

# **Advancing Equality for Men and Women: Response to Government proposals to introduce a public sector duty to promote gender equality**

## **1. Oxfam's approach**

In the early 1980s, Oxfam identified gender inequality as a key barrier to addressing long-term poverty in its international work. Since 1995, our UK Poverty Programme has been tackling gender inequality in order to reduce poverty, working at UK-wide, devolved and community levels. The programme is built on the recognition that poverty and inequality are connected to powerlessness and lack of rights, as well as unmet material needs. Our experience suggests that the participation of women and men on low incomes is an essential component of anti-poverty strategies; with sufficient resources and power, we believe they can achieve greater control over key decisions affecting their lives.

The UK Poverty Programme's core programme priorities are livelihoods (and in particular the rights of vulnerable workers), asylum, and race and gender equality. In relation to gender, specific projects have focussed in recent years on:

- Using gender analysis in regeneration
- Supporting gender budgeting initiatives
- Encouraging gender-aware policy and practice
- Engaging men in gender equality work

Further details are provided in Appendix 1, and on the UK Poverty Programme's website at: [www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp](http://www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp)

## **2. Introduction to Oxfam's submission**

Oxfam warmly welcomes the proposed introduction of a public sector duty to promote gender equality as the most significant change in legislation underpinning gender equality since the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts of the 1970s.

In this submission, we address Oxfam's key concerns, including: the importance of a strategic approach; issues of structural inequality between men and women; the effects of the proposals on men as well as women; equal pay and women experiencing poverty; the importance of gender-disaggregated data; and the process of conducting Gender Impact Assessments.

## **3. The importance of a strategic approach**

Oxfam's own gender policy has been actively driven by a series of action plans supported by leadership at the highest level. In order to embed gender equality goals across all areas of the organisation's programme, structures and culture, we are seeking to ensure that the necessary strategic direction, leadership and resources are in place. Without these components, there is a risk that initiatives are not joined up, and that systemic and sustained change is not achieved.

*Oxfam endorses the call by the Equal Opportunities Commission in its consultation response for enforceable specific duties on public authorities to encourage the setting of strategic priorities and development of co-ordinated action; national and local target*

*coherence; and the use of national policy levers (eg. the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review and Public Service Agreements) to ensure action across government.*

*The implementation of the duty also needs to be supported by sufficient resources and training made available by both central and local government in order to be effective in tackling discrimination and promoting gender equality goals.*

#### **4. Focusing on structural inequality between men and women**

Oxfam welcomes the recognition in paragraphs 2.1-2.5 of the paper that women and men have different needs, and that both can experience unfair and unequal outcomes. Oxfam proposes that the rationale put forward in paragraph 2.1 be developed beyond the notion of a “fair, prosperous and cohesive society, where all can reach their potential, and where none are denied opportunities...”, in line with the enormous body of academic research and practical experience on gender equality that has developed over the past three decades.

The consultation paper is written on the basis that the *needs* of women and men are different, but in reality the causes of gender inequality go much deeper than this. Inequality between men and women in society is caused, and perpetuated by, structural factors that must be actively tackled if “all [are to] reach their potential”. Gender inequality reflects the structural advantages experienced by men *as a group*, because societal norms and institutions have been routinely shaped around their interests. For example, the pensions system is still mainly geared to a male breadwinner model of continuous uninterrupted service during the length of a career, creating structural disadvantage for women.

It is also vital to recognise and understand how gender interacts with other aspects of identity (including disability, religion and belief, age, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation) and acknowledge how multiple layers of discrimination better reflects the real, lived experiences of men and women as compared with the ‘equality strands’ approach. In practice, this highlights the importance of public authorities addressing the needs of different groups of women and men, and not just focussing on the overall gender categories.

*Oxfam proposes that the guidance and codes of practice developed as a result of the consultation must be built on an explicit analysis of how unequal power relations cause gender inequality, and should compel public bodies to develop strategies that tackle the structural causes of power imbalances between men and women.*

#### **5. The effect of the proposals on men as well as women**

Oxfam’s international work has tended to focus on developing programmes aimed directly at improving the lives of women, based on continuing evidence that they are the majority in the poorest groups in almost all countries. This understanding remains central, but we believe it is also essential to assess the impact of economic and social change on women *and* men if real change is to be achieved.

In recent years, Oxfam has therefore pioneered work focusing on the role of men in gender equality initiatives<sup>1</sup>. If men are to be included in gender equality strategies, it is necessary to base interventions on a number of key principles. For example:

- Gender equality should be defined as a concern – and a positive project - for men as well as women
- The emphasis should be on addressing gender relations, and on developing integrated gender policies, rather than separate policies towards men and women.
- Men and boys should be ‘named’ in gender equality policies, rather than leaving their presence implicit.
- The well-being of men and boys should be acknowledged as a legitimate goal of gender equality measures.
- It is important to address the specific needs of men and boys, and where they differ from, and converge with, the needs of women and girls.
- The diverse situations, interests and outlooks of different groups of men and boys must be acknowledged.
- Although most statistics, interventions and institutions tend to be shaped around men’s interests, the position of some men - especially those who are unemployed or economically inactive - is precarious.

In practice, the potential and importance of men’s participation in gender equality strategies is frequently not recognised. For instance, women at community level in the Oxfam ReGender project<sup>2</sup> identified that men rarely engage in grassroots organising.

Work with a partner organisation, the Centre for Separated Families in York, has highlighted that fathers sometimes feel excluded from services for their children by the assumptions of service providers, and this exacerbates increasing lack of contact between fathers and their children<sup>3</sup>. Without greater male involvement in consultations on how services should respond to different gender needs, it will be difficult to ensure men benefit alongside women from services that are often assumed to be irrelevant to them (eg. child care, family services, and service provision for lone parents).

*Oxfam welcomes the recognition in the gender duty proposal that any gender assessment must look at the impact on men as well as women. We believe that further guidance and codes of practice should set out clear aims and objectives in relation to the development of work with men, based on the principles set out above<sup>4</sup>.*

## **6. Equal pay and women experiencing poverty**

Oxfam’s experience of working with women in poverty demonstrates the significance of poor pay levels, the predominance of women among part time workers, women’s responsibility for caring, and occupational segregation, in preventing their advancement in the labour market. Women predominate as employees in some of the lowest paid public sector services, and any move to strengthen requirements to address equal pay are key to

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<sup>1</sup> Ruxton S. (ed.) (2004) *Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice*, Oxford: Oxfam. Available at [www.oxfam.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/resources/geneqmen.htm](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/resources/geneqmen.htm)

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>3</sup> See Richardson K. (2004) ‘See Both Sides: A practical guide to gender analysis for quality service delivery’, Oxfam. Ordering information at [www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/resources/seebothsides.htm](http://www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/resources/seebothsides.htm)

<sup>4</sup> See Ruxton S. (2002) ‘Men, Masculinities and Poverty in the UK’, Oxford: Oxfam. Available at [www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/resources/menmascsumm.htm](http://www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/resources/menmascsumm.htm)

progress. Our work with the Gellideg Foundation in Merthyr Tydfil<sup>5</sup> and with homeworkers in the North of England has helped us to understand and address the specific connections between low pay, part time work and poverty for women and men.

*Oxfam supports the call by the Equal Opportunities Commission and others for mandatory pay audits as a requirement for tackling the gender pay gap, and also the proactive provision of information support and advice to women on their employment rights.*

## **7. The importance of gender-disaggregated data.**

For public bodies to set and implement gender equality goals, and to decide in what areas to conduct gender impact assessments, gender disaggregated data is essential. Yet because there is no requirement to do so, public authorities often do not have the data available to determine if gender-based discrimination exists, and they are therefore often unaware of it in the way they run their services.

For example, an Oxfam analysis of Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council's Job Connect service identified that three quarters of the beneficiaries were men, and the training provided as part of the scheme was skewed towards gender-stereotypical employment for men. Redcar and Cleveland are now redressing this by active outreach to women and reconsideration of the courses they recommend to job-seekers.

Oxfam's experience suggests that this 'gender-blindness' is more the norm than the exception. Without collecting gender-disaggregated data, it is difficult, if not impossible, for public authorities to determine where gender impact assessments are appropriate or necessary. It is a waste of resources, and a risk to the necessary leadership for this process, to undertake assessments that do not effectively identify what needs to be changed because the information is not available, or indeed sought.

*Oxfam recommends that the gender duty proposals require public bodies to put in place systems to ensure routine and systematic collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data as an essential first step to conducting effective impact assessments, and achieving realistic gender equality goals and action plans.*

## **8. Conducting Gender Impact Assessments**

Oxfam agrees with the assertions in paragraphs 3.44-3.46 in terms of the role and value of Gender Impact Assessment (GIA).

Oxfam uses gender impact assessment in its international programmes as a matter of course. For example, Oxfam has sought to ensure that the gender impact of its response to the Tsunami disaster has been addressed from the outset. A gender analysis also informs the development of sustainable livelihoods programmes for women and men from Central America to Indonesia. And the 'We Can' campaign to combat violence against women is currently running in several countries in South Asia.

Across the UK, Oxfam has also built up a considerable body of experience, and is well recognised for its work in developing, implementing and assessing the effectiveness of GIAs within the context of regeneration policies, structures and initiatives (see box below). The success, and clear need, for this work has led to the development of further

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1

programmes in Scotland and England by Oxfam to mainstream gender and race into regeneration initiatives. As a result of this work, the UK Poverty Programme has also developed an impressive range of relevant materials and resources, and these are listed at the end of this submission.

#### *Gellideg*

With the Gellideg Foundation Group, the UK Poverty Programme carried out a participatory gender needs assessment on a deprived estate in Wales. This collected gender-disaggregated data and information, and analysed how men and women face distinct barriers and opportunities and perceive their life chances in very different ways. Oxfam has since supported the Group in responding to the results of the assessment, in particular through staff training to tackle stereotyping in service provision on the estate; this is starting to make a difference to long-held attitudes in the community.

#### *Thornaby*

Oxfam is working with the Just Thornaby Initiative in the north-east of England, carrying out a gender impact household survey of the assets and livelihood challenges for some of the poorest households in Thornaby. Analysis is underway now, and will draw out how men and women are differently affected by the provision and location of public services as a key element in their livelihoods.

#### *Govan*

In Govan, Oxfam worked closely with the Greater Govan Social Inclusion Partnership (a regeneration structure in a 'deprived area' of Glasgow) to look at the design and effect of regeneration policies and practices from the perspectives of women and men. We also trained a group of local women to build their knowledge and confidence and to link their experiences to wider decision-making structures. In addition, we conducted a Gender and Ethnicity Impact Assessment, in partnership with the Social Inclusion Partnership; this highlighted the long-term structural barriers to race and gender equality, and the importance of the participation of women and men affected by policies and decisions in ensuring that impact assessment is effective.

The programme of work led by the UK Poverty Programme to mainstream gender into regeneration has highlighted the following key points that inform our response to this aspect of the consultation:

- Steps to ensure the routine, systematic and mandatory collection of gender-disaggregated data are critical as a key baseline for measuring both specific impact and the effectiveness of the gender duty.
- There has to be a level of compulsion and commitment to *both* process and outcome in addressing gender inequality. Each is dependent on the other and Gender Impact Assessment is a key process step in achieving wider gender equality goals.
- The rationale, role and value of the gender duty (and Gender Impact Assessment as part of that duty) must be understood by key actors for the process to be meaningful, effective and result in some real change.
- Gender Impact Assessment is not necessarily resource-intensive and/or requiring of a high level of 'gender expertise'. Indeed, any 'investment' in undertaking gender impact assessment will be offset by cost savings in better targeted (and used) public services; the avoidance of potentially costly litigation; and more relevant and robust policy-making.

- Addressing the issues highlighted through the assessment process should lead to better overall decision-making in the round and increased, transferable skills that can be applied to wider policy and decision-making.
- The key steps in Gender Impact Assessment need to be, and be regarded as being, achievable and meaningful to reduce the risk of ‘paper exercises’ or non-compliance.
- The engagement of women and men, and different groups of women and men, is integral to an effective Gender Impact Assessment processes. This is of value to many aspects of the public sector, not least democratic legitimacy and accountability.

*Based on our experience and expertise, Oxfam agrees that (in paragraph 3.46) public authorities must be required to conduct GIAs for all proposed primary legislation, but proposes that this requirement also be extended to secondary legislation also (removing the ambiguous term ‘significant’).*

*In terms of the essential ingredients of the published GIA we would reword paragraph 3.47 in the following manner to make the basic requirements for the process clearer to public bodies:-*

- *An initial outline of the proposal.*
- *A contextual analysis which highlights available data (and data that are not available) and relevant research.*
- *The proposed outcome, with an analysis of the implications for women and men (including any positive benefits and/or adverse effects whether intentional or unintentional).*
- *A description of the form and content of the participation of, and/or consultation with, women and men in: designing the GIA; undertaking the assessment; and analysing the implications.*
- *The identification of specific and measurable actions that will effectively consolidate any positive benefits or address adverse effects that result from gender inequality, including a cost benefit analysis of taking, and failing to take, action.*
- *An explicit cross-reference to current and planned work on race (in line with the existing duty) and how this adds value/ brings synergy, and wider work on other equality strands.*

*We also recommend that the GIA be published in a range of accessible formats, paper as well as electronic, and communicated in ways which will allow for dialogue, scrutiny and accountability to the women and men to whom the policies and services apply/are relevant.*

### ***Identifying developments that justify formal gender impact assessment***

In relation to ‘arrangements for identifying developments that justify conducting a formal gender impact assessment’, Oxfam takes issue with the proposals laid out in paragraphs 3.50 to 3.55 for a number of reasons.

First, inserting an additional layer of ‘screening’ fuels perceptions of bureaucracy around gender equality goal setting. Its introduction may, however, achieve just that as it is unclear as to what purpose it would serve. For example, if little gender equality work has been undertaken in the past (as could reasonably be assumed given the need to introduce a legislative duty) with an absence of even routine gender-disaggregation of statistics, then what light would an initial screening shed on the circumstances which would, and which

would not, justify more in-depth impact assessment? The assumption that such an initial screening could be ‘straightforward’ [paragraph 3.54) is based on an erroneous premise that the requisite data is in fact ‘readily available’. In addition, it is a further assumption that an initial screening would ‘quickly establish what impacts’ there would be on women and men. If an initial screening can achieve this then what would be the incentive to public authorities to invest further time and resources in more in-depth assessment? In any event, it should not merely be the indication of an ‘adverse impact’ which prompts the need for a Gender Impact Assessment. For example, the identification of a disproportionate positive benefit experienced by certain groups as a result of gender inequality would surely also require in-depth analysis. One could argue that an initial, cursory screening process without a level of analysis, skill and experience might lead to the very outcomes which the gender duty was presumably created to change.

Second, the language of ‘screening’ almost infers a screening ‘out of’. The prospect of a potential filtering process before the Gender Duty has been conceptualised properly, far less introduced, is regrettable. At best it will possibly undermine a commitment to the rationale and function of Gender Impact Assessment and, at worst, will offer a relatively easy ‘escape route’ for disinclined authorities.

Third, it is not clear as to the link between ‘screening’ and ‘major employment/ policy/ service changes and developments’. Is it anticipated that one will precede the other? If so, criteria for assessing ‘major’ may as well be incorporated into a Gender Impact Assessment process itself, particularly in light of the examples of criteria given in the consultation document (which would, in any event, be considerations built into a Gender Impact Assessment). It would seem an incredible duplication of resources to undertake, for example, stakeholder analysis to determine what should be considered ‘major’ and then to undertake a similar activity when undertaking the Gender Impact Assessment itself (if indeed the development was considered ‘major’). Each component of the Impact Assessment has to be, and be regarded to be, meaningful and an efficient use of resources if there is to be leadership and commitment to the effective implementation of the duty;

*Oxfam believes there should be an expectation that Gender Impact Assessment be conducted as part of the development of, and decision-making on, all policy, service provision, resource allocation, and employment.* This would allow for a coordinated and consistent approach that would pick up inconsistencies and disproportionate (negative and positive) outcomes for both men and women across a whole range of public sector functions [which may not at first glance, or even initial screening, appear to have ‘gender implications’]. This bigger picture would also allow for synergy and efficiencies of scale, and the development of skills and experience of use to wider policy and decision-making processes. This approach would clearly require a level of initial investment [of time, resources, commitment etc] by public authorities. However, Oxfam believes that this is vastly outweighed by the medium and longer term benefits and opportunities afforded by gender mainstreaming, from avoiding potentially very costly legal action to the proactive planning of services which women and men will actually use and which will positively impact on different aspects of their lives.

*We also believe that the ‘public authority... will demonstrate its commitment...’ by actually undertaking Gender Impact Assessments across the board, being transparent in its findings, and making changes on that basis* (while obviously taking cognisance of resources and priorities). We are not convinced that developing and publishing a policy

that states its intention [or not] to undertake Gender Impact Assessment will have quite the same effect.

## **9. Conclusion: Oxfam's contribution**

As outlined in this submission, Oxfam and its partners have wide experiencing of using gender analysis and gender impact assessment across the UK; this demonstrates the effectiveness of addressing men and women's different needs and lives in order to tackle poverty and discrimination.

We offer our expertise in assisting government and public bodies in the development of subsequent guidance and codes of practice. We are also keen to develop training and capacity building for public bodies in the run up to implementation of the gender duty over the next 1-2 years.

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## **Resources**

See Both Sides: a practical guide to gender analysis for quality service delivery, Oxfam GB, 2004

What men and women want: a practical guide to gender and participation, Oxfam GB, 2004 (also available in Welsh)

Fifty voices are better than one: combating social exclusion and gender stereotyping in Gellideg, in the South Wales Valleys, Oxfam GB, 2003

Into the lion's den: a practical guide to including women in regeneration, Oxfam GB, 2005

Gender: at the heart of regeneration (introductory leaflet), Oxfam GB, 2004

Gender and the reality of regeneration: a tale of two cities (conference report), Oxfam GB and Regional Action West Midlands, 2004

All the above publications are available on Oxfam's Social Inclusion Directory, an online information bank sharing knowledge on equality and participation, Oxfam GB, visit: [www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/sid](http://www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/sid)



## **Appendix 1 – Examples of Oxfam UK Poverty Programme work on gender equality**

- **Using gender analysis in regeneration and anti-poverty strategies**

*ReGender*: Through a combination of grassroots training, national advocacy, and setting up a national network, this operational project influences regeneration practitioners and decision makers to use gender analysis and ensure that women have a voice on decision making bodies and structures. An initial 2-year project is complete; funding has been secured for a further 3-year project (now in its first year), to continue this work to build on the early indicators of practice change.

- **Supporting gender budgeting initiatives**

Across the UK, the UKPP has supported and built capacity for the UK Women's Budget Group; promoted learning with other Women/gender Budget Groups in Scotland and Wales; developed a toolkit to support wider use of gender budgeting; encouraged learning and exchange of good practice with other European countries and other Oxfam regions internationally. At local authority level, the UKPP is supporting a gender budgeting initiative in Redcar and Cleveland.

- **Encouraging gender-aware policy and practice**

The UKPP has built capacity of Gellideg Foundation Group (GFG) and Cae Mawr group (Llandudno) to ensure women's voices reach decision makers in Wales, gender analysis is built into their service provision delivery; and positive action programmes are developed to combat gender and age discrimination in their work in the community.

- **Engaging men in gender equality work**

Oxfam's Gender Equality and Men project<sup>6</sup> has aimed to ensure that capacity building and advocacy actively includes men as well as women, and explores men's role as potential and actual contributors to gender equality. Based on examples of interventions from a range of countries in the fields of fatherhood, reproductive health, gender-based violence, livelihoods, and work with young men, a resulting book has provided a critical account of practical experience<sup>7</sup>.

In the UK, the UKPP has recently developed a gender analysis toolkit with the Centre for Separated Families in York, which explores the gendered assumptions upon which services may be based and how these can be challenged<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> For more information go to: [www.oxfam.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/issues/gender/gem/index.htm](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/gender/gem/index.htm)

<sup>7</sup> Available at: [www.oxfam.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/resources/geneqmen.htm](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/resources/geneqmen.htm)

<sup>8</sup> See Richardson K. (2004) 'See Both Sides: A practical guide to gender analysis for quality service delivery', Oxfam. Ordering information at [www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/resources/seebothsides.htm](http://www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/resources/seebothsides.htm)