequal power within it. In the final peer event, for example, Lina Elias one of the Sudanese participants reflected, "*From the presentations, I understand that we are focusing on human development not just physical development. We really need to develop humans before we go on to the material aspects.*" And Abnet, one of the PACE team, said how much he had learned from the participants' stories, "*I feel like I am starting to practice development.*" He was referring to how participants were learning to talk about and connect with their own problems, thus opening up dialogue and opportunities for themselves to develop locally appropriate solutions. He was seeing how development practitioners can practically facilitate such independence.

This paper reflects on the GAL program, and how it supported the six participating organizations to affirm and cultivate change processes "in their own idiom."[20] The details of each organizational story, and the changes that unfolded for them during the two-year period, are described in the "Culture" paper. This paper, by contrast, reflects on the patterns emerging across all six organizations and articulates what made the program unique. As Facilitators, we were impressed with the depth of change we noticed in the participants we worked with and the stories of change we heard emerging from their organizations and communities. Andrea Lindores, the PACE Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning specialist said recently,[21] "*What we are seeing suggests some quite significant transformations in gender relations as well as more attention being paid to gender issues in organizations and communities.*" In this paper, we consider some of the factors that led to such inspiring outcomes.

Setting intentions

At the beginning of the program, the Gender at Work team developed a series of intentions that would guide the Facilitators throughout the two years. Among these, the following are significant in that they helped to shape the experience of the participants and created the opportunity for self-generation of meaning and outcomes.

- We work in a way that is respectful of where participants are coming from and the risks they face in confronting conservative/traditional cultural beliefs, views, and practices.

- We create space for participants to explore and examine their own meanings, assumptions, and visions about gender equality, and to clarify the differences between gender equality and women's rights approaches. The program is energizing and inspiring, enabling partners to develop the most suitable and strategic ways of challenging what needs to change.

- We create learning environments which catalyze both personal and organizational change and which allow participants to feel safe, relaxed, and open so that they can become more of who they are. We help ourselves and participants unlearn old ways of thinking, being, and doing, letting go of all obstacles to growth. We ignite the desire among participants to reflect and write about their experiences.

In this paper, we explore how these intentions manifested, how the program supported participants to feel a sense of ownership, as well as how it enabled the depth of response and commitment over the two year period.

The next section briefly outlines how the PACE/GAL program was initiated. The third section describes the theory of change as developed by the participants based on their experiences during the process. Finally, we reflect on the lessons we learned from the experience and the unique flavor of doing this work in the context of the Horn of Africa.

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20 "Idiom" here refers both to local dialects/forms of expression as well as local ways of doing things.
21 E-mail correspondence, Nov 14th, 2009.

BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE PROCESS

The care with which the PACE program prepared the ground before introducing Gender at Works' action learning program is noteworthy as their care played a key role in the success of the program. PACE's attention to timing, process, and method of selecting collaborators (Gender at Work, as well as participating organizations) created an environment that was very easy for Gender at Work (G@W) to enter.[22] We could literally hit the ground running, able to take advantage of the deep relationships of trust that existed between PACE and the people we were to work with. PACE was is no rush to respond to external pressures and wanted to be sure they found a process that suited their style and the conditions and context they were working in. The PACE program manager, for instance, had a number of opportunities to learn more about G@W before hiring us. He was formally introduced to the inclusive nature of G@W's adaptation of Ken Wilber's integral framework[23] – one of the key tools used in the GAL program – in 2003 at the Khartoum Gender Encounter.[24] Then, in May 2004,[25] an international group of women and men involved in innovative developmental and transformative processes and practices came together in a meeting at which the PACE program manager learned more about the Gender at Work approach.[26] One of the reasons PACE was interested in working with Gender at Work was that we offer a non-prescriptive process by which participating organizations can both define and develop their own change agenda. The GAL program finally began at the end of 2006, when Gender at Work and PACE developed an approach together and set the terms of reference for what became known as the GAL program.

The GAL program followed nine key steps, as outlined by David Kelleher in "Action Learning for Gender Equality: The Gender at Work Experience."[27] Preparatory work included designing the program and careful selection of participating organizations. G@W Facilitators were introduced to the organizations and their change teams in situ at an initial two-day meeting. These meetings built trust and explored possibilities for change. The bulk of the process then involved three peer-learning workshops involving the three selected change team members from each organization. These workshops were about eight months apart, interspersed with support and mentoring by locally based Facilitators.

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22 More details on why the PACE and G@W approaches had such good synergy is explored later in the report.

23 This framework is described at http://www.genderatwork.org/gender-work-framework

24 See Gender Encounter 2003.

25 See Michel Friedman and David Kelleher (2004).

26 For a detailed exposition of our approach and 'model' for our action-learning process, see David Kelleher "Action Learning for Gender Equality: The Gender at Work Experience," (2009) and http://www.genderatwork.org/action-learning-process

27 The specificity of these steps as they occurred in the Horn process are outlined in more depth with their related timeline in Appendix 2.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Change happens in different ways in different contexts. A theory of change emerges from a program's and participants' idiosyncratic experiences and outcomes. During the final peer-learning event in the Horn, through sharing their experiences and learnings, participants discussed what precipitated change in their action-learning projects and what most helped them learn throughout the two-year process. The two Gender at Work Facilitators, Michel and David, consolidated and integrated these reflections and mirrored to the group its own theory of change. This section outlines the five core aspects of this theory, namely: context, capacity, commitment, methodology, and support.

Context

Mr. Demeke Bogalle, an Ethiopian participant from the Admas change team, succinctly characterized the Horn context when he said, *"I saw that the problems in the Horn of Africa are much to be concerned about. We need to work hard to free the region from war and violence and to make it a place where people can live peacefully."* [28] The impact of the changes achieved by the partner organizations is even more significant when we recognize that the backdrop to the GAL process was this pervading sense of the context: countries riven by violence and war – factors that contribute significantly to processes of dehumanisation, as well as gender-based violence.

The context in which partners operate can have a different impact on women's and men's lives; it depends on the country context and its socio-political ethos and structures. For instance, the southern Sudanese state, which recently emerged from a twenty-year liberation war in which violence against women intensified, is now rebuilding itself. The Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between northern and southern Sudan sets a supportive context for challenging gender-based violence, for creating new rules that encourage women's rights, and for valuing the role of education in creating new gender-sensitive girls and boys. By contrast, in Ethiopia the state is harassing civil society, constraining people's agency. Tisge Agaz, another of Admas' participants, explained that, *"government officials have told Admas members they must stop talking about rights.*" In a case where good governance and state support are lacking, it is more difficult to do change work that challenges power relations.

An organization's credibility in the community and with the state also plays a crucial role in our organizational partners' ability to achieve their change project goals. For instance, over its ten-year history, GAVO, which started out as an organization of men, developed excellent relationships with local male clan and religious leaders. These existing relationships of trust helped create a climate of readiness (or at least openness) to GAVO's introduction of dialogue on gender relationships in Somali culture.

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28 All direct quotes are taken from various meetings we had with partner organizations, either individually, or in peer-learning spaces (see GAL reports, 2007, 2008, 2009), or in separate meetings with Facilitators. Where participant's names are recorded in the written documents, we refer to them directly.

Resistance is common to most contexts. The ways in which women and men resist change can vary. As an Admas participant explained,

> *Men don't know any alternative to making women subordinate so it makes it difficult for change. Women are under a lot of pressure from the family because when they get married their family gets a lot of dowry. Even if the woman isn't happy in the marriage the family pushes her to stay in the relationship.*

Poverty increases the stakes, making it more difficult for both men and women to change when change could mean a loss of income.

During the two years of the GAL process, economic survival issues became more pressing than in the past, effectively reducing people's time availability for doing the change work.

The participants also acknowledged that diverse realities require differing approaches – there is no one formula that will suit everyone. As one participant explained,

> *People struggle with different frameworks and the approaches presented in the [GAL] workshop can be helpful for organisations. Each organisation can develop its own framework, experiment with it and develop it. It is not frameworks but understanding of the community and context that matters. Each organisation should feel free to use its own approaches as long as it works.*

Capacity

Two aspects of capacity emerged when partners were given an opportunity to reflect on what they needed to engender personal and organizational capacity changes. Participants recognized that they had to feel strong themselves as change agents; they had to have the understanding, knowledge, dialogic facilitation skills, and confidence in order to talk to others. Bonnie John Mayer, a participant from UNYDA, said they also had to "*remove the fear*" that blocked them from addressing gender inequalities. Depending on the particular organizational culture and country context, women's and men's sense of self-worth, value, and sense of "power within" is often different. Such differences need to be taken into account in capacity-building processes; ensuring women are not catapulted into leadership roles without proper management training and other supports. Nor can one assume that men –working in situations where women are dominant in leadership structures – are always confident of *their* own "power within."

In addition, organizations need to be ready for change. Some organizations were able to rely on pre-existing conditions. Admas, for example, was helped by having a large membership base that was organized and easy to engage with, a history of working together, and relationships of trust. In UNYDA and Ratson, however, more preparatory work was required as part of the change project. Being a young organization, UNYDA used the change project to further develop its identity and program direction. In an

organization like Ratson, with decision-making processes that involve more people, it helps to build a program that everyone can own.

Phoeben Abate, a participant from Ratson, articulated what the program did for her:

> I would like to thank Oxfam Canada because this initiative helped not only to work on ourselves but also capacity to work with others. I have been sleeping but now I have woken up. I consider it my alarm. This made me wide awake so I really appreciate this." Another participant said, "[the] GAL workshop gave me more ways of how I am working through it. At the beginning that for me trained my capacity, dug out my inner personal talent, and developed the way of an implementation process. It helped to capacitate my day to day activities.

Commitment

Many participants – both women and men – commented upon how much they had taken personal ownership and responsibility for the change projects, for their roles as change agents in their organizations, for themselves as individuals, and for their own families. In reflecting on what helped them learn, participants said:

> What helped me learn is the courage I have within myself plus the commitment I have to the issue of gender justice.

> The most striking part of the exercise is the idea of changing self before changing others.

> [I discovered] a new way to deal with conflict with my wife – so there's a chance to also change my family. (Mohamedeen Mohamad from Abu Hadia, Red Sea District, Sudan).

> Rabha Elias from Womens' Development Group, South Sudan explained…my home has become a field to practice all my knowledge.

> Being equipped with tools triggered a feeling of responsibility to translate the plan into work and strive to show progress for the next meeting (awareness triggers responsibility).

Most participants demonstrated a willingness and openness to learning, to be challenged, and to reflect deeply on themselves, their attitudes, behaviors, and practices. The GAL team observed considerable commitment and evidence of enormous effort being made, sometimes at great personal cost. For instance, Admas members told us the story of how, in addressing a case of domestic violence, one of their change agents was nearly killed:

> One change agent wanted to take a couple to the local court office. Implementation

is so weak that the woman was victimized even worse. When she got home from the court, her husband beat her so violently she had to stay in bed for a few days. The change agent took her to her own home while she recovered in bed. The husband came to the change agent and said he wanted to apologise to his wife. However he attacked the change agent and put gasoline on her and pushed her into a fire. Others caught her before the flames could get her and she survived ok. So there can be a very high price to pay for doing this work.

Everyone recognized the significance of personal change, and how they couldn't ask others to do something that they themselves weren't prepared to do. In this context, having men who demonstrated their own commitment through practice helped them talk to, and gain access to, other men, as well as influence women. For instance, Abdiaziz Hersi Warsame, one of the participants from GAVO in the conservative cultural context of Somaliland, told us how he persuaded his cousin not to perform Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) on her daughter.

When I went to visit my aunt's son, I met his wife at the door. She told me that she is going to be away from home for the whole day. I asked her what her mission was and she told me that she is going to circumcise her daughter. I asked her where her husband was and she said he was not around. She is going to find a women who is a traditional circumciser. I told her to get back to the house. When we talked about it she tried to convince me that it is right to do it because it keeps girls from adultery. I asked her to wait until the next Friday. In the mean time I tried to collect information on FGM. Then I went to visit the next Friday and explained to her…. I also brought a cassette where a religious leader was preaching against FGM, she listened to it and decided not to circumcise her daughter.

Methodology

This group demonstrated that for change to be effective and long lasting, it requires careful attention to a methodology (approach and tools). The following is a list of methodological factors that proved successful in the Horn program:

Recognize that change takes time
The participating organizations understood that deep cultural changes take time, and that it is not easy, nor can it be achieved with short training workshops. Demeke from Admas noted, "*Change is the result of long term effort and change in gender requires sustained struggle,*" while a male participant from Ratson acknowledged that, "*Change is a painful process which requires patience and we go forward by learning from our mistakes.*" The two-year process was thus recognized as taking a long-term view, a long-enough time period, a recognition of the importance of process and a shared understanding that everyone saw as extremely helpful.

Negotiating culture
The type of approach the partners developed in the Horn program showed a high level of capacity for negotiating cultural and contextual complexity. Emphasis was placed on how

to communicate a message so that community members would be encouraged to participate and engage in dialogue (e.g. it helps to frame change positively). All partners learned that in order to create new norms they could not ignore the cultural gatekeepers. The partners therefore all developed unique ways to negotiate and engage with key community gatekeepers, leaders, and powerful individuals (usually male).

Inclusive and dialogic approaches
One of the most impressive aspects of the Horn program's approach was the high level of skill in facilitating inclusive and dialogic communication with both women and men in the organizations and community, allowing all voices to be heard and issues debated. Participants learned that engaging in debate is more effective than pushing new ideas down people's throats. For dialogue to be effective, it has to include all the stakeholders, must be ongoing, and requires a great deal of patience. Community members need to be respected and not judged during these discussions, especially when the topics touch on their deepest-held (often unquestioned) values. As Demeke said: *"You are having conversations that touch their heartbeat. You are bringing other people into new ideas that can start to challenge old ideas."* Respect is a key factor of this approach, especially when challenging traditional ideas. Facilitators and change agents thus need to find contextually appropriate ways of initiating conversations. Women and men in this program were able to use their positions and identities differently in order to effect change. For instance, UNYDA, GAVO, and WDG all used men to lead conversations with traditional leaders. GAVO also created space for a woman staff member to share her views in an otherwise all-male gathering of clan leaders. One of the participants, Tsehay Welle from Admas, recognized a different aspect of working within culture by starting where people are at and using lessons from life.

> *The beginning point for change is to encourage people by showing them that they know and to encourage them to speak. Otherwise they will feel shy and get scared away. Life is a school and it is important to help people to learn from one another.*

The participants invited discussion in a variety of settings, from informal conversations everywhere and anywhere (e.g. at bus-stops, with neighbors, at coffee ceremonies, funerals, weddings, family gatherings) to formal training sessions and community-wide public meetings. Admas and Ratson both did intensive work with themselves and their colleagues around interrogating gender "misconceptions" in order to see their *own* role in perpetuating unequal relationships. As Tsehay articulated, *"we need to be creative and use different techniques to enable people to understand the need for change."*

Role modeling
As part of their approach, participants learned about the inspirational value of role models, using life experience to teach, recognizing how much it enabled others to listen to new ideas. In all organizations, participants showed a keen awareness of needing to practice what they were preaching. Increasingly, as the projects progressed, participants proactively used themselves and their personal experience as examples of change. For instance, Admas invited local men, either members of the Association and/or husbands of wives who are members, and who had transformed from being violent themselves, to

share their experiences in learning sessions.

In addition, some members from both Admas and Ratson went to visit a remote community, Awra Amba, which was founded precisely to demonstrate that a different way of living is possible.

A participant's reflections also explain how this community works:

> *I learned about strength and persistence – they have faced a lot of challenges – they started out with ostracisation and other problems. They persisted and now others can see the relevance of their experiment. I learned a lot from them about childrearing – they instill truthfulness, valuing, respect and discipline for accepting others. They totally rely on their own locally raised resources. They don't accept any money from others. They work hard and manage their own lives. There is a lack of strict social roles between women and men; men were baking njera and fetching water and women were farming. It is very impressive to see this and to see how they live so peacefully and that this is possible. They also pay lots of respect to the elderly and have a system of collective leadership.*

These visitors to Awra Amba used stories (and videos) from their trip in training sessions back home. Colleagues' excuses such as, "women can't" or "men can't because they were born that way," or because "God said so" become more difficult to sustain when real, living women and men showed they *can*.

Collective holding to account
Another aspect of the methodology that stands out is the way some partners in the Horn program began to build a mechanism for a collective holding to account. They started to challenge each other on problem behavior, or when anyone made degrading comments towards women. Many of the processes occurred in the larger community where individuals and stakeholders across a broad spectrum of the society and culture were involved and thus began to contribute to a collective change.

Learning by doing
Many of the partners developed their change plans together with other staff, or association members, valuing the process of learning by doing. It helped to have a plan that provided direction and focus around which they could organize. But the learning occurred as they implemented their projects and saw which parts worked and didn't work. This feedback loop enabled them to refine their projects for improved outcomes.

Developing gender policies
Many gender-mainstreaming methodologies start with developing gender policies. Not so in this change program in the Horn. Only near the end of the program did some of the organizations consider developing gender policies. It is not clear why policy development was left for the end. Andrea[29] (the Pace Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning specialist) suggests that perhaps policy came last because

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29 E-mail correspondence, 13th of August, 2009.

... this was an organic process and not a mechanical or technical one, so the need for a policy emerged from a set of experiences that were not part of the organization's body of knowledge before the action-learning program. Through the <u>doing</u>, organizations began to see what more they needed to do. In some cases, this meant formalizing or focusing their commitment to gender in the form of a policy. From a practice perspective it makes me wonder to what extent we (Oxfam) support organizations to develop gender policies without thinking through whether a particular organization has done enough <u>doing</u> on gender to really value what a gender policy has to contribute.

Support

Difficult and deep-change processes require considerable support at many levels in order for change to take root and spread widely. The GAL program itself had built-in mechanisms for support – the peer-learning workshops, action-learning processes, and Facilitator support throughout. All of this enabled the organizations to network, to get feedback, and to develop and implement their projects effectively. Many of the partner organizations also garnered support from elsewhere, including other sponsors, government officials, organizational management, or community volunteers.

Peer-learning workshops
The regional peer-learning aspect of the process facilitated learning and inspiration as participants came together to share experiences, issues, questions, concerns, strategies, successes, obstacles, and to receive quality feedback.

> *[T]he process helped us to look inside and outside, helped us to learn from ourselves and from others, and to learn together; The multicultural /multi-experiences setting helped me a lot to be open about different opinions, different ways of thinking and different ways of analyzing and thus different ways of strategizing interventions that would lead to social justice in the specific setting. We are doing our individual things but when we listen to each others stories it gives us courage, hope, motivation and the tools to do our work. My level of motivation has really increased.*

Action-learning process
The action-learning part of the process encouraged experimentation and curiosity, necessarily discouraging judgment, since there is no one right answer when experimenting with solutions. Participants figured out the viability and longevity of their action projects through *doing*.

> *Since the project is action learning which means learning by doing it has helped us a lot. I mean the process and the way and approaches of facilitation which was very remarkable and amazing. We saw the important and very crucial point which was not dictating or changing our minds swiftly but through action learning. Based on that we learned a lot through various means, we unfolded new energy within us*

with which we can overcome cultural barriers, we discovered new skills, knowledge and self awareness and new understanding about our context.

There was a positive attitude to share with others rather than criticizing, using wisdom and positivity.

We feel confident in what we do and in learning from our mistakes. Yesterday when we worked on what didn't work/happen, through the presentations we learned that some of our questions became the responses to others and some of the responses became questions. We learned from what didn't work.

GAL team and Facilitator support

Participants felt supported by the PACE/GAL team in many different ways. Participants acknowledged the respect of the PACE team saying, "*the safe environment Oxfam Canada provided for its partners allowed them to move back and forth while learning with full respect to partner's culture and way of relating to their own culture.*" In addition, the role, style, and attitude of the PACE team leader, Raymond, was highly valued: "*Raymond's opinion gives strength about how we work in the future. He gave us the method and the way. In addition to this he appreciates every change agents work.*" The time and effort put into translation by the PACE team was also recognized, "*The learning process would not have been successful without the tireless translation of Mahelet and Amel.*"

The Facilitators' experience and style was a large factor in the Horn program's successes. "*We learnt a lot from Michel and David's approach, the way they are flexible in the way they are leading us; The facilitators, coming from Canada and South Africa brought a lot of perspectives to the work and also diversity to the group.*" Participants also appreciated the Facilitators "*for bringing a scientific interpretation of gender issues and giving a human face to the issue which enabled ownership as well as commitment from participants.*"

The role of Facilitators in between peer-learning events also provided valuable support and mentoring. A participant explained, "*The role of the facilitators/mentors - Amel and Mahelet - also helped us in combining what we learned from the peer learning session with our own skills, understanding, and commitment towards better achievements.*"

Mahelet, for instance, reflects[30] on her role as facilitator with Admas:

What helped was the consultation at the beginning of the process after hearing the story and the process where we identified the progress markers. Those consultations were useful for we clearly figured out what was needed to be done. We also asked many questions regarding their agenda until they clearly articulated what they want to do, and tried to find out the reason why they are identifying this particular agenda as the issue. Expectations and responsibilities (including who is

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30 E-mail correspondence July 2009.

doing what) were also sorted out at the beginning. That time gave us the opportunity to deeply question what was realistic or not and how they can communicate with and ally their membership. (This helped them realize how difficult it might be for three people to work among about 2000 membership). I feel the fact that they clearly articulated what they wanted to do and the realization of what was realistic or not, helped a lot.

Amel was called upon to support the Sudanese organizations in a variety of ways. She helped WDG develop an action-research approach and a set of questions for it, as well as helped them learn how to analyze and work with the findings, how to develop appropriate approaches for different stakeholders, and how to develop appropriate facilitation skills. She helped UNYDA reflect on and review their Training of Trainers program experience (in which they first trained their internal staff on gender sensitivity before going into the community), clarify their understanding of gender, and develope simple guidelines for doing community outreach and facilitation. Amel also provided relevant information and telephone support to the UNYDA change team while they were in the field.

Analytical framework and other tools
Conceptual tools, such as the Gender at Work integral framework also added tremendous value: "*We learnt a tool that brings together scattered ideas that help clarify our direction in implementing our change agenda.*" Working in ways that enable participants to recognize their own capacities in knowledge building was also crucial: "*We discussed all kinds of issues and ideas over the past two days and seeing it here today made me realize it is possible to extract knowledge from our experience and practice. The way you have done it is useful for us to use as a tool in our own work.*"

Logistics and venues
The venues that the PACE team chose for the peer-learning events, and the logistical care that the PACE team took, all enhanced a positive energy for change. Mahelet was thanked more than once for the care with which she managed the administration: "*The effective logistic arrangements and services also facilitated the learning process. The places where these workshops were conducted were beautiful - it made people feel hope and created interest in learning.*"

OUR LESSONS AND REFLECTIONS – Why it worked and what is unique

In this section, we consider the key ingredients that made this program so unique. We explore the role of the PACE program itself as a holding container, as well as particular partner strategies, meanings of gender equality in this context, and the embracing of body, mind, spirit practices in the form of Capacitar[31] techniques. We conclude with some thoughts on salient silences and hindsights.

PACE as the GAL program holding container
GAL worked so well because it did not take place in a vacuum but benefited from the many ways in which PACE's history in the area, their relationships with partners, and their overall approach to their work smoothed the way. PACE's approach also meshed seamlessly with Gender at Work's approach. PACE also allocated significant funds to assist the organizations to embark upon their substantial change projects.

History and approach
Gender at Work was able to piggyback on Oxfam Canada and the PACE team's programmatic history as well as Raymond Genesse's long personal history in the region. Gender at Work thus arrived into a situation in which deep relationships of trust had already been built with the partner organizations, making it safe to engage in challenging and sometimes difficult processes with ostensible strangers. In addition, PACE's exacting standards meant Gender at Work was working with an unusual set of people. As Raymond said,

> *PACE has a very demanding selection process for partnership with the program. Candidates must demonstrate capacity and/or willingness to act as "reformers" on all fronts. The idea is they engage in the progressive removal of unfreedoms at individual, organizational and society levels.* [32]

As the overall leader of the PACE program, Raymond, used his power to manage a nurturing and challenging approach, both within his own team and with partner relationships. This set in motion a particular attitude and way of working that fit seamlessly with Gender at Work's approach.[33] At all levels of interaction with partners the PACE team challenged partner dependency and supported the development of robust learning organizations. In terms of gender inequality, this aspect of working with power,

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31 Capacitar is a set of physical/psychological exercises developed initially to help people living in regions of conflict deal with trauma. The exercises can be used in all contexts to revitalize. See www.capacitar.org.
32 E-mail correspondence July 2009.
33 In the final peer-learning event, Raymond said, *"My years in the Horn of Africa have taught me one thing. You may have lots of academic knowledge but if you do not have the right attitude you will go nowhere here. So, the relationship with G@W is almost a community of minds. When you realize this you realize the depth of what we are trying to do in this region. It is obvious that Michel and David have all the knowledge and methodology. Within three sessions, the way they share and draw learning is almost seamless and painless. We feel enriched. Your empathy, humility respect and trust in our partnerships and robustness are revitalizing, stimulating and are bringing life."*

i.e. challenging dependency and victimhood, is crucial.

Key to PACE's practice is the length of time they work with partners, the core support PACE offers, their way of asking probing-yet-supportive questions, their intent on building the organization to become a leader in the field, and their way of fostering an open and honest climate for reflection, evaluation, learning, challenge, and growth – developing in everyone a practice that takes process very seriously. PACE, like Gender at Work, also works in ways that are flexible and responsive to situations as they arise. Often, Raymond would demonstrate his capacity to accept the prevailing climate and conditions, saying, "*this is how it is in the Horn (or Sudan/Ethiopia etc.) So face it and figure out how you are going to get around it.*" We have no doubt that this attitude enabled and supported the partners' own capacity to deal with sometimes extremely challenging circumstances. In addition, PACE's capacity to facilitate high-quality content translation (thanks to Mahelet and Amel) enabled all participants to understand what was going on and to feel heard.

These key ingredients of PACE's approach thus laid a strong foundation for Gender at Work's intervention. For instance, the high levels of commitment at both personal and organizational levels can perhaps be linked to one of PACE's starting assumptions: that they only work with organizations that have some kind of pre-existing voluntarism and sense of ownership. In fact, our contracts were signed by the partner organizations and not Oxfam Canada. The partners, therefore, knew the price of the investment in the process. For instance, they were responsible for deciding whether or not they were happy with the facilitators. In one instance, they took this responsibility very seriously and released a facilitator from her contract as they deemed her unsuitable for the job! In this way, PACE already had a "practice" in place for challenging existing power relationships – especially in the context between donor and partner.

Initially, Gender at Work's team was concerned that the donor/partner power dynamic would influence the process. Based on a stereotypical assumption, the fact that a donor was initiating this process could hamper the sense of ownership. So, although the GAL program emphasized gender inequalities, PACE's approach already had in place practices that challenged traditional stereotyped donor/partner dynamics and the power relations within that. This kind of practice facilitated Gender at Work's approach to challenging unequal power relations.

PACE proactively used the GAL process as part of its own capacity building to deepen their approach, and to ground skills building. As a result, by the end of the GAL process, both partners and PACE were less reliant on outside experts. Partners were developing in-house policy documents based on their own experiences rather than copying others' formulas. In addition, staff members learned how to lead and facilitate significant and complex processes.[34] PACE also began to facilitate new GAL change processes without Gender at Work.

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34 In a recent (July 2009) e-mail, Raymond commented on how far they have traveled since launching PACE. "*It is now our partners and local consultants who are facilitating the sharing of newly acquired knowledge.*" Now workshops can be conducted in local languages, increasing the level of participation.

PACE's complementary processes with GAL

As a donor, PACE did not participate as a partner organization in the process in that PACE did not have a three-person change team and did not set out to develop a change project like other participating partners. However, the PACE team certainly took advantage of the opportunity to learn from their involvement with Gender at Work. Mahelet Hailemariam, the PACE Deputy Program Manager, was directly involved throughout the process and attended the two Hearing the Stories meetings in Ethiopia, helping with translation into Amharic. She also took over facilitating in Ethiopia and Somaliland halfway through the process and attended all three peer-learning events. Abnet Kassa Debay (Program Officer) and Andrea Lindores (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Specialist) both attended two peer-learning events. Raymond Genesse, the PACE Program Manager, attended the last of the peer events, as well as was present for part of the first one. This level of commitment to the process and willingness to invest so much staff time in significant moments is striking and cannot be assumed as a given with all donors. It resulted in PACE changing a number of its own practices. Raymond gave four examples:

> *6. In the past we used to approach gender in a compartmentalized manner. We had sections and boxes dealing with gender. Now it is incorporated into all components of the practice.*
> *7. With Capacitar, we are now able to work more effectively on the body/mind dynamics.*
> *8. We have a greater willingness and capacity to work on the "I" by the team members. We view each one of us as fully engaged in a development process and not only the partners. We used to do it intuitively in the past.*
> *9. We have a reinforced capacity to facilitate action-learning processes, starting from where partners are at, desire for change, nurturing of this desire with new ideas and opportunity for application and then reflection on the process. We have greater confidence in our capacity to facilitate such a cycle.*

The above illustrates PACE's commitment to seeing themselves as learners, and not only as providers, contrary to the more classic donor/partner dynamic.

PACE's more regular forms of engagement with the partner organizations meant that there was ongoing reinforcement of key GAL ideas during the entire two-year period. For instance, PACE's own integration of the key issues and questions into all their tools and ongoing relationship work/conversations with partners, partnership annual reviews, and assessments, organizational profiles, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, and policy development meant that something GAL program started was being strengthened throughout all other interactions that partners had with PACE staff. In at least one instance, PACE's intervention played a key role in helping a change project that had gone off track to refind its direction. In another instance, Mahelet's overlap as Regional Program Manager and Facilitator (which was not the original plan) with one of the Ethiopian partners had a significant impact: she was able to insist on certain principles

being in place (e.g. she strongly suggested to one partner that it would be valuable to have at least one member of the GAL change team sit in on a general organizational planning meeting. She also assisted the change team of this partner to gain confidence in their own ability to facilitate gender-training workshops, to design processes, learn lessons, and assess and critique the role and value of external consultants). Her role and her ability to use her structural power was helped by the trust that the partner's Director had developed with Oxfam Canada and his valuing of what they offer.

PACE's deep commitment to the value of cultivating good process-facilitation skills
The other substantial PACE intervention was the parallel facilitation training of leaders in partner organizations during the same time period as the GAL program. The complementary role this training played, both in terms of skills development, as well as in cultivating the kind of attitude that Gender at Work's approach ideally requires, was invaluable. It helped ensure Facilitators, who worked with the partners in between peer events, had the appropriate sensitivity, and that partners were receptive to working in open ways and with curiosity. PACE and Gender at Work share values and assumptions about what characterizes good facilitation. For instance, both PACE and Gender at Work begin working with partners/communities by starting from where they are and surfacing what is hidden into consciousness. Both organizations assist partners/communities to recognize and tap their own resourcefulness and creativity, both within the organizations and with potential collaborators. Both PACE and Gender at Work encourage good leadership development, good team processes, collective learning from experience, and joint strategizing meetings. Both encourage partnering organizations to be clear about their purpose and to learn from experience in order to shape the future. Both bring an awareness of different kinds of power in relationships in organizations and between organizations, and ask that partners become aware of these power relationships as well. Both understand the importance of, and the need to, work *with* existing organizational culture.

Facilitators need to be aware of who they are in relation to the people they are working with, and how their different identities and social positions can influence their relationships. For Gender at Work, self-consciousness about one's own identities, as well as those of the people with whom one is working, is vital. Also, Facilitators need to pay rigorous attention to how they engage in traditionally conservative contexts. For instance, one of the facilitators spoke about how important it is to consider the way one challenges an assumption, which (body) language to use, how to interpret religion, and how self-aware one has to be. As one facilitator said, "*Sometimes you have to work within yourself a lot before you challenge.*"

Financing and budgeting
A major ingredient in PACE's capacity-building program was the availability of substantial finances for partners to implement their change plans. After each peer-learning event, partner organizations were able to develop project budgets to support the planned work. In G@W's own Civil Society Organizational Strengthening program in South Africa and India, Gender at Work budgets are not available to partners for implementing change plans. The assumption has been that organizations would simply do

what they were already doing, but differently. In the Horn, the availability of change-project financing facilitated a substantial amount of work.[35] In addition, it prioritized the GAL change-project work in organizational work plans and reduced its potential to be sidelined as the "extra add-on."

Financed projects must be reported to the donor, which adds an additional layer of accountability – namely, to the donor as well as to the organization, its peers, and Gender at Work. One partner's GAL project was so substantial, they hired a specific person to manage it. For at least two of the partners, the GAL work constituted the majority of what they did during the program period. By contrast, in one South African example, the first time Gender at Work engaged with them, they did most of the GAL work in their spare time and after hours. By the time we came to work with them a second time, they had learned this lesson and had budgeted for the GAL work that is now a significant part of their ongoing work plan. At the final peer event, Raymond reflected on the cost of the process.

> *I estimate it is about $350,000, which includes the contribution of Oxfam and I've also included the time that you [referring to participants]have all put into this. Some of us are paid, some not, and some more than others. Many put in overtime.*

More recently, Raymond commented on value for money*:*

> *There was a good fit between PACE and GAL's approaches. Hence, investing in the GAL was investing in PACE itself. Given this high level of porosity between the two approaches, GAL organically reinforced our own organizational development work with partner organizations. Without such synergy, the risk is to look for and merely apply "recipes" that allow development workers to claim that they paid due diligence to gender justice.* [36]

Partner strategies and what is unique to the Horn

Striking aspects of the partners' change strategies include their responses to culture, their capacity to both value and challenge culture simultaneously, the commitment of men, such as their openness and skill in facilitating dialogic conversations that are inclusive of both men and women, and the collective construction of new norms.

Responses to culture
The Horn group had no difficulty understanding the important role culture plays in change processes. From the first peer-learning event, participants spoke from past experience of the difficulty of changing culture. But they also noted the ways in which culture was already changing before the Horn program began. For instance, in Somaliland, as a result of growing awareness about the role of women, even cultural leaders condoned women's participation in development meetings. In Dire Dawe,

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35 Refer to "Culture, Change and Gender Relations," Kelleher and Friedman (2009) for more detail on the extent of the activities the six organizations were able to include in their change projects.
36 E-mail correspondence July 2009.

Ethiopia, education on the Constitution, and awareness on Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) such as Female Genital Mutilation, extraction of milk teeth, and rape, have transformed people such that they have started reporting such cases. Muslim members, who previously considered interest on loans as *haram*, (that which is forbidden by Islamic law) started practicing innovative loan techniques, such as collecting interest and giving it to the poor, or using it as an administration budget. Muslim women who were previously not allowed to participate in meetings because of the law were now able to be included because of the credit/interest innovation. Other women who previously had low self confidence were also being included more because of exposure and experience exchanges with active women role models who were able to encourage their participation. The whole raison d'être of the Admas community-based organizational network is to save money so they can access credit. Awareness of what blocks women's participation started leading to certain changes in the way they did things, so more women were beginning to be included even before we started there. In Wau, Sudan, resource provisions through saving and credit, seeds, tools, and training (in handicrafts) helped create value around women's work. At the time Gender at Work first met the women in Wau, they were already planning to involve men in the intervention so that together they could discuss and identify the root causes of gender inequality.

Simultaneous valuing and challenging of culture
All partners demonstrated a mixed response to culture – on the one hand, valuing and respecting it, and on the other hand, challenging it. The Admas change team explained, "*we work not to lose culture but cultivate positive practices and get rid of negative ones.*" They spoke of "*using culture to challenge culture.*" Tsehay from Admas explained how

> *… the issue of religion created sensitivity among the people. Misconception on the interpretation of religious scripts created resistance. In order to resolve this we invited people who have good knowledge of the Koran and the Bible. The answer came from the participants. We use the same strategy plus well respected people to strengthen the lessons.*"

Chul Gaj from UNYDA in South Sudan affirmed, "*We cannot change gender relations unless we respect and work with the tradition (we cannot throw it away at once but change it slowly).*"

Participants were able to understand culture, value it, and recognize that it had to be part of the equation, otherwise people would be alienated and the change teams would get nowhere. Perhaps the non-prescriptive approach, which encouraged all participants to engage with their own meanings, concerns, local idioms (referring both to local dialects and local ways of doing things), and to take ownership over their change projects, enabled them to generate contextually suitable outcomes, even while challenging the status quo.

Commitment of men
A particularly outstanding feature of the GAL program in the Horn was the number of men who participated in the change teams, their willingness and commitment to the

process, and their engagement with traditional male gatekeepers. Raymond's leadership style no doubt played an important role. Raymond felt that the process, David Kelleher's role modeling, the partners' trust in PACE, and the caliber of partners involved all contributed to why men felt so committed.[37]

> *For years, we heard from both men and women about their abrasive experiences with gender work that triggered resistance and disengagement. The GAL's engagement process sent a different signal to potential participants. Michel and David traveled to their localities to "hear" them rather than "tell" them about it. I heard from many that David's engagement and attitude proved inspirational. David was viewed as highly credible through his knowledge and attitude and therefore worth emulating. Another factor could be the partners' trust in PACE and therefore willingness to commit to uncharted waters. Lastly, PACE has very demanding selection process for partnership with the program.*

Amel pointed out that some partners also began to engage in redefining the meaning of masculinity. For instance, two participants from UNYDA and one from Admas all commented on how they risked a traditional meaning of masculinity by assuming roles that are considered more feminine (such as helping out with domestic labor) without feeling threatened in their masculinity.

Inclusivity of women and men, openness, and skill in using dialogic facilitation methods
The Horn organizational partners' previous experience of working to change culture was expanded upon and deepened in the GAL process, with partners influencing each other in important ways. Most change teams worked with both women and men, using and cultivating a processes of deep listening, dialogue, and inclusivity. Early in the process, participants realized that, "*the presence of more men in the workshop gave a lesson for gender sensitivity for future workshops (that men should also be part of the gender analysis of the problem and the debate on gender)."* At the end of the process, WDG participants reflected, *"It is very important to include men—men listen to other men who transform their life. In a chief workshop, one was very rigid but listened to other men. It's not a threat to masculinity to listen to another man…"*

The partners' creativity and openness to learning and listening contributed significantly to the outcome successes. Participants commented on how they learned to leave the agenda open, enabling different issues and priorities to emerge through this open process. In most cases, partners managed to simultaneously support independent women's empowerment work, while including general discussions and engagements with community men as well, and, where relevant, with male traditional and religious leaders. In some cases, men from the organizations were strategically used in community workshops while women were consciously given space to speak, thus role modeling a different possibility for how women and men can behave and interact.

The GAVO (Somaliland) experience demonstrated that in order to change exclusionary norms and practices, it is ineffective to create new norms that exclude the original

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37 E-mail correspondence July 2009.

excluders! As Ayan Sihaam, the only woman in the GAVO team, put it, "*in order to attain our objective in gender we need to work with elders, elites and traditional leaders because they have a stake in perpetuating gender inequality.*" Given how invisible power works, strategies to empower women, to help them gain collective strength, confidence, and assert their rights, as well as giving them voice and power, is vital. However, the approach to such empowerment can potentially reinforce the very process of exclusion it is attempting to challenge. That said, it is difficult to be inclusive without some degree of healing taking place first. Women have to come to a place of wholeness in themselves otherwise they will sound (feel) bitter and resentful. Unhealed women will find "including" traditional gatekeepers almost impossible, thus perpetuating conditions of "no dialogue." At the same time, it is easier for men alone, or men in strong support of women, to approach other men, especially traditional gatekeepers; men don't have to manage the historical baggage of feeling excluded. Closed men who are unwilling to look at themselves will also find dialogue nearly impossible. The UNYDA (Sudan) experience showed that when men facilitators role model support for women and encourage women to talk first in front of community members, i.e., opening community discussions, new levels of openness are enabled at the community level. Community women are encouraged to speak up in new ways and community men learn that it is okay for women to lead. The Admas (Ethiopia) experience showed that when women and men from membership associations work to interrogate gender misconceptions at personal and communal levels, members can build high levels of commitment and accountability towards creating new norms. The approach of hearing and creating space for all voices, and allowing dissent to process itself through dialogue, is considered a sophisticated approach to facilitation.[38] Most of the partners demonstrated incredible skill in implementing it. Perhaps previous skills from working across serious social divides during the peace-building initiatives were transferred to the gender work, specifically in Somaliland and South Sudan. These methods, in turn, inspired and influenced the other partners.

Despite the sensitivity of the issues at hand, both the organizations themselves and the communities they serve demonstrated a hunger for discussion and engagement on topics touching their lives in important ways if approached in the right way. This interest and openness facilitated organizational growth in at least three partners (e.g. UNYDA, Admas, WDG).

Collective construction of new norms
The combination of personal consciousness and behavioral changes spread awareness to and through family members, neighbors, relatives, and other community members. Particularly outstanding was the incipient growth of new collective norms. The Admas and Ratson teams both spoke about how they are now challenging each other and holding each other to account when people are being derogatory or discriminatory. Admas has 140 active change agents working throughout their communities; the sheer numbers of agents, as well as their approach, is having a profound collective impact (e.g. large numbers of community members are engaging in discussion and dialogue, questioning their gender misconceptions. There is less violence in some homes and visible changes in

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38 See Mindell (2002).

relation to divorce). The extent to which WDG is working within the broader community, and linking their work to personal practice and peace building, suggests they might eventually have a similar result to Admas. It is impressive that new-norm building is taking root (and could be linked to the initial voluntarism that motivated the origins of many of these organizations). Being grounded in their communities means that organizations have a vested interest in seeing a difference in their communities.

Deepening a culture of democratic practice
Amel observed that although most of the change projects address power relations between men and women at organizational or community levels, the projects have also gone further to address intersecting forms of oppression. For example, the projects interrogate democracy as well, as evidenced in the Sudanese partners who addressed the issue of diversity. UNYDA has initiated discussions on gender equality as well as broader cultural pluralism in 5 rural communities and in Malakal itself. The active engagement of ordinary community members has helped to build a more active citizenry. WDG managed to get support from local traditional leaders to consider including women as chiefs in the formal traditional authority. Even where women are in leadership positions, there have been provocative discussions about the meaning of democracy and how it is linked to gender equality. For instance, if the leader is a woman, but there is no collective voice in decision-making, the organization is asking itself if this is the kind of gender equality they want. The change projects were able to catalyze deep discussions about how visible and invisible power work internally in organizations, and how both have an impact on the work in the community.

Meanings of gender equality in the context

Organizational partners were encouraged to interrogate and explore meanings of gender equality in their own contexts and not to feel beholden to any predetermined meanings. This flexibility contributed to the partners' sense of ownership. During the Hearing the Stories sessions, different partners named their own approaches and developed their own terms. They used various terms to represent their own concept of more desirable gender relations – women's empowerment, gender complementarity, gender justice, gender equality, and women's rights. Sometimes these differences provided strategic entry points into discussions, sometimes they ensured that valuable aspects of local meanings and ways of being would continue to be respected. Defining their own terms enabled participants to dissociate from feeling like they were being controlled by externally driven agendas and the individualism of the western approach.

Gender at Work Facilitators encouraged participants to define what concepts meant to them, as well as encouraged them to be conscious of their choices, how these choices impacted on, or intended to change, the complex realities of women's and men's lives in the region. By the end of the two-year process, many of the activities and outcomes undertaken by the partners reflected fairly standard gender-equality goals, only they were framed and named in the partners' own terms. Thus, participants always had control over their meanings and the ability to negotiate differences through listening and questioning each other.

The Gender at Work integral framework (a conceptual structure that enables organizations to map where they are with regards to gender equality within their organizational culture and informal culture), as well as the encouraging of partners to engage with their own meanings, helped push and stretch participants beyond their initial horizons. One of the most outstanding differences with the outcomes in this region, as we have discussed above, was the extent to which partners worked overtly with traditional cultural and religious leaders, such as chiefs, headmen, and imams. We suggest that the openness of the dialogic processes and the opportunity for traditional leaders to engage in exploring their own meanings contributed to this outcome.

Another layer of complexity of meanings of gender equality is related to the question of customary law in Sudan in particular. Amel, in talking about Sudan, succinctly summed up the realities and dilemmas of the dual legal context and how it impacts on the potential for gender transformations in the region.

> *In Sudan, like in some other African countries there is a dualism in the legal system, between customary law and civil law. Where abuse at family level, is for example considered private and should be governed by the customs and traditions of the specific group. While abuse of rights in public are subjected to civil laws, that are up to the standard of universal human rights. The problem for women, is that their rights in Sudan and in most African countries often lie within family boundaries and are not seen as public issues (for instance, marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody of children and so on). This situation denies Sudanese women from both the North and South access to universal rights. However, given that about 90% of the people in the South are governed by customary law, the situation there might be even worse. During war time, customary law was retained as the main source of justice - due to among other things, the physical isolation of people, a lack of judges and low levels of consciousness among women about their rights. UNYDA members said that while the culture of the community has to be retained and affirmed, as it is an important part of community identity, there is also a need to find a way to reconcile both cultural rights and universal rights. We need to have a common ground between the two rights.*

Capacitar's role

From the first meeting with partners, Michel introduced some simple exercises from the Capacitar toolkit, which assist resource-poor communities to help themselves heal from traumatic experiences, both at the individual and community levels. Michel shared adapted forms of Tai Chi, breathing exercises, and other practices initially developed and adapted from a variety of ancient traditions. By introducing these exercises into the GAL program context, Michel wanted to make sure that people living in painful circumstances – post war, high levels of poverty, illness due to HIV and AIDS, and many forms of violence – had additional resources to help themselves feel whole, and to energize themselves and their social-change work. Capacitar exercises also helped empower participants to cultivate different practices of respect between women and men. These

benefits enabled participants to contain anxiety, and thus to be more open to listening to each other and less fearful of deep change with respect to unequal gender relations.

The extent to which participants embraced these practices in the formal workshop settings and in their daily personal and organizational lives made the exercises central to the whole GAL program. Mahelet reported that whenever she works with partners now, they always request the exercises before they begin working.

At the first peer-learning workshop, participants said the exercises helped clarify focus, were energizing to the body, kept people awake, connected them to others in the group (thus building trust), reminded everyone to see the wisdom in people as opposed to their problems or difficulties, helped with accepting and valuing different people, and generated less irritability in a long workshop of listening to four languages. The following quotes from participants during the various peer-learning events demonstrate different aspects of Capacitar's value and benefit.

In relation to calming and preparing oneself for interaction with others, Wubayehu Mulugeta, a supervisor and gender change agent from Ratson said, *"the exercises helped me to be calm inside and ready for the work."* Farhan Adam Haibe, the Executive Director from GAVO in Somaliland, explained,

> *the exercise helped body and mind, to exercise releasing negative feelings, and to live positively with self and others. They refresh me and help me to be one with the others. They make me to participate fully. We become one – morally and psychologically. They connect us as one system.*

Phoeben from Ratson talked about the physical and spiritual value, *"the exercises are like mineral water for me – they help digestion, concentration both in body and spirit."* Tsehay from Admas shared how the exercises helped her and her family deal with anger, *"when I arrived in Dire Dawe I was angry and I couldn't concentrate – after the 'sports' I was calm. I have done it ever since then. Not only for me, but for my family and community – that is so helpful."* Demeke from Admas shared how it aligns him on all levels, *"I liked the energiser, it purifies our purposes and intention and godliness. It has confirmed for me that we work with our whole bodies for everything to work in harmony."* The exercises activated Habesha's (from Admas) sense of agency, *"it's possible to make a choice ot to be frustrated all the time – it is possible to let go, this is a choice we make."* Lina Elias from WDG in South Sudan expressed the feeling of being physically and emotionally transformed, *"I am very happy for the exercises. I am very energised by them."*

Mohamedeen from Abu Hadia improved his relationship with his wife, *"I tried to transfer what I gained in the workshop from Michel, especially the massage to practice communication with the hand. The exercise broke the ice between me and my wife."*

Amel recognized that the exercises contribute to the kind of positive energy needed to inspire forward movement on the change projects.

This morning I was in the Sudanese group and there was talk about if you want to make a project you need to surround yourself with positive energy. This is what we learned from Michel's exercises. This is reflected in the naming of the project, for example, WDG's project is about domestic violence but they don't use this name because it is negative so they called it 'Home Peace Education,' I got the idea from one of my professors at the university but at the time, I didn't grasp it well, until now.

The way in which so many participants have taken up the practices on a regular basis has spread more thoroughly in the Horn than elsewhere.[39] Mahelet and Michel hypothesized why Capacitar was embraced in this context:

- PACE uses these practices in all its workshops and gatherings, which reinforces them and increases the number of people exposed to them.
- Similar to parts of South Africa (rural and very poor peri-urban areas) where participants loved the practices, the Horn's adoption of them might be due to people in that region living with high levels of trauma (repressive regimes, highly traditional and conservative cultures, high levels illness due to HIV and AIDS, poverty and unemployment, etc.); the practices bring relief.
- Isolation is also a factor; people have little (if at all) access to the internet and other sources of information, therefore, they are thirsty for, and appreciate, whatever resources they can get, as long as people feel a positive effect. In the Horn, people are not very aware of calming practices such as Capacitar because it is not part of the culture. People normally go to friends, or turn to religion for comfort.
- There is a spiritual openness in the Horn, which helped participants be open to what Capacitar offers. Mahelet pointed out that such openness is sustained as long as the narratives used are not too alienating from what people already know and can understand within their own religion and values.
- Raymond, the PACE program manager, was also open to new ideas and had a great focus on what should be changed.
- The practice has enough built in flexibility and room for experimentation to enable everyone to try it out.
- In South Africa, Kenya, and India, there is a lot more singing and dancing, which also acts as a kind of therapy. There is a lot less of the singing and dancing in the Horn, so Capacitar provided a valuable body-mind-spirit integration that was otherwise missing.

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[39] In a forthcoming paper, "Becoming the change we want to see," Michel Friedman uses the Horn experience to illustrate why and how these practices are so valued and significant in change processes like the GAL program, and how they support deep cultural changes.

Silences and hindsights

Interestingly, many of PACE's partners in the region work on issues that are centrally connected to debates about sexuality and its connection to gender equality/inequality, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), early child marriage, HIV and AIDS, domestic violence (including sexual violence) and sexual violence as part of war. During all Gender at Work's formal interactions with the partners (Hearing the Stories and the three peer-learning events), the issue of sexuality was never overtly raised for discussion.[40] This silence is particularly noteworthy given how salient the topic is to people's everyday lives, as well as to how it is emerging as a loud concern in the first decade of the 21st Century in both international and African debates around women's rights. On the one hand, the silence is perhaps not surprising given that there were so many other seemingly "easier" and maybe more "obvious" taboo issues to tackle first. Yet, perhaps we, as Facilitators responsible for this process, can also ask ourselves if we failed to open the space for such discussions. Gender at Work does not prescribe what partners' change projects need to focus on, and we do have to, at all times, be sensitive to the cultural contexts in which we work. However, we also strive to stimulate engagement and thinking about deep structures and taken-for-granted cultural norms. In this sense, by *not* raising issues of sexuality as possible avenues to explore when we first introduced our analytical framework, perhaps we erred on the side of colluding with a cultural taboo? We don't know if our own silence also closed down the space and did not "give permission" for some of the participants to explore issues that were possibly burning for them. This area might, therefore, be one that the PACE team could consider encouraging partners to interrogate more carefully.[41]

Amel, the Sudanese Facilitator, feels that good facilitation is all in the timing and sense of ownership. The nearly two-year process helped participants break silences/taboos by themselves through awakening their consciousness and removing fear around making issues more public, by naming them, all of which are, in fact, part of the process. She feels that if we had pushed the issue earlier, we might have generated resistance and fear. We need to value the slow dance of the process, which is precisely what enables each partner to take ownership of their process, project, and change outcomes. Amel reports that WDG, for example, is already breaking this silence by working specifically on sexuality education, specifically teenagers' sexuality (as part of the Home Peace Education manual). She is sure that it won't be long before other partners will also start naming such issues by their exact names.

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40 We are less familiar with the detail of the debates that were undertaken within the processes internal to each partner during their implementation work.

41 See, for instance, the very valuable resource produced by an Oxfam Canada partner in Zimbabwe, *Changing the Rivers' Flow* by SaFaids, 2009.

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APPENDIX 1 – DETAILED OUTLINE OF STEPS INVOLVED IN THE HORN GAL PROCESS

- **Program Design (Oct – Dec 2006):** Gender at Work team together with PACE manager and Horn gender consultant discussed the details of how each step of the process would work and built an overall schedule.
- **Getting Started (Dec 06 – Feb 2007):** PACE selected[42] partner organizations that showed a readiness for this kind of work. Once organizations were chosen, PACE's regional gender consultant began to build a relationship of trust with them. The consultant found out what the key issues were that the organization was facing, described the GAL process and the program, explained the idea of the three-person change team, and negotiated initial commitment to the process. (A central idea in the GAL program is that three people from the participating organization with significant influence are chosen to lead the change project and will also participate in the peer-learning events).
- **Hearing the Story Meetings (March 07 in Ethiopia and Somaliland, May 07 in Sudan):** These were two-day visits to each organization facilitated by the Gender at Work team and the Facilitator who was going to work with that partner throughout the duration of the process. Ideally, key organizational leaders were present at these meetings, which provided a climate of exploration and insight into what was happening in that organization's internal and programmatic life. Implicit thoughts about existing meanings and practices of gender and its relationship to organizational life were surfaced. These visits were crucial for developing understanding and direction for change, as well as for building relationships between the organizational change team and the Gender at Work team. The Gender at Work team visited the partner organization in their own setting, which is very important, especially for organizations that live far from easily accessible urban centres. These visits represent a real interest in and valuing of who they are and a commitment to engaging with them on their own turf.[43]
- **Peer-Learning Workshop 1 (3rd week May 2007)**: This workshop brought together the change teams from all the organizations and built a climate of relationship and trust for peer learning. Some frameworks for understanding, which often challenged existing perceptions and offered new ways of seeing, as well as ideas for strategic planning, were shared. Participants were supported in developing plans for change projects.
- **Work in the organizations**: This was about a six-to-eight month period in which the organization worked to implement its plan with the support of a Facilitator. The organization generally chose how it wished to use its Facilitator, which could involve

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42 Mahelet describes the criteria PACE uses for selection: *"partners who are already engaged in gender work but feel at a dead end; partners who demonstrate a capacity/eagerness to learn; partners who are looking for alternative approaches to gender and who express discomfort with the standard approaches; partners with high levels of integrity and genuineness in their leadership and membership who, in turn, could contribute to fueling the changes; partners who are very isolated (e.g. in South Sudan). Finally, as PACE, we wish to reflect the cultural and religious diversity of the Horn."*

43 For those readers who don't know the area, it is worth noting that it took us six days of travel time to visit two organizations in South Sudan.

visits, resource sharing, e-mail and/or phone contact. Usually Facilitators have about 5 working days allocated to each partner, but in the GAL program this visit time varied between 5 days (Admas), 10 days, (Abu Hadia), 12 days (Ratson), 15 (UNYDA), and 20 days (WDG) in Sudan, some of which included voluntary time.

- **Peer-Learning Workshop 2 (4th week Feb 2008)**: This workshop was primarily for change teams to hear how the work was going, to get advice from their peers and program staff, and to re-plan their work in the organization.
- **Work in the organizations:** Facilitator supported the change process in each organization.
- **Peer-Learning Workshop 3 (end of Nov 2008)**: The final workshop of the program allowed participants to tell the stories of the change process and attempted to isolate the factors responsible for change. Where relevant, the Gender at Work team provided relevant inputs to assist participants in developing deeper insight and understanding of the issues that emerged during the change projects. Even though the formal Gender at Work supported GAL program ended at this point, the participants still reflected on how they would take the work forward.
- **Writing**: We made use of different writing techniques as tools for reflection and learning throughout the joint learning processes, but it is listed at the end because that is when we focused on developing a written product. Throughout the program, partners were encouraged to maintain good documentation of their own work. About four months after the last peer-learning workshop, PACE organized a writing workshop with internationally renowned writing trainer, Louise Dunlap.[44] PACE intends bringing out a publication in which most participants will write short three page reflections on a few key highlights for them.[45]

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44 Amel and Mahelet facilitated additional writing workshops based on Louise's framework in Sudan and Ethiopia.

45 Mahelet explains that PACE is also grappling with the challenge of the development sector being flooded with information, and the reality of people having limited time to read. Believing that face-to-face communication is more culturally appropriate for the region, PACE is proposing that organizations that have experienced significant transformation share their experiences with partners and interested audiences. The three-page individual writing pieces will be used for this sharing piece.