
Gender Planning in Development Agencies

Meeting the Challenge

Edited by Mandy Macdonald



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A report of a workshop held
at The Cherwell Centre, Oxford, England
in May 1993

Edited by Mandy Macdonald

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Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to everyone who helped to organise the EUROSTEP workshop which took place in Oxford in May 1993, and to all those who helped to produce this report.

The core group which planned and coordinated the workshop consisted of Brita Nielsen, EUROSTEP secretariat; Diana Vinding, IBIS; Anna Foca, MOLISV; and Eugenia Piza-López, Oxfam (UK and Ireland). Many people within Oxfam helped to host the event. Twenty-five individuals and agencies (listed in Appendix 3) contributed their ideas and experience. Mandy Macdonald recorded the proceedings of the workshop, and produced the report.

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Foreword

Eugenia Piza-López

*Coordinator, Gender and Development Unit, Oxfam
(UK and Ireland)*

In 1975 the United Nations declared the International Decade for Women. This initiative prompted debate, research, analysis, and movement-building, and boosted the work of activists worldwide. It legitimised women's claims for equality and social change at all levels from the state to the household, from the public domain to the private sphere.

So why is it that we women of European non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) found ourselves meeting, nearly twenty years on, to discuss and agree strategies for advancing this agenda? The answer is simple: we still have a long way to go before the goals of the Forward-Looking Strategies, stated by over 5,000 women of many nations at Nairobi in 1985, are achieved.

However, many years of action have taught us a great deal. We have learnt about strategies to promote institutional change; where the blockages lie; how to operate within and outside the system; and the importance of building institutional alliances with men and women working towards the same objectives inside and outside our organisations.

We have also learned about the multiple realities and profound differences between women; about the multi-faceted nature of women's identity and oppression; about how women work through

their differences in order to build alliances and new forms of social organisation; about the discrepancies and differences which can and do divide women individually and collectively.

We have learned — and are still learning — about the possibilities for women from the North and the South to work together, with common agendas but different roles, and the challenges which this relationship presents. From academics, development workers, and our own practice we have developed a holistic understanding of gender issues and how they interrelate with development at both local and global levels.

A major objective of the workshop on which this book is based was to share this knowledge and identify points of similarity and difference between our various experiences. The issues we are concerned about are not marginal to the development debate. Gender is not a question of securing a small slice of the cake for women in development projects. Our proposals have profound implications for the way in which development agencies work and the way in which development issues are conceptualised and approached. Gender issues are not secondary or of 'special interest', but are central to sustainable development. Women's views are not the views of a 'special interest' group. Women represent half the world's population, and their perspectives are a major component of development.

Gender and development practitioners are saying that perceived divisions and hierarchies between 'development' and 'gender' issues (with the latter somehow secondary to the former) must be challenged and broken down. Mainstreaming gender is about introducing women's perspectives into all areas of development work and claiming both the private and the public domains, individual and collective experience, as legitimate spheres for development action.

The workshop held in Oxford in May 1993 was the beginning of a process aimed at gaining a collective understanding of what, as gender and development practitioners, we are proposing, and how we would like to move forward. The specific objectives that gathered the EUROSTEP agencies together were:

- to promote an exchange of experiences in research, monitoring, and evaluation, and information about practical tools and strategies for future work;
- to promote the development of new methodologies and systematise best practice;

- to strengthen member agencies' work on gender and to identify ways of working together to avoid duplication, move forward effectively, and meet forthcoming challenges.

For Oxfam UK/Ireland, as the host agency, the workshop was a valuable exercise in coordination and an important opportunity to learn from all the EUROSTEP agencies and share our experiences, difficulties, and achievements. There are many reasons why this meeting was particularly important. As development agencies we need to adapt to new realities and challenges, including those posed by the women's movements, which demand a rethinking and reappraisal of Northern agencies' role in promoting women's and gender-sensitive development. We need to enhance our understanding of how we can play a more active and coordinated role in strengthening Southern women's movements so that they can continue challenging discrimination and marginalisation on the grounds of gender. We need to work collectively towards improving the quality of international cooperation for women, particularly women in poorer and marginal communities with whom we work. And we need to define common strategies to influence the direction of multilateral and bilateral aid, which has a decisive impact on Southern women's livelihoods and well-being.

During the meeting we became clearly aware of the need to address these issues and to systematise our experience so as to share the lessons learned with NGOs, groups, and organisations in the North and the South. The creation of the EUROSTEP gender network is the beginning of this process. We are now consolidating our first steps. We will be working together in a structured process, looking at ways of influencing the policies of the European Community and preparing the ground for the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and the UN Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).

In this work, Oxfam (UK and Ireland) will be the lead agency on gender and development lobbying, and NCOS will lead on programme learning. Together with a steering group, we are already preparing a two-year lobbying and learning programme and planning a future meeting in Denmark, to be hosted by MS.

The future holds exciting prospects and the development of new ways of working. Together we will have to address critical issues and face important challenges. As gender and development professionals, we will have to overcome obstacles in our own institutions, while maintaining a positive and hopeful spirit. We will have to work,

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within the institutional framework, on our own roles, workloads, and decision-making capacities, and particularly to address the lack of control over resources that hinders many gender specialists.

Instruments will need to be developed to evaluate and monitor progress and the impact of EUROSTEP agencies' work from a gender-based perspective, both at the 'macro' level of policy and in our everyday work at the 'micro' level of projects. Mechanisms must be sought to overcome institutional differences between the agencies: differences in policy, different ways of working, different structures in order to create sustainable alliances.

We will need a dynamic analysis of gender issues which reflects the concerns and realities of the women we are working with in the South. And finally, we will have to clarify our role as Northern agencies *vis à vis* Southern women's movements and organisations, striving to appreciate and embrace in our thinking and action the full complexities of North-South cooperation.

Oxford, November 1993

Opening speech

Audrey Moser, Trustee of Oxfam (UK and Ireland)

First of all, I want to offer a warm welcome to you all on behalf of Oxfam. You have come here from many countries and many different backgrounds, and with a great wealth of varied experience to contribute. I'm particularly pleased to be here, because of my own experience and interest in international NGOs: I worked in two such agencies, based in Geneva, from 1955 to 1986. Since my background is in work with children, I have inevitably found myself working with, and in contact with, women from many different countries. So it is a privilege to be here with colleagues from different countries to open this workshop today.

I bring you good wishes also from the Chair of Oxfam (UK/I), Mary Cherry, and the Director, David Bryer, both of whom regret that they cannot be with us today.

Oxfam (UK/I) is delighted to host this meeting, given its commitment to gender and its concern to influence the development agenda on this issue. The meeting takes place at an important time in Oxfam's history: its fiftieth anniversary coincides with a significant shift in attitudes towards gender issues. Oxfam has put gender firmly on its agenda as a strategic objective for the institution in its development and humanitarian work overseas and its advocacy, education, and campaigning work in the UK and Ireland.

Since 1985, when it was created, the Gender and Development Unit (GADU) has done much work in training, publications, research, education, and advocacy. Now, I am glad to say, Oxfam has agreed on a corporate policy on gender and development, and this was approved and endorsed by the Executive Council on 16 May 1993. This represents a significant endorsement of the work of GADU.

As a result of this policy, we can now see more clearly the immense task ahead and get a clearer view of how we can move forward to achieve our objectives in our overseas programme, in our work in the UK and Ireland, and in management. I would emphasise that last element — management — because, as we all know, the battle to achieve gender-awareness in our own institutions is by no means over yet, either in the UK and Ireland or, I imagine, in other European countries.

One important part of our strategy will be to assist in strengthening the lobby of bilateral and multilateral agencies on gender issues and promoting advocacy work together with networks and organisations both in the North and the South, including institutional support for international gender-focused lobbying networks. Many international agencies now recognise that gender is a crucial issue to consider in the construction of democratic, participatory, and sustainable development processes. And this recognition is taking place at a moment of important changes in the world order.

The present social and economic crisis has had devastating effects on the poor of the South, and these have been particularly bad for women. Cuts in public expenditure, coupled with discriminatory employment practices, have increased female unemployment and led to poorer labour conditions for women. Falling commodity prices have forced farmers into more intense cash-cropping, creating more manual work for women without any corresponding increase in what they are paid. Structural adjustment policies, particularly cuts in state subsidies on drinking water, food, health, education, and transport, have had a disproportionate effect on women.

Widespread armed and ethnic conflict also has a particular impact on women. Women and their children form the majority of refugee or displaced populations, and the proportion of woman-maintained households in turbulent situations has grown. In addition, women in situations of conflict suffer abuses, such as sexual assault or exploitation, which are not experienced by men.

Environmental destruction has a multiple and growing impact on women. Increasingly they cannot provide fuel, wood, and water for their families' needs. Urbanisation has cut women off from traditional support systems. Industrialisation exposes women to hazardous substances and dangerous processes in factories with poor safety regulations. In many areas of the world, the spread of AIDS is particularly affecting women as sufferers and as carers.

Governments, multilateral agencies, and NGOs do not always understand the different impact of development aid on women and men, and this has led in many cases to a further marginalisation of women from traditional decision-making structures. It has displaced them from their economic activities and has meant that their valuable knowledge and their potential contribution to development has been ignored. Development aid is less effective when women are not participating on an equal footing.

The challenges for EUROSTEP agencies and individuals committed to working on gender and development are greater than ever. Promoting a gender-based perspective leads development practitioners to look for alternatives which will promote women's rights to self-determination, choice, and more equitable relations in general. And that means radical transformations at all levels, from the household to the state. EUROSTEP agencies are in a privileged position to contribute to those changes, with our commitment and closeness to the needs and perspectives of poor women, our role in North/South solidarity, and our focus on advocacy.

This meeting is an important contribution to the process of widening understanding of gender, both in Oxfam and all EUROSTEP member agencies. EUROSTEP is providing the space and the opportunity to bring together skills, knowledge, and a vast range of experience which will undoubtedly take the debate forward. We hope that this workshop will provide the inspiration and impetus needed to meet these many challenges and will strengthen the links between practitioners for joint action and support.

It is with pleasure, therefore, that I declare this workshop open, and wish you very successful and fruitful work together.

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