

# 2

## The Context

Gender equality and equity are being advanced by the Gender Management System in the context of global and Commonwealth mandates, and of shifts in the theoretical understanding of how gender disparities in societies can best be addressed.

### **Mandates for Gender Equality and Equity**

Advancing gender equality and equity has been mandated internationally by the Commonwealth, by the UN and related agencies, and by some regional groupings.

### **The Commonwealth**

The Commonwealth is committed to gender equality and equity. In 1985, Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Women's Affairs recommended the preparation of a Plan of Action on Women and Development, followed by the institutionalisation of an expert group to update the Plan of Action periodically. The first Plan of Action was adopted by Ministers at their 1987 meeting. In 1991, Commonwealth Heads of Governments reaffirmed that commitment in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, which pledges the Commonwealth and its member countries to work with renewed vigour on, among other areas, "equality for women, so that they may exercise their full and equal rights."

Annexed to the 1991 Harare Communiqué was the Ottawa Declaration on Women and Structural Adjustment, in which Commonwealth leaders committed their governments to a programme of action which included integrating "women's interests more consistently into public policy, including the design and implementation of structural adjustment policies through: increasing gender awareness throughout government; ensuring the full involvement of women in decision-making and operational processes at all levels; enhancing the capacity of women's bureaux to contribute effectively to economic analysis and project appraisal ... and establishing steering committees within Ministries of Finance to ensure that gender issues are incorporated into all decision relating to structural adjustment" (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997: 112-113).

The central strategy of the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development is the mainstreaming of gender considerations into all government policies, programmes and projects. It advocates the adoption by member governments of a national plan on gender and development, and emphasises the importance of a strong national women's machinery, with authority emanating from the highest level of government and adequate resources, to lead the mainstreaming process.

Among 15 government action points under the Plan of Action, seven are of particular relevance to public service commissions, central personnel offices, and similar government agencies:

- 1 establish and strengthen gender management systems and national women's machineries;
- 2 integrate gender issues in all national policies, plans and programmes;
- 3 build capacity in gender planning;
- 4 become a model of good practice as a gender-aware employer;
- 5 promote equal opportunities and positive and/or affirmative action throughout the country and consult women and men equally on priorities;
- 6 take action for anti-discrimination;
- 7 take action for women's participation in decision-making.

As key players in the staffing of governments and the management of personnel in the public service – with responsibilities that can include appointments, promotions, training and discipline – public service commissions and central personnel offices are strategically placed to carry out these action points and make a significant contribution to advancing gender equality, both directly (within government) and indirectly (in the wider society).

At their 1996 meeting in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers set the target that by the year 2005, 30 per cent of those in decision-making positions in the political, public and private sectors should be women. They added that countries already close to this target should be encouraged to strive for a 50-50 balance. These targets were endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 1997 summit in Edinburgh.

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## Global commitments

In 1986, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the declaration on the right of all countries to development. It proclaimed that right by stating that each person and all peoples of the world are entitled to participate in and contribute to economic, social, cultural and political development in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised.

The Declaration of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, to which many Commonwealth countries are signatories, commits governments, *inter alia*, to establishing "structures, policies, objectives and measurable goals to ensure gender balance and equity in decision-making processes at all levels, broaden women's political, economic, social and cultural opportunities and independence, and support the empowerment of women ... including through affirmative action, where necessary and also through measures to integrate a gender perspective in the design and implementation of economic and social policies" (Commitment 5). Many countries of the Commonwealth have also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which commits governments to passing laws to taking "all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights" (Article 11).

The Platform for Action adopted by the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing called upon governments, the international community and civil society to take action on 12 critical areas of concern, including "inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources" and "inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels" (United Nations, 1995a). Under these concerns the following strategic objectives were stated:

- ◆ eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination ;
- ◆ take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making;
- ◆ increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

### A Southern African Regional Initiative

In 1997, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), a regional organisation consisting of 12 governments adopted a series of measures to place gender firmly on the SADC agenda.

The measures include:

- ◆ establishing a policy framework for mainstreaming gender in all SADC activities;
- ◆ putting in place machinery including a Standing Committee of Ministers Responsible for Gender Affairs, an Advisory Committee, Gender Focal Points in all sector co-ordinating units and regional committees, and a Gender Unit in the SADC Secretariat;
- ◆ adopting a Plan of Action on Gender and Development, including a gender audit, gender mainstreaming, programmes and projects for the advancement of women, an integrated gender training programme, the setting of gender targets and indicators, and the creation of an enabling environment for the participation of NGOs and other groups;
- ◆ mobilising and committing adequate resources for programmes to advance gender equality.

The measures were tabled in September 1997 at the SADC Heads of State Summit in Lilongwe, Malawi, at which leaders adopted a Declaration on Gender and Development. The measures grew out of recommendations developed at a regional gender strategy workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa, in January 1997 and finalised at a ministerial workshop on the eve of the SADC Council of Ministers Meeting in Windhoek, Namibia, in February 1997.

As the leading public sector employer in many countries, the public service has a clear responsibility to work towards the attainment of these objectives.

## Development of Theoretical Approaches to Advancing Gender Equality

The United Nations Decade for the Advancement of Women (1975-1985) encouraged United Nations agencies, national governments, and non-governmental organisations to develop projects and programmes that would improve the economic and social position of women. The demand for policy attention to women's needs in development was often framed in terms of access or 'integration' to a range of development policy-making and project institutions. The implicit assumption behind many of these policies was that women's main problem in developing countries was insufficient participation in an otherwise benevolent process of growth and development.

The Women in Development (WID) approach was premised on this assumption and on the underlying rationale that women were an untapped resource that could provide an economic contribution to development. The thinking behind the WID approach was strongly affected by the assumption that heavy investment in education systems and in the development of highly trained workers and managers would result in the transformation of predominantly agricultural societies into ones which were industrialised and modernised. The resultant improvements in living conditions, wages, health services, and education would then lead to a 'trickle down' effect in all sectors of the society, and it was assumed that women and men would benefit equally from these changes.

This assumption began to be questioned in the 1980s, however, as the relative position of women over the two decades of modernisation had not only shown very little improvement, but had actually declined in some sectors. Gradually, it became widely recognised that women's experience of development was different from that of men, and research began to focus on women's views, opinions and experiences.

Initially, intervention programmes were designed using the women in development (WID) approach; providing services or introducing technologies which would reduce the workloads of women, so that they could participate more in educational and other

opportunities offered by society. Very little work was done to try and determine why women had not benefited as much as men in the development process. There was an acceptance of the existing structures within society and an avoidance of any questioning of, or challenge to the origins of women's subordination. The WID approach also focused on sex as an analytical category without simultaneously examining the effects of race, class and culture; and the potential for, and actual discrimination and exploitation of women by women (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999b).

At the Third UN Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985, a network of women from the economic South produced a platform document which formed the basis for a series of panels. The response to the document led to the launching of the network Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), an ongoing programme of research and analysis on key development issues, which questioned the impact of development on poor people, especially women, particularly in view of the global economic and political crises, and voiced a sense of urgency regarding the need to advocate alternative development processes that would give principal emphasis to the basic survival needs of the majority of the world's people.

In the 1980s, the gender and development (GAD) approach was offered as an alternative to the WID approach. This approach questioned the previous tendency to view women's problems in terms of their sex, i.e., their biological distinctions from men – rather than in terms of their gender, i.e., the social relationship between men and women in which women have been subordinated and oppressed. The GAD approach also emphasises the importance of taking into consideration class and race/ethnic distinctions, and intra-class/race variations as these relate to gender.

The GAD approach supports the WID view that women must be given the opportunity to participate on equal terms in all aspects of life, but its primary focus is to examine the gendered power structures of society. The state is expected to assist in this process of promotion of women's emancipation, and has been called upon, for example, to assume the responsibility of facilitating women's participation in the productive sphere by providing social services such as child care, which women in many countries provide on a voluntary or private basis. The GAD approach also places strong emphasis on legal reform.

In the GAD approach, women are viewed as agents of change rather than as passive recipients of development assistance. The intervention strategies of a GAD perspective do not seek merely to integrate women into ongoing developmental initiatives; they seek to bring about structural change and shifts in power relationships, and in so doing, to eliminate gender biases at all levels.

Whereas a WID approach addresses some of women's needs, it does little to break down existing stereotypes and male-oriented cultural patterns. Most authorities have difficulty accepting gender as an important planning issue. This has been attributed to the fact that, although in many countries, women's bureaux and ministries have been established, the decision-making processes are still largely male-dominated and gender-blind. When gender planning does take place, it still tends to be an 'add-on' type of activity, and also perpetuates gender stereotypes (Moser, 1989).

The shift in emphasis from women in development to gender and development has the potential for more efficient use of development resources, and greater long term benefits, since a major objective of the GAD approach is ensuring that women are empowered to affect development planning and implementation. However, government practice has sometimes been slow to follow this shift in theoretical perspective (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999b).

Gender mainstreaming is designed both to address the immediate needs of women and men, derived from the concrete conditions in which they live (practical gender needs), and to alter the systemic biases that perpetuate gender inequalities over the longer term (thereby addressing strategic gender needs).

Gender mainstreaming involves, among other things:

- ◆ focusing attention on the vital roles played by women as well as men in sustainable development, and ensuring that these roles are acknowledged;
- ◆ ensuring that women's and men's voices are heard equally and that both women and men participate in making decisions that affect their lives, at all levels: the national level of government and the public service, the local and community level, and the family and personal level;
- ◆ ensuring that in all sectors, policy is developed based on sex-disaggregated data and an awareness that policy decisions impact on the lives of women and men in different ways;
- ◆ ensuring that the delivery of government services is equitable and that resources are allocated to women and men – and among different social groupings according to age, race/ethnicity, class/caste and other differences – on an equitable basis;
- ◆ empowering women to define and articulate their needs and aspirations, and to acquire skills, experience and self confidence in order to participate equally at all levels; and
- ◆ ensuring that language used in policy statements and other documents is gender sensitive and inclusive, and does not imply bias towards a male perception of society.

## Gender Discrimination

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Gender discrimination in organisations may operate at various levels, often as a result of male bias. Diane Elson defines male bias as:

*“a bias that operates in favour of men as a gender, and against women as a gender, not that all men are biased against women. Some men have contributed substantially to the diagnosis and understanding of male bias and have campaigned to overcome it. Some women show little understanding of the operation of male bias and do much to perpetuate it.”*

Elson 1991: 3

In the context of development, Elson locates male bias in three main areas: (1) everyday attitudes and practices which may be both conscious and unconscious, for example the tendency to overlook women's contribution to family income because it is largely unpaid or takes the form of services, leading to women being allocated a smaller proportion of household resources; (2) theoretical reasoning, which is often couched in terms that are ostensibly gender-neutral, masking the fact that they are “imbued with male bias presenting a view of the world... in which to be male is normal, but to be female is to be deviant” (1991: 8-9); (3) development policies, which are elaborated in a context of male bias, both in everyday attitudes/practices and in theoretical reasoning, which is then reinforced by a male bias in policy formation and implementation (1991: 11-13).

## The Gender Management System and Organisational Development

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Organisational development is “a process that focuses on organisation culture, processes and structure, utilising a total system perspective” (Williams and Harvey, 1998). An organisational development approach to planned change as envisaged by the GMS places particular emphasis on:

- ◆ collaboration and participatory involvement;
- ◆ improving and enhancing performance;
- ◆ increased opportunity and development of human potential;
- ◆ a systemic approach where activities are inter-related and based on unity of purpose; and
- ◆ empirical and experiential information used to guide the change.

A Gender Management System based on this approach would include the following elements:

- ◆ clear and well-articulated goals with realistic targets and indicators for structuring the mainstreaming process, and monitoring and assessing the outcomes;
- ◆ a realistic understanding of what gender mainstreaming involves and the scope and depth of the institutional and organisational changes associated with mainstreaming;
- ◆ a strategy for mobilising and winning the active commitment of the various stakeholders in the change process;
- ◆ a viable communication strategy to ensure the on-going involvement of all the actors involved in the change;
- ◆ sponsors and agents of change who provide committed leadership for the mainstreaming process; and
- ◆ appropriate and sustainable resource support (Williams and Harvey, 1998).