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Unravelling Institutionalized Gender Inequality

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Each major institutional arena is gendered in its male bias-its failure to value or recognize reproductive work, defining it as "unproductive" or basing effective participation on a capacity to attain freedom from the reproductive sphere€¦ [This bias] is then deeply reinforced-institutionalized through the formation of social networks, or shared understandings and conventions of inclusion or exclusion, justified ideologically, which privilege the participation of a particular social group.

Anne Marie Goetz, 1997

The expansion of women's capabilities not only enhances women's own freedom and well being, but also has many other effects on the lives of all. An enhancement of women's active agency can, in many circumstances, contribute substantially to the lives of all people - men as well as women, children as well as adults.

Amartya Sen (New Delhi, November 2001)

I. Introduction

Today, the implications of gross gender oppression for peace and human security have come into sharp focus. As persistent gender inequalities continue we need to rethink concepts and strategies for promoting women's dignity and rights. National security interests, when they are defined narrowly as military security fundamentally thwart emerging notions of human security. The latter emphasizes sustainable development, gender justice, human rights, and democracy.

Moreover, Progress of the World's Women (UNIFEM, 2000) reports that income inequalities between both countries and individuals have been accelerating since the early 1970s. Recent global economic shocks include the financial crisis in East Asia, growing indebtedness of developing countries, persistent unemployment in developed countries and the off-loading of welfare concerns onto households and, particularly, the women within them. Elson sees both promise and despair for women in globalization trends. For some women, particularly educated women with professional skills, globalization opens up new possibilities. For women with fewer skills, it has meant loss of livelihoods and labor rights and increased migration as temporary, low paid workers. Feminist economists increasingly believe that "conventional conceptions of the way in which economies operate offer limited guidance for policies to promote women's empowerment and ways to combine gender justice with economic justice." Women's progress, Elson suggests, is facilitated by a human development approach to economic policy.

In 1990, the first Human Development Report put people back at the centre of development, defining human development as a process of "enlarging people's choices". Grounded in Amartya Sen's "human capabilities" framework, which posits that a person's enjoyment of capabilities is linked to the exercise of entitlements, the human development approach holds that markets have to be socially regulated so that they don't undermine human development objectives, and that governments and civil society organizations must create new arrangements that address risk and provide security in case of market failure. It also calls for governments to restructure public expenditures to develop the capabilities of the poor. In terms of women's empowerment and gender justice, Elson points out that a human development approach makes social

transformation central to the development agenda.

Choices for women, especially poor women, cannot be enlarged without a change in relations between women and men as well as in the ideologies and institutions that preserve and reproduce gender inequality. This does not mean reversing positions, so that men become subordinate and women dominant. Rather, it means negotiating new kinds of relationships that are based not on power over others but on a mutual development of creative human energy (power to based on power within and power with). It also means negotiating new kinds of institutions, incorporating new norms and rules that support egalitarian and just relations between women and men.
(Elson, 2000)

Much effort in the past decade has gone into creating those new rules -- both through conditions for enhanced women's agency and by building women's capabilities to choose and to act. In countries as different as India and Brazil, women are finding places in local governance structures. (In India, over one million women have been elected to local **panchayats** as a result of a 1993 amendment to the Indian Constitution requiring that one third of the elected seats to local governing bodies be reserved for women.) Self-help groups are mushrooming as a result of a variety of development interventions from forestry and environmental efforts to micro-credit schemes. (In India, for example, there are over 700,000 women's self-help groups - a potentially powerful channel for voicing women's interests.) In a few countries, women have been elected to national parliaments in significant numbers. South Africa however, is the only southern country that has achieved 30 percent parliamentary representation by women.

Over the past ten years, the concept of "gender mainstreaming" has become more prevalent in United Nations and national government circles. As defined by the UN, gender mainstreaming is the "process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality." *(E/1997/L.3014 July 1997)*

By most estimates, gender mainstreaming within the UN system and national governments faces an uphill struggle. Gender equality concerns are not mainstreamed but ghettoized as special machinery created to deal with women's issues. Sometimes this ghetto becomes a space in which to advocate broadly for women's interests while connecting to a women's political constituency and

scrutinizing national budgets and resource allocations. Mostly, however, it does little good. A recent review of gender mainstreaming in Asia and the Pacific found that in countries such as Cambodia, which were emerging from conflict situations, putting a gender infrastructure in place was just beginning as focus was on developing policies, building capacity and capturing more resources. Established bureaucratic contexts such as the Philippines were concentrating more with developing specialized expertise on for example, gender and economic globalization and in addressing deep-seated cultural barriers to gender equality within bureaucratic structures.

A problem then arises, for once the issue slips into what Staudt calls the "bureaucratic mire" it gets bogged down in technical questions. Then the case can be made only piecemeal in myriad specific locations and disciplines and the effort loses connections to its original constituency. Countering such dismemberment usually involves mobilizing women and advocating for women's interests (as was done in Japan for the Basic Law for A Gender Equal Society).

In rare cases, the constituency prevails: despite the reluctance of the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor to support a 30 percent quota for women in all government positions, the formation and campaigning of the Women's National Caucus led to the election of 24 percent women to those posts.

Women's interests are also compromised when rules are not followed or where there are no rules. In certain public sector contexts in Latin America for example, Gloria Bonder suggests that new rules to promote gender equity don't stick because of the the "normality of transgressions" and corruption with organizations operating amidst political unpredictability. All the more heartening are organizations such as Masum, a community-level organization in the Indian state of Maharashtra, which prove that it is possible to institutionalize a structure and new rules that overturn inequalities of gender, caste and class, promote a new way of relating and redefine development at the grassroots, significantly improving people's life chances.

In governmental and non-governmental organizations, efforts toward organizational change for gender equality have often involved putting in place gender-equitable policies, organizational mechanisms to steer this work, building specialist technical expertise for gender equality work, and advocating greater resource allocation to women's programs and women's interests - what we call the four holy cows of gender work. A review of these interventions indicates that small to moderate gains in gender equality were achieved; however, most projects were unable to accomplish as much as they intended because of insufficient resources, resistance of male managers, organizational culture, and

lack of accountability including mechanisms to monitor and prevent gradual backsliding.

For some, the above experiences have led to a deeper examination of development and human rights organizations (Goetz, 1997; Rao et.al, 1999). For others, preparation for implementing a progressive political agenda (such as in South Africa) forced better acquaintance with government organizations and how they work. However, many of us have come to believe that we need to think more deeply about **institutions**, that is, the rules of the game underlying organizational forms. Just as you don't 'add the idea that the world is round to the idea that the world is flat' (Minnich, 1995) -- trying to 'add gender' to the existing structure and work of organizations is ultimately futile.

We have set out therefore to review illustrative interventions of organizational change for gender equality, to analyze useful conceptual and methodological approaches, and to offer some key perspectives on how to move the work forward, drawing on our experiences and writings and those of colleagues. It is important to acknowledge that the particular significance of these issues will depend on local histories, contexts and conditions. Nevertheless we believe that by identifying important linkages in different contexts we can deepen our understanding and articulate new questions to further the overall process.

II. The Warp and Weft of Institutions

The major role of institutions in a society is to reduce uncertainty by establishing a stable (but not necessarily efficient) structure to human interaction.

Douglas North, 1990

In recent years, feminist scholarship and action has shifted its focus to the nature of institutional values and practices, and how they embody male agency, needs and interests, obstructing a gender equality agenda.

The terms 'institution' and 'organization' are often used synonymously, but we find it useful to distinguish between the two. We understand **institutions** as the rules for achieving social or economic ends (Kabeer, 1996). These rules specify how resources are allocated and how tasks, responsibilities and value are assigned. In other words, the rules determine who gets what, who does what, and who decides. Although institutions vary within and across cultures

and are constantly evolving and changing, they are embedded in relational hierarchies of gender, class, caste and other critical fault lines that define identities and distribute power both symbolically and materially. Gender is a primary field within or by means of which power is articulated (Scott, 1991).

Concepts of gender structure perception as well as the concrete and symbolic organization of all social life. To the extent that these perceptions, established as a set of objective references, establish distributions of power - such as the differential control over and access to material and symbolic resources -- gender becomes involved in the construction of power itself.

Geoff Wood (among other analysts, including North and Kabeer) identifies four levels of institutions: state, market, community and household. In neoliberal economics, the household is characterized as an altruistic unit where the collective welfare is maximized by a benign household head. However, the household is now recognized more as an arena of contestation where power is exercised through a complex fabric of social interaction. In a South Asian context Kumar-Range identifies this to include: "the norms of deference, dependency, risk avoidance, plural security portfolios, blood ties, mutual interdependence, subordination of individuality, patriarchy and the submersion of the self to the collective identity, which together constitute socialization for life". Community level institutions are also highly gendered and in highly stratified societies, patron-client relationships are the norm. Citing Leela Dube's study of gender and kinship in South and South East Asian countries, Kumar-Range reminds us that kinship institutions are at the core of gender relations - "family formation, bride price and dowry payments, inheritance and family dissolution rules and practices are governed by kinship ties, and these play a key role in shaping gender relations". State-level institutions operate both by formal rules and policies and informal practices. But, states are peopled with those who live in the households and community level relationships so their functioning reflects those intricate tapestries of power relationships. Geoff Wood asks: "What social and cultural distance does an official have to travel from home to work every day?" In weak public organizations, with little accountability to the public and operating in a context of high uncertainty, that distance may not be large; patronage and other societal institutions may dominate in both spheres. Markets, too, "while largely shaped by the extent to which individual entrepreneurs can interface with macroeconomic changes taking place and benefit from them, are also influenced by household and community-level institutions" (Kumar-Range, 2001).

If institutions are the frameworks of rules, organizations such as NGOs are the social structures within these frameworks and act to either reinforce them or to challenge them. These institutional norms often operate below the level of awareness but are woven into the hierarchies, work practices and beliefs of the

organizations constraining organizational efforts to challenge gender-biased norms.

Most writing and thinking about organizations describe them as rational, mechanistic constructs consisting of policies, structures - the inevitable organizational chart - and systems. Such thinking is embedded in the Weberian premise that organizational decisions and actions - structure and function - are founded in logic, efficiency and rationality. The result is consistency not arbitrariness. However, organizations are not neutral bodies, they are microcosms of the institutional contexts from which they spring. Gender-inequitable institutions produce gender-inequitable organizations, which produce gender inequitable outcomes-and a power base with a stake in defending those inequitable rules.

Thus, a big part of the work is to understand and change not only how organizations function inside (in terms of overt and hidden gender biases) but also how organizations conceive of their mission, develop strategic thinking and partnerships with their constituencies and, most importantly, whether they deliver services and programs that challenge and change biased gender norms.

III. Unravelling Institutional Biases: The Role of Organizations

Although some informal actions have had critical effects on equality, most efforts to either combat or maintain inequality are organizationally-based/ driven. For example, if there is to be a para-legal training program to help rural women fight for their rights, most likely it will be conceived, funded, designed and delivered by one or more organizations. (This is not to downplay the critical importance of the participation of the women in designing these programs.) Similarly, if a development project ignores the needs of women and maintains and reinforces the gendered power relations, the thinking that conceived of the project is the product of one or more sets of organizational processes, capabilities, culture, and power relations. This section discusses the gender-biased organization's inner workings.

Gender and Organizations

Organizations swim in a sea of societal norms, which not only influence organizational behavior but often operate below the level of consciousness. They were a foundation on which the hierarchies, work practices and beliefs of organizational life are built. They constrain organizational efforts to challenge gender-biased norms both in the society and in the organization.

The building blocks of many of our organizations are gender biased in ways that are quite invisible. Acker (1990) outlines at least five "gendering processes" in organizations. Formal practices may appear neutral but discriminate against women. Informal practices such as the expectation that staff commit to work nights and weekends discriminate against those (mainly women) with family responsibilities. Symbols and images in the organization such as the assumption that supervisors need to be men, as men alone can make the hard decisions, exclude women from even considering their own possible promotion. Everyday social interactions such as sexual "teasing" reinforce women's subordinate place in the organization.

Goetz also writes about the hidden gendering of organizations. She outlines a "gendered archeology" of organizations that demonstrates how organizations perpetuate societal norms favouring men's interests. She points to issues as the inherent conceptual bias of institutions. Just as Elson's work that demonstrated that economics is "fundamentally disabled" in its capacity to understand women's inequality, fields such as peace building, and human rights are built on conceptual understandings that have excluded women's perspectives and interests. Goetz also discusses gendered accountability systems that focus NGOs and state bureaucracies on donors' need for quantifiable and measurable performance targets, rather than on the needs and interests of women clients.

Our own work, has focused on the deep structure of organizations and how it blocks efforts to increase gender equality. By "deep structure" we mean that collection of values, history, culture and practices that form the unquestioned, 'reasonable' way to work in organizations. At least four aspects of deep structure perpetuate gender inequality:

1. valorization of heroic individualism;
2. the split between work and family;
3. exclusionary power; and
4. the monoculture of instrumentality.

Perhaps the most powerful of these is exclusionary power. Feminist writers such as Ferguson and others believe that the command and control systems of exercising power in most organizations are somehow "male" and inimical to a female way of working. They therefore exclude women by forcing them to work in ways not comfortable to them or which they have not been prepared by their upbringing. This is contentious, although there is some empirical evidence of men's preference and capacity for competitive living. Our concern, however, relates to how power is used to exclude women's perspectives and interests.

One helpful way to understand the ways this is accomplished is the framework developed by Stephen Lukes. He discusses three kinds of power:

1. Traditional power-the power to make and enforce decisions;
2. Agenda power-the power to decide what can be talked about or even considered in organizational discourse; and
3. Hidden power-power that shapes perceptions, cognitions and preferences so that people accept that their place in the order of things is unchangeable and "natural."

The ability of these dimensions of power to maintain inequitable power relations are reinforced by the lack of democratic process in modern state and NGO bureaucracies. Very few have political mechanisms to balance or restrain the power of those at the top. Very few are interested in the reality of "real" politics-constituencies, interest groups, and accountability to clients and communities. Although some organizations pride themselves on participation, it is almost always of a type that leaves intact the authority structure of people and ideas.

How Deep Structure Acts to Hinder Work on Gender Equality

The four aspects of deep structure listed above inhibit gender equality outcomes in different ways. Heroic individualism focuses on winning. Goal orientation focuses on clear outcomes rather than on the somewhat murky process of uncovering gender inequity in social relations and institutions. Moreover, the hero stereotype is generally male. The paucity of women heroes results in women's interests being under-represented. Therefore, there is no pressure (or constituency) for challenging existing gender-biased relations and ideologies. The idea that women's rights are human rights came not from the human rights movement but from the women's movement.

The work-family split that devalues women's participation and interests within organizations also does not support re-organizing responsibilities inside families.

Exclusionary power blocks organizational learning, particularly on those issues which are at odds with core organizing values. Such power regimes devalue participation and silence the voices that would bring the alternative perspectives and knowledge that are required to deliver gender-equal outcomes. Finally, the monoculture of instrumentality ensures that organizational resources are focused on producing quantifiable results leaving little time for the complexities

of institution-changing.

The analysis leads us to the understanding that power hides the fact that organizations are gendered at very deep levels. That is, women are prevented from challenging institutions by four interrelated factors:

- Political access: There are neither systems nor powerful actors who can bring women's perspectives and interests to the table;
- Accountability systems: Organizational resources are steered toward quantitative targets often only distantly related to institutional change for gender equality;
- Cultural systems: The understanding of the place of work and family prevent women from being full participants in many organizations; and
- Cognitive structures: Work itself is seen only within existing, gender-biased norms and understandings.

Both women and men internalize these factors so they seem reasonable and "normal". But, they result in a set of assumptions about internal organizational dynamics and the work itself. Gendered organizations determine what is seen as possible, reasonable and appropriate.

These systemic forces for the maintenance of the status quo do not make change impossible. Nor do individuals within organizations lack agency. In fact, we are the beneficiaries of generations of efforts to make organizations and their products more gender equitable.

In the past few years, a number of in-depth gender and organizational transformation programs have been carried out. For example, in the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), a Bangladeshi development organization working with poor rural women, the work focused on strengthening BRAC's ability to improve its programs. Thousands of BRAC staff in analyzed hierarchical, inter-staff and client relations from a gender-equality perspective. They then took action to change attitudes, power relations, and work practices. The International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) has used collaborative action research to deepen understanding of the scope and complexity of gender issues in the workplace; and to test and develop work environments that support women and men and new, more gender-equitable ways of working.

Others have worked in for-profit corporations focusing on the balance between work and family, challenging work practices and intervening to make changes that both benefit the organization and legitimate employees' work/family

issues. (Bailyn, Kolb et. al., 1996). Another approach to organizational transformation uses gender budgeting to build organizational accountability to women and gender-equality commitments (Govender, 1997).

IV. Approaches to Gender and Organizational Change

An analysis of our experience and that of others has led us to a comprehensive approach to organizational change for gender equality. We believe that there are three complementary types of changes required-gender infrastructure, organizational change and programming institutional change.   As all organizations are different, a different proportion is required in each. The table below outlines these three approaches.

Table 1: Gender & Organizational Change Approaches

Approach/span>

Outcomes/span>

Change Strategy/span>

Notes/span>

/span>

Gender Infrastructure/span>

- Gender policy, including family-friendly policy
- Gender Unit
- Increased female staff and managers
- Increased resources for women's program/span>
- Reference to international covenants and agreements
- Management support
- Internal constituency
- External pressure from women's movement and/or donors /span>

This "formal" architecture is necessary but far from sufficient.

This approach may leave organizational attitudes intact, making overworked gender staff fight uphill battles.

Unlikely to develop new program oriented to changing institutions./span>

/span>

Organizational Change/span>

- **Changes in the "deep structure," such as power relations, work-family balance, instrumentality, etc.**
- **Accountability to client constituency/span>**

A mixture of organizational development, pressure from internal and external constituencies, management support, gender training /span>

This is the "informal architecture" required to change institutions.

This approach risks creating a black hole of organizational change processes in which gender may be lost. /span>

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Institutional Change for Gender Equality/span>

Changes in social institutions as seen in families, communities, markets and the state./span>

Gender analysis of the institutions relevant to the organization's program, developing programs and processes to challenge these institutional norms, changing reward structures, building organizational capacity /span>

This approach grounds the change effort in the work and maintains the focus where it should be.

Difficult to sustain without strong external pressure and high commitment from within the organization./span>

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1.
    Gender Infrastructure:

Current thinking sees the basics of gender equality as :

- **a gender policy that commits the organization to a particular path in working on equality;**
- **a gender unit of technically-skilled change agents that can ensure that organizational programs do not disadvantage women and that holds the organization to its policy commitments;**
- **gender training and tools;**
- **family-friendly policies, such as flex-time and day-care, that make it possible for women in particular to balance work and family responsibilities;**
- **an increase in the number of women staff and managers;**
- **an increase in resources devoted to women's programming.**

Typically, the infrastructure described above is gained through lobbying, pressure from clients, donors and/or internal staff groups and requires some degree of management support. The case is generally argued either on the grounds of rights (appealing to international agreements such as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action) or of efficiency. For example, a study demonstrating the economic advantages of women's education is credited with considerable movement towards the use of World Bank resources for women's programming.

An UNRISD study found that the extent to which an organization will build and use such an infrastructure is dependent on three factors: degree of responsiveness to external pressures; organizational mandate; ideology and procedures; and the existence and capacity of internal policy advocates and entrepreneurs.

A recent Norwegian government-sponsored study found that gender units are usually under-resourced and in low status locations in their organizations; they also enjoy little influence. According to this study, even if gains are made at headquarters, work at the country level is often quite weak.

However, gender units have made important gains in a number of organizations in developing tools, doing gender training and inexorably bringing gender-equity considerations to the organization table. For example, in the ten years following its inception, the Gender and Development Unit (GADU) at Oxfam GB developed networks; sensitized staff through gender training; assisted with the development of national and regional policies; included gender considerations in job descriptions, grant requests, procedures and guidelines; initiated a publishing program; and developed an organizational gender policy ultimately passed by the Oxfam trustees.

Although GADU put the concept of gender firmly on the map at Oxfam, its work was not without resistance and contention. (See *Gender Works*, *Oxfam GB*, *1999* for more details.)

However, infrastructure alone is seldom sufficient to enable an organization to challenge institutional /societal norms. A systematic effort of organizational change is also required.

1.
    Organizational Change:

Changes that build the organization's capacity to challenge gender-biased institutions in the society include: democratizing relations; making women's voices more powerful in the organization; finding ways to make the organization more accountable to women clients, and more amenable to women's participation; and building relations with other organizations to further a gender-equality agenda.

The concept of organizational change has received much attention in the past 30 years or so. In 1969, in a groundbreaking study, Graham Allison analyzed the political and organizational dynamics of the US government and the US Navy with regard to the Cuban missile crisis. Allison found that the strategic choices made were understandable given the costs and benefits of the available strategic options. However, a much deeper understanding of the actions of the government and the Navy was revealed by an analysis of their "organizational process" and "bureaucratic politics". Looking at organizational process alerts us to the fact that organizations are constrained by their current capabilities, knowledge, and procedures: limited flexibility because of a continual flow of work and issues; and entrenched agreements that determine how resources are shared and used. The bureaucratic politics analysis reveals an organization that is a not a monolithic entity, but rather numerous interests and coalitions competing to determine outcomes in the interest (altruistic or selfish) of key players.

Some time later, Noel Tichy developed a similar framework for thinking about strategic change. He suggested we look at:

- **Who influences whom and about what? This question relates to power, resource allocation, and who reaps the benefits-i.e. The Political Point**

of View on an organization.

- **How are resources allocated? This question relates to how social, technical and financial resources are organized to produce desired outputs in the most efficient manner-i.e. the Technical Point of View on an organization.**
- **Who talks to whom about what? This question relates to the relations network, values, standards, beliefs and interpretations of staff-, i.e. the Cultural Point of View on an organization.**

Looking at the two frameworks developed by Allison and Tichy enables us to understand why change can be so difficult if only a single path is taken. Changing organizations requires:

- **new information and cognitive frameworks to enable different choices to be made , i.e. Rational Analysis;**
- **a new political alignment so that new issues make it on to the agenda, i. e. Bureaucratic Politics;**
- **new work practices and an increase in capacity, i.e. Organizational Process; and**
- **an organizational learning process that will integrate these threads and help members learn what is required.**

Much of the work on organizational change for gender equality has adapted practices of organizational development and organizational learning, particularly with regard to the importance of the learning process and of participation. However, unlike traditional organizational development, gender-equality organizational change holds that rational analysis and bureaucratic politics are equally important to the change process. The challenge is to develop methods that combine politics and participation with an understanding of organizations in terms of their equality mission. For many practitioners this entails linking organizational and feminist theory.

Three such recent efforts at organizational change are instructive.

BRAC is a large rural development NGO in Bangladesh. The Gender Team was charged with leading a long-term effort to improve gender equality both within BRAC and in the provision of services to poor rural women in Bangladesh. Changing organizational norms, systems, and relationships was critical to the change effort. The process had three broad stages:

- **Start-up: This comprised clarifying management interest, finding resources, and negotiating the essential elements of the process and the establishment of the Gender Team.**

- **Needs Assessment and Knowledge Building: This participatory process involved more than 400 BRAC staff at all levels in 2-day workshops to assess gender issues in both BRAC and BRAC's programs.**

- **Strategic Planning: The team met with the senior management team to discuss the results of the needs assessment. The resultant process design evolved through further management discussions. Approval was given for the program design and an action-learning approach involving local area staff first, in a collaborative analysis of the gender dimensions of their work, and then in planning action to strengthen gender equality.**

- **Training of trainers and micro-design of the program: A core group of 25 facilitators (now nearly 50) was developed to work with area-office staff to facilitate the action-learning process. The training of trainers was used to test and refine the program design; a pilot was then launched in which new facilitators worked with Gender Team members to begin to deliver the program in area offices.**

- **Implementation: The facilitators worked in area offices to lead staff through learning, analysis and action planning. Area-office teams developed analyses of gender issues in their settings and in programs, and developed local solutions. Area managers met to consider issues that seemed beyond the capacity of local staff. After two years, the most important outcomes were democratization of BRAC, and changes in relationships between women and men and between levels of the hierarchy. The program is now in its eighth year. (For a more complete description, see Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999).**

CIMMYT (Centro International de Mejoraramiento de Maiz y Trigo):

CIMMYT is a center of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research system, focusing on plant breeding, documentation, and distribution of wheat and maize. In order to attract and retain the highest-caliber scientists, CIMMYT committed itself to building a work environment that is equally hospitable to men and women. The change process was aided by an internal constituency of women and by positive funding incentives from donors. The process involved:

1. **Project set-up: An external action-research team was set up, a process was agreed to, and key project values were affirmed: collaboration, inclusion of diverse groups, and wide participation of staff. These values reflected a way of working that was intrinsic to a gender-equitable work environment.   A key aim of the change process was the "dual agenda", not only more gender-equitable organization but also more effective organization as a whole.**

1. **Inquiry: The external research team interviewed some 60 staff and spouses, and held 5 focus groups. The interviews were structured within a carefully developed conceptual framework, including questions not only about the gendered aspects of the organization but also about the strategic issues facing the center.**

1. **Analysis: After some discussion with CIMMYT staff, the action-research team developed an analysis that included a description of the current work environment and the "mental models" that drove it and strategic challenges facing CIMMYT, and the implications of these challenges for both gender equality and organizational effectiveness.**

1. **Feedback: A series of meetings at CIMMYT, including all staff and a number of spouses, discussed the ways in which the mental models that drove the organization were problematic in terms of both gender equality and organizational effectiveness. The staff then developed a number of concrete action steps (experiments).**

1. **Implementation: Staff volunteered to lead teams that would implement these experiments, which focused on building participation, strengthening communication between managers and staff, and creating a system of management accountability to staff. After two years, there was significant progress in improving the transparency, fairness and gender neutrality of the hiring system, improved communication, and improved quality of interaction in key project planning teams. Several issues remained unresolved, but significant steps had been taken. (For more information on this case, see Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999 or Center for Gender in Organizations, Simmons Graduate School of Management, Working Paper #3, "Engendering Organizational Change", Merrill-Sands et al., 1999.)**

Novib's Gender Route Project

In the dialogue among Novib (a Dutch funding agency now part of the

Oxfam group) and its partner organizations, it became increasingly clear that all needed much more knowledge on gender issues and change processes within organizations. The Gender Route project was initiated to provide this learning and to improve the capacity of the participating organizations. The project was originally to last three years, but was extended to five years beginning in 1995.

All 31, non-women specific participating organizations had had a long relationship with Novib; they were based in Asia, Africa, or Latin America, plus two global networks and Novib. Each drew up its learning goals in advance and completed a self-diagnosis, implementation and evaluation.

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Important elements of all phases included:

- Funds and expertise (local gender consultants) made available by Novib for all project-related activities;
- Agreements on the submission of regular progress reports;
- Annual workshops organized by Novib for each region/continent, during which participants and Novib exchanged experiences and reported on progress. The workshops often also included a training element, on such subjects as the role of change agents or gender-sensitive PMES.

Phase 1: Self-diagnosis

As a start, all partners and Novib assessed the extent gender equity was part of their policy and practice. In order to do this, the "9 boxes framework" model for self-diagnosis was introduced. This framework identifies three crucial elements of an organization: mission/mandate, organizational structure, and human resources. It further distinguishes among subsystems of an organization: technical, political and cultural.

The technical subsystem organizes social, technical and financial resources. The political subsystem allocates organizational power and benefits, and determines who influences whom and about what. The cultural subsystem comprises norms and values, relationship networks and interpretations shared by all staff. For an organization to work smoothly, the three crucial elements and three subsystems must be aligned, not working at cross-purposes. In each of the 9 boxes of the

framework are questions that can be tailored to specific realities of an organization. The advantage of this model is that it illustrates the strong and weak parts of an organization at a glance.

The self-diagnosis pointed out that, many participant groups scored most positively on their technical subsystems. Some were improving at the political subsystem level (e.g. organizations had already identified a problem with decision-making processes or lack of democratic access to information). The elements least addressed were elements of the cultural subsystem, at the deepest level of the organization. These included such things as promotion of teamwork and learning, promotion of non-sexist attitudes, and an assessment of how staff experience the workplace.

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The Gender Route workshops concluded that technical measures alone were hardly enough. Even organizations with gender focal points, increased women staff members, more women's projects, and gender training often failed to change organizational systems and processes. On the political level, women staff members often had little influence on formal and informal decision-making processes; women among the beneficiaries continue to operate in traditional spheres; sex-disaggregated data on the conditions of men and women among the target group fail to reach higher decision-making levels, and gender focal points continue preaching to the converted. While such an organization might look good at a first glance, the political and cultural subsystems were preventing technical measures from operating effectively. In other words, the subsystems were working at cross-purposes.

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The Gender Route project helped participants to start identifying and addressing these deep-seated processes that affect the organization's ability to embed a gender perspective. Overtime, it became clear that without addressing these issues, change would not be genuine.

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Phase 2: Action Plans

Based on the self-diagnosis, all participants designed and implemented action plans. Along with common strategies such as

changing the gender infrastructure, providing staff gender training, establishing gender PMES, and conducting gender-disaggregated baseline studies, were less standard interventions. Participants analyzed how male ways of behaving blocked gender equality both in the workplace and in the field, male and female staff temporarily swapped jobs, gender criteria were included in job-appraisal interviews, men's and women's experiences of the workplace and work arrangements were assessed, issues relating to sexual harassment were included and staff members were trained in counselling skills to deal with sexual harassment cases, the undemocratic nature of decision-making processes and sharing of information were addressed, and the structure of the organization was changed in order to promote teamwork and learning.

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All regions showed a similar pattern regarding the choice of strategic intervention. What difference there was seemed to be between organizations that were more and less advanced in integrating a gender perspective. Those opting for less common interventions also seemed to be most advanced in their gender policy and practices.

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In some cases, where existing organizational problems surfaced, the Gender Route Project work became closely linked with the need for improved organizational performance. Individuals responsible for the Gender Route Project (i.e., change agents) found they were dealing with general organizational-change issues. In the workshops, a lot of attention was paid to the crucial role of these change agents. The broadening of the discussion to the "dual agenda" -- for equal rights and opportunities for women and men and improved organizational performance -- helped a number of organizations to take their gender work to a higher level, facilitating an analysis of organizational conditions and factors that enable or inhibit gender practices. This renewed the creativity, curiosity and enthusiasm of both women and men.

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Phase 3: Evaluation: Preliminary Conclusions

At the end of phase two, all partners had implemented their action plans, developed by means of the diagnosis exercise. Although it was too early to provide conclusive results in regard to long term objectives, a number of elements were seen to have been crucial to

some participant's deep organizational change. These are:

- **Involved and committed senior management: Leadership must express a need and willingness to learn and change their work practices, and to create a work culture in which staff members can articulate and express the need for change. In more hierarchical organizations where there is little sharing of information and decisions are made by leadership alone, this enabling environment is lacking. The importance of leadership - both enabling and unsupportive - kept coming up in workshops. For example, in the last South Asia workshop (in 1999), much discussion centered on sustainability of the achievements made through the gender route. Participants kept coming back to box 5 in the Tichy model: the role of the decision-makers in sustaining the learnings and translating them to higher quality of work.**

- **Gender infrastructure: Regional workshops concluded that a gender infrastructure is a must for sustainability. Organizations that had `mainstreamed' gender issues, thereby doing away with gender focal points, risked loosing the gender perspective; gender focal points remain relevant it seems, but must be central and in all organizational units.**

- **A culture of gender equity: in recruitment, women in field-management structures (which seems to be always possible if you try), and family friendliness in work arrangements.**

- **A culture of participation and consultation: This is necessary both at organization and target-group level.**

The three change efforts we have looked at - BRAC, CIMMYT and NOVIB Gender Route share a basic organizational-development (OD) approach to change. Information collection, analysis and action planning are participatory; there is a focus on issues of communications, relationships, and increasing equality of managers and staff. Apart from the OD interventions were outcomes such as the legitimization of gender issues, focus on hiring practices, equal pay for equal work and male/female balance, and the building of gender infrastructure such as the creation of specialist units. There are also important differences between the three change efforts - action learning at BRAC, the mental models and dual agenda at CIMMYT, and the 9 Box Framework and the support of other organizations in the NOVIB program.

Although these interventions also focused on the programs of the organization many OD interventions focus solely on organizational processes. In such cases, efforts to promote gender equality in beneficiary communities is lost. Thus, the process must include an explicit focus on institutional change.

1. **Institutional Change for Gender Equality:**

Institutional change involves changes in strategy and programs. The question becomes, does the program focus on changing social institutions -- families, communities, markets and the state? In other words, will the program challenge gender-biased norms throughout society and work to upgrade women's position and voice, not merely their material condition. In order to answer "yes," the organization's mission, processes and programs may have to change in ways that challenge and alter institutional norms. Such an agenda will be driven as much by women clients or women at the grassroots as by the organization.

Our thinking on "institutional change" is very much influenced by the work of Molyneux and of Kabeer. Kabeer poses the question of institutional change as follows:

> *gender as a power relation derives from institutional arrangements which provide men, of a given social group, with greater capacity than women from the group to mobilize institutional rules and resources to promote and defend their strategic interests. In most contexts, men enjoy, by and large, greater access to food, political position or land, greater physical mobility, lesser responsibilities in terms of self maintenance or care of the young and the old, a privileged position in command of labor, particularly women's labor, less confined sexuality. â €¦ The different gender interests of men and women derive out of their positioning within these unequal social relations and shape their attitudes to change.*

Molyneux's analysis of strategic interests and practical needs is vital here. Women's strategic interests enhance women's power of choice over politics, reproduction, work, and income. In order to change institutions, interventions must focus on women's strategic interests.

For example, BRAC, in Bangladesh realized that many of their women members were suffering from illegal divorces or inheritance disputes. They therefore initiated a para-legal training program that taught women to understand their rights and how to claim them. GRAM, in South India, changed from initiating to supporting the agenda increasingly voiced by their dalit women members. IBAM, in Brazil, developed a training process for women candidates in municipal

elections.

However, to work on strategic interests as well practical needs, an organization must accept three primary facts:

- **The program needs to challenge the basis of women's disempowerment;**
- **The women intended to benefit from the program must be involved in its definition. (This involves freeing time and space for their participation.); and**
- **The resistance to these changes can be powerful. Working on strategic needs builds strength through accessing resources, building awareness and alliances, and mobilizing around self-identified needs and priorities.**

The work begins with a gender analysis of the organization's programs:

- **Does the program focus on strategic interests or only on practical needs?**
- **Who was involved in identifying both goals and delivery mechanisms?**
- **Does the program challenge existing power relations between men and women?**
- **What resistance can be anticipated and how can it be countered?**
- **Does the program allow women to choose social roles other than those of wife and homemaker?**
- **Does the program focus on the empowerment of women?**

This gender analysis leads to work with women's groups; building alliances within the organization, and a participative design process that identifies opportunities and plans for resistance, and puts in place necessary resources and infrastructure.

One final note: this section has identified three main components of the process of institutional change: building a gender infrastructure, organizational change, and planning for institutional change. Although we have discussed them sequentially, they are not necessarily followed in order, as each organization has a unique cultural and temporal context.

V. Weaving New Institutional Rules for Gender Equality

The work of organizational change for gender equality is propelled by an understanding of the large picture (as described at the beginning of this paper), and an intention to positively impact women's lives; but this connection often gets lost along the way. Re-focusing organizational efforts on institutional change addresses this unintended de-linking. While global, regional and national trends shape local realities and choices for interventions, interventions are often designed as if organizations exist in a contextual vacuum.

The gender and organizational change intervention at PALM Foundation, in Sri Lanka (supported by the Novib Gender Route) is a case in point. PALM works to establish and develop people's organizations in tea plantations in the central region of Sri Lanka and the surrounding villages. The plantation workers are from the Tamil ethnic minority, whose brethren have been waging a civil war in northern Sri Lanka for the past two decades; the plantations are half owned and fully managed by a transnational corporation headquartered in the west. Tea prices have fared badly on the commodity market in the last few years. PALM provides a variety of welfare activities, such as health and education facilities, but only with management's 'good will.' Labour unions are prohibited on plantations though legal under Sri Lanka's constitution. (One quarter of its 6.8 million labor force is unionized.) Gender hierarchies ensure that plantation women suffer not only extreme isolation, but also material deprivation and economic and social discrimination. Global and local factors complicate and nuance their situation, and PALM staff have a sophisticated understanding of them; yet this did not come to the design of PALM's gender and organizational intervention. Instead, the effort focused simply on hiring more women and creating a more 'gender-sensitive' culture within PALM.

What was missing in the PALM intervention was the understanding that work at the level of organizations and groups of organizations needs to be nourished by knowledge that elucidates both gender perspectives and the larger contexts: development and economic globalization, human rights, and human security. Making this connection between gender and these broader issues will enable change agents to 'see' issues (especially discriminatory institutional rules and the factors that perpetuate them) in both contexts. Cooperinder suggests that this "sensemaking" â€¦ *sets the frame for decision-making, becomes the basis for envisioning possible futures, and creates the communication context for linking with others.* To facilitate "sensemaking," we need to build better connections

between organizational change activists, macro policy analysts, and women and men in communities. This work is challenging, as organizational interventions for change remain poorly understood and undervalued. Because of the persistent erroneous belief that if we get the policy right, implementation will inevitably follow, institutional analysis and change through organizational interventions are often inadequate.

An institutional change approach (as opposed to mainstreaming or simple organizational change) encourages us to make strategic links to larger economic, political and social conditions shaping women's and men's lives. It also directs our interventions to changing the material and relational hierarchies that define them. It involves searching for collaborators (outside the traditional development NGOs) that work at the community level. These collaborators are in the best position to help us understand institutional factors that shape gender relations, highlight innovative structures and processes and, where relevant, to understand the links to research.

That there are many examples to draw from, we have no doubt. Powerful actors, firmly grounded in local realities, straddle the macro-micro divide with ease. As described by Batliwala, such organizations as WEIGO and Shack Dwellers International have "created new forms of partnership between grassroots actors and NGOs, other private and public institutions, scholars and researchers, and state and multilateral agencies." (Batliwala, 2002). They are reshaping macro discourses, from informal sector employment to water sharing to slum development and equally important, they are developing practical solutions for women's material welfare and empowerment.

Supportive discourses and supporting change agents are critical to change. Gender and institutional change activists must create partnerships with grassroots and community-based organizations to highlight creative solutions, find ways to support strategic-change work, build new knowledge rooted in on-the-ground experience, and develop innovative ways of learning and networking this new knowledge. An institutional-change approach forces us to strategize for change by analyzing the connections between the global and the local context to "[get] institutions right for women in development." Supriya Roy Chowdhury suggests, that that sometimes necessitates getting out of the organizational box and addressing deeper sources of powerlessness through movement struggles.

Where the structural inhibitors to women's ability to negotiate gender interests and identities are so severely handicapped by organizational frameworks we must look to other possibilities of addressing issues of justice and equality.

Endnotes

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