
II

Organisational culture and procedures

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The editors with thanks to Norman Clift

Introduction to section II

The inclusion of women is never a simple addition; a fundamental rearrangement of some kind is always needed. (Eisenstein in Dean 1997, p.34)

As stated in the main Introduction to this book, research into integrating gender issues into organisations has proliferated over the past decade, showing us that putting in place a policy on gender is only a first step to transforming working practices, and the end results of the work itself. Articles in this section consider the links between Oxfam GB's organisational culture, systems and procedures, and good development work for women — both outside and within the organisation.

One of the great debates for gender analysts is to what extent work on gender issues can really achieve greater equality between women and men without a change in organisational culture which goes beyond a gender policy, to an explicit commitment to feminist and transformative goals. The languages of 'feminism' and 'gender' are examined in this light by Ines Smyth, working in Oxfam's specialist gender unit at head office; in her article, she argues that the choice of language indicates a fundamental difference in political stance. In many development agencies, gender issues are regarded as an important 'technical' area of development, but the use of the more transformative and political language of feminism would mean that accepting a depoliticised notion of women as the 'poorest of the poor' would not occur so easily.

The barriers to gender equality that are part of organisational culture are explored further in the article by Wendy Carson, who carried out research in Oxfam in 1995, using a psychological approach. She argues that in Oxfam, organisational norms reflect archetypal 'male' values of efficiency and results-orientation, at the expense of 'female' values of co-operation and process-orientation. Wendy Carson argues for a more even balance between the two sets of values, as the language and ideas of gender equity must be supported and legitimated by organisational culture as well as systems and procedures.

Elsa Dawson's and Bridget Walker's articles give insights into the way in which different systems and procedures, particularly planning and impact assessment, can be used as a lever to achieve successful implementation of an organisation's gender policy, and to take a step along the route to social transformation. In

addition, both emphasise that policy development, and use of systems and procedures to enforce policy, must be accompanied by change on a third level: individual change in the form of personal commitment of development workers to gender equality and organisational change.

In line with this, many development organisations which have engaged with gender issues have found that the commitment of senior level staff is an essential element of success. Oxfam GB is no exception. The commitment of senior staff gives authority and legitimacy to gender issues, while a high percentage of women at senior level indicates the organisation's willingness to change its ways of working. For many women managers in non-profit-making organisations, as well as for those in government and the private sector, promotion to senior office has amounted to a struggle for their own legitimacy as post-holders, as well as for the legitimacy of the policies they promote.

While not all women are advocates of gendered approaches to development, and men can support them too, the contribution of women managers who are committed to gender equity must not be underestimated. In Oxfam GB, women managers have often used the power and opportunity given to them to pave the way for an understanding and acceptance of gender concerns in many different contexts. This is clearly demonstrated by Visha Padmanabhan, whose article discusses her efforts to transform the programme in Cambodia from a technical relief programme to a community-based development programme with gender equity central to its work. In turn, Sue Emmott looks at the strategic decisions that upheld Oxfam's commitment to women's rights, and at the implications of such decisions. Parallel to this, she analyses her own role as a woman manager, guiding Oxfam staff in the complex and dangerous environment of Afghanistan.

At what cost are such contributions by women managers made? The article by Dianna Melrose examines at the way in which Oxfam GB's organisational culture and her own personal and professional commitments have interacted, putting enormous pressure on her and other women managers as they ascend the organisational hierarchy. In Oxfam GB, as in other development organisations, the imperative 'to change the world' demands a commitment of time which is difficult to balance with the dominant social norms in most cultures which expect women to take on the role of primary carers for their families. In his article, Norman Clift, of Oxfam GB's human resources department, looks at the way in which a facility such as a workplace nursery can further equal opportunities between women and men. Oxfam GB should demonstrate its commitment to its Gender Policy by providing facilities to ensure that women and men with caring responsibilities have these recognised and their practical needs met.

Changing the rules: Implementing a gender policy through organisational procedures

Bridget Walker

Don't change your body, change the rules. (Jackie Fleming, Leeds Postcards)

The study of organisations, their structures and processes has always been of concern to those interested in social change, and particularly for women: organisations are usually in the public domain, from which women have been so often excluded. Even if women are permitted to enter and participate in organisational life, this does not guarantee entry into the forums where policy is made, nor does it guarantee the formulation of policy that takes women's interests into account. Often, it is in procedures for policy implementation that the match or mismatch between policy and practice becomes evident. Examining the 'rules' of institutions — both written and unwritten — from a gender perspective has therefore been an important area for feminist enquiry into women's subordination. For organisations with a mandate to promote equitable human development, this kind of enquiry is an essential task.

This contribution is a personal account of my own experience within Oxfam GB over the past seven years. It speculates about the extent to which changes to the organisational structures, and the stresses on these structures at a time of substantial change, have affected the way in which gender issues were introduced and perceived in Oxfam, and the opportunities that were taken or missed.

I arrived in Oxfam at a time when management was being more clearly defined as a line stretching from the Oxford head office to the country offices, with the aim of creating clearer levels of accountability and coherence in the vertical relationship. However, Oxfam failed at that time to establish meaningful links between posts *across* the organisation. For an issue such as gender relations, which cuts

across all of Oxfam's concerns worldwide, this presented problems. Obtaining programme information on which to base decisions about issues such as gender was surprisingly difficult. It was not easy for one office to learn from another's experience of working on gender issues, owing to an existing organisational weakness in the recording, storage, retrieval, and exchange of information.

I was faced with the task of managing from Oxford, for a temporary period, a large country-programme at a time of emergency. The problems of communicating about work on gender outlined above were compounded by a feeling on the part of some staff that gender issues were an 'add-on' concern, for which there was no time during a disaster. In situations where working on gender was not prioritised by staff or their managers, there was no way for other staff to challenge this, since gender was seen as a management responsibility.

Using systems and procedures for feminist ends

Handy (1988)¹ points out that 'the more differences you have to take account of in your structure ... the more you will need to find ways of integrating the different parts ... there are three main ways of holding an organisation together: the hierarchy of command; rules and procedures; co-ordinating groups.'

In Oxfam, the hierarchy of command was strengthened through the formalisation of the line-management structure. Subsequently, strategic planning was introduced in the early 1990s as a mandatory procedure for all parts of the organisation. In contrast to these developments, the Gender and Development Unit (GADU) had been set up in 1985 with a co-ordination function, as an advisory unit for the international programme. GADU lacked the authority which is a feature of hierarchies of command, governed by rules and procedures; consequently, when I subsequently joined GADU as an adviser to the international programme, I encountered problems similar to those encountered in my previous role.

The culture of Oxfam at that time meant that there was considerable ambivalence about codifying procedures, and a fear of imposition from the centre. When the subject at issue for codifying good practice and minimum standards is a highly personal one, concerning gender roles and relations, attitudes and behaviours, seeming ambivalence on the part of colleagues may mask substantial levels of personal discomfort or resistance. This ambivalence seemed to pervade the context in which GADU's gender advisers operated. The unit had been in existence for some four years when I joined Oxfam, yet there was no organisational policy on gender. This lack conveyed a mixed message: on the one hand, Oxfam had devoted human and financial resources to work on gender,

and this was clearly an exciting and pioneering initiative which was evidence of commitment at the most senior levels. On the other hand, the unit's purely advisory role meant that programme managers were under no obligation to consult gender advisers for support on their work, or, if they did so, to follow the advice that was given. Staff in some areas of the world which fell within my geographic responsibility as a gender adviser did not converse readily with GADU — a group described by one colleague as the 'feminist thought-police'. (Policing, of course, is ideally carried out by consent.) The position of GADU within the International Division led to a focus on gender concerns in the overseas programme only, to the exclusion of other parts of the organisation. Links with Oxfam's other departments were largely informal; in particular, there were no clear mechanisms to ensure that gender issues were considered by staff responsible for personnel and human resources. Thus, there were no ways of creating and enforcing gender-aware strategies for recruitment, selection, and staff development, although an equal-opportunities policy covered some areas.

However, theories of organisational culture point to the existence of sub-cultures alongside the dominant cultures. Within Oxfam, personal contacts were the key to gaining entry to territories which were sometimes described as 'hill-top republics' by those to whom the structures gave the role of gate-keeper. Cultivating relationships with individuals who shared a commitment to gender issues was critical to GADU's work. Staff searched out others who were in sympathy with aspirations to gender equity, forging alliances and networking across programmes and hierarchies. This horizontal linking created a critical mass of people and data from which to work for change.

Uncovering the rules to achieve change

A first step in thinking about change is to discover what the rules actually are. This is not always straightforward. It was not easy when I joined Oxfam to identify where policy was made, by whom and how, or indeed what constituted policy, and how it derived its authenticity. It can be argued that this lack of clarity was a feature of Oxfam at that time of change from a 'family firm' to a multinational corporation; the organisation had yet to institute systems and procedures which would promote information-sharing, and adequately manage such a large, diverse body.

Two key processes and procedures — strategic planning, and monitoring and evaluation systems — will be discussed here, as a route through which gender concerns were introduced into Oxfam's programme mandate. Strategic planning is tracked over two phases: 1990–91, and 1994–95. In the process of developing these procedures, Oxfam's organisational Gender Policy was formulated and

approved, providing an extra impetus for the incorporation of gender concerns across Oxfam's programmes. By working with these processes and procedures, significant progress has been made in changing Oxfam's 'rules'.

Strategic planning

It was the introduction of strategic planning in the wake of restructuring in 1990/91 which made gender issues into an institutional priority in Oxfam's international programme. Strategic planning was intended to be a tool to help implement organisational change and strengthen new ways of working. It was mandatory for all, and gender was one of the themes that had to be addressed. The planning process began at programme level: each country office was asked to produce a situational analysis, including an internal critique of Oxfam's strengths and weaknesses in that context. From this, a set of aims and strategies had to be agreed, to shape the office's work for the next three years. These aims and strategies were synthesised with those of other countries and regions, and fed into the same process at cross-divisional and corporate level. This work led to a summary of how Oxfam's work with communities contributed to the overarching aim of achieving universal 'basic rights' and 'sustainable livelihoods'. In this way, the language of 'rights' entered Oxfam's everyday vocabulary, and the concept formed a rationale for work to promote women's basic rights and livelihoods.

Strategic planning was regarded with some ambivalence in some quarters; fear was expressed that a chain of 'command and control' would be established, since strategic planning was a tool developed in the military and commercial sectors of the industrialised world. A review of the first round of strategic planning frankly acknowledged some of the teething problems.

But for me, and others seeking knowledge of how gender issues were being addressed in country programmes, it was a breakthrough. For the first time, it was possible to have an overview of gender work across Oxfam's programmes, in a consistent and systematic format. The poverty analysis included data disaggregated by gender, which revealed the particular condition and position of women — for example, numbers of female-maintained households, teenage mothers, vulnerable girl-children; women's lack of civil and legal status, property and inheritance rights, and access to resources; the economic and political trends leading to women's further exclusion and impoverishment; the effects of these on gender relations, and of male exclusion/unemployment. The strategic planning process also ensured a new profile for issues such as violence against women, and the causes and effects of conflict.

Critics have argued that the strategic planning process merely revealed the lack of gender awareness in many programmes, and did not in itself lead to more gender-fair programme implementation. I would suggest that it served a similar

function to legislation. Like the UK's 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, it has been a necessary but not sufficient reform, from which to build up a body of case law.

In the first phase of strategic planning, gender was described as a theme. It became evident that this approach did not capture the totality of what was needed, but a new rule had been established: gender was no longer an optional extra, but central to programme planning and implementation. The International Division's strategic plan addressed the crucial issue of personnel procedures, proposing that gender awareness be included in all 'Overseas and Marketing Division recruitment /selection, and other personnel procedures and practice, and ... management induction and staff training'.

However, the ID strategic plan did not mention the recruitment of women managers as part of the gender strategy; this was a serious omission. The need for this, and enabling procedures to encourage women, had previously been discussed and documented on the Africa Desk:

At a discussion of gender at an Africa Strategy meeting in September 1991 it was recognised that programmes were most committed to gender ... in those field offices where the staff worked well as a team, where there were gender-aware male managers and women in the team at a senior level who were committed to gender justice. The seniority of the women concerned was a key issue.²

This illustrates the complexity of policy implementation: appropriate procedures are not enough. While procedures supply a clear operational framework, and rules of engagement and minimum standards, people always provide the driving force.

By the time that the second phase of strategic planning began in 1994–95, Oxfam's Gender Policy had been agreed. After wide consultation across the organisation, the policy was approved by Oxfam's Council in May 1993. The programme of implementation for the Gender Policy was subject to delays, so strategic planning — at least in the International Division — was the chief driver of Gender Policy implementation. It was now part of the mandate. The second phase of strategic planning built on learning from the first; there was wide consultation over the draft guidelines. These were introduced at regional planning meetings. A Strategic Planning and Evaluation (SPE) team had been created, and I had joined the team as SPE adviser to the Asia and Middle East programmes. The new matrix management structure — designed to enable cross-programme exchange and thus address some of the problems that resulted from the failure to create these linkages in the first round of restructuring — meant that, in addition to being part of a central team, SPE advisers with a geographical responsibility were full members of the management teams of the areas to which they had been assigned. As a gender adviser, I had seldom been

invited to these forums, and I certainly did not have a place on them by right. Yet I found that my background in gender-related work was welcomed by the Asia / Middle East management team, and I was asked to take a 'lead role' on gender in the area. Often, gender advisers and SPE advisers worked hand in hand.

Gender was no longer seen as an issue to be addressed in isolation from other issues, but as a defining perspective on development. Staff were asked to look critically at the use of data, and sources of information for situational analysis; and to think how gender issues informed their vision and values. The process, designed from the start to be participatory, was to consult women, and women's organisations were seen as important stakeholders.

What difference did this make? In the Middle East, a consultant was commissioned to produce a paper on poverty and gender issues in the region. Violence against women emerged as an important issue; research has continued, and support has been given to new partners. In Indonesia, Oxfam convened a gathering of a wide spectrum of women's organisations and networks for a discussion day, whose conclusions formed part of the country situational analysis. In Oxfam in Bangladesh (a country office which had already drawn up its own set of project criteria from a gender perspective), the Gender Policy was examined as part of the organisational mandate, and 'customised' for the country context. This included stressing practical ways of ensuring the safety and mobility of women workers — and consideration of the implications of this for resources. An analysis of activities was carried out as part of an organisational self-assessment exercise by the office in December 1997; this made a comparison over a five-year period, and showed that there had been important changes in staffing, with increasing numbers of women in management positions, and shared approaches to work on gender. In all these instances the initiative came from the managers concerned, both male and female. It was their commitment, together with the specialist advice that they commissioned (both within and from outside Oxfam), that turned paper procedures into human realities.

Monitoring and evaluation

In my view, the other key procedure to assist the integration of gender concerns into Oxfam's programmes has been monitoring and evaluation. Documentation of programme experience has enabled women to articulate their interests and needs, and provided evidence of the gender-determined impact of development processes. Externally, it was evidence that women were not benefiting from development that provided the initial drive for resources for women in development (WID) and gender and development (GAD) initiatives. The UN Conference in Nairobi in 1985, and the resulting Forward Looking Strategies, created an international environment of support for work on gender.

Within Oxfam at that time, committed women staff in Latin America and East Africa, and women's networks in India, were challenging Oxfam to take account of gender issues. Subsequent work in Oxfam has explored what women want from the development process and asked whether that is being delivered. (The most formal example of this in Oxfam was the consultation process of the Women's Linking Project, discussed in Candida March's contribution to this volume.) Oxfam has been generally weak in the area of monitoring and evaluation from a gender perspective; successive evaluations have shown that much work needs to be done on integrating gender issues into the process. This has been particularly the case in the evaluation of emergency work. Currently, the organisational policy on evaluation is changing, with increased emphasis on continuing monitoring and assessment during the life of an intervention. Nevertheless, it is likely that external evaluation of major programmes will continue.

Work needs to be done to ensure that terms of reference for monitoring and evaluation consistently include gender-related criteria. It is not enough simply to include women on the evaluation team: both they and the other team members need to have an understanding of gender issues, and expertise in enabling women (and children, where appropriate) to contribute effectively to the evaluation processes. Women may use different indicators to assess the success of a project from those of the NGO engaged in the project: in Chad, an evaluation of urban income-generating projects for women-maintained households was successful from the point of view of simple quantitative measures of repayments schedules and sustainable small business enterprises. However, the assumption of planners that women might use the income to pay for health and education services was not entirely borne out. For the women, the success of the project lay in the fact that it provided resources which enabled them to buy pots to cook extra food for other members of the community, to contribute to community celebrations, helping to end their enforced exclusion from society.

Here, the outcome may have been slightly unexpected for the funders, but seemed ultimately beneficial to the programme participants. In other income-generation projects, the same cannot be claimed: in Bangladesh, quantitative indicators may suggest success, but the reality behind the repayment figures may be less optimistic. It is the degree of women's control over resources within the household which determines whether women are themselves benefiting from development interventions; they may simply be acting as channels for resources to men, with more responsibility for repayment, and no more authority than before. Such research would suggest that a pretty wide net needs to be cast in assessing the outcome of our work, that the unpredictable is what should be expected, and that, with multiple actors and competing interests, there will

always be the likelihood that someone's gain is someone else's loss. We need monitoring procedures and practices which can identify qualitative indicators, which take account of the different stakeholders' interests, and which can become part of a learning process for all involved.

Developing and using tools

In both strategic planning and monitoring and evaluation, a gender-aware approach to analysis is an important starting point. At project level, analytical tools (the various gender frameworks, the 'People-Oriented Planning' framework for use in refugee situations, the 'Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis') are used widely by programme staff. In Oxfam, use of these tools in emergency programmes in Asia has significantly increased understanding of the issues and interests involved. However, programme staff have also increasingly worked on developing appropriate tools. For example, in Pakistan and Bangladesh workshops on 'lessons learned' are a regular follow-up to relief programmes, and a workshop in Bali in 1996 drew on the experience of programme staff to identify models of good practice and establish standards. At the same time, the SPE team at head office has been working on guidelines for programme and project management and support, drawing on checklists, guidelines, and materials produced and tested in the country offices.

Conclusion

Despite the positive achievements mentioned above, a tension remains. How should organisational procedures for policy implementation agreed and implemented? Are guidelines to be developed and adopted collectively, or disseminated from the centre? The Project and Programme Management Support Guidelines developed by the SPE team are available for use in each office, and training workshops have been initiated by many (but not all) managers. It is too early, as yet, to assess how effective these guidelines may be in providing a systematic and consistent approach to improving programme quality; but, like the strategic planning guidelines before them, they should provide an opportunity for looking at gender at project level across the programme.

What is certain is that no procedures can be effective without the commitment of people — both women and men, and at every level. And commitment alone is not enough. Yatori Matsui³ talks of the 'need to have a global perspective, a structural analysis and long term strategies. We must begin by listening to the voices and hearing the pain of the most victimised and oppressed women in our own countries ...' Learning how to listen to women is a first and essential step to

developing strategies for change, but sympathy and solidarity need to be accompanied by analysis of political, economic, and social structures, from the most personal levels, where gender relations are learned, to the international level, where the development discourse has yet to incorporate gender in a systematic and meaningful way.

I have suggested that the introduction of planning and evaluation procedures which develop an analysis requiring the participation of all stakeholders has the potential to transform organisational understandings and actions on gender and development. However, commitment is needed from staff with the authority to take this forward. There remains organisational weakness in sharing knowledge, and remembering and rewarding programme experience. In developing the Gender Policy and devising means for its implementation, Oxfam's organisational rules have been exposed to critical consideration. The jury has yet to reach a verdict on the extent to which, in consequence, they have been changed.

About the author

Bridget Walker has worked in development with several different organisations in Africa and the UK, in programme management and support. She joined to Oxfam in 1990 as a regional manager, and subsequently was employed as a Gender Adviser and most recently as Strategic Planning and Evaluation Adviser for programmes in Asia, Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union. She will take up the post of Deputy Director of Responding to Conflict, based in Birmingham, UK, in 1999.

Two steps forward, one step back: Experiences of senior management

Dianna Melrose

Introduction

I write from the perspective of a feminist, who is also a working mother and one of the relatively small but expanding number of women senior managers in Oxfam GB. As the member of the international programme's Senior Management Team charged with responsibility for gender issues, and head of the department in which the organisation's gender specialists are located, my aim is to share some reflections on what has and has not worked in implementing our Gender Policy.

By sharing this experience, hopefully others will avoid some of our mistakes. I feel that the more open we are with each other about the huge obstacles to pursuing gender equity and meaningful organisational transformation, the more we can pool ideas on solutions to common problems and feel a much-needed sense of solidarity. By basing this article on my own experience, I also bring out the particular obstacles faced by a woman senior manager who has broken through the glass ceiling of an organisation,⁴ and I outline some of the lessons to be learned.

At least on paper, Oxfam GB is a feminist⁵ organisation. Our Gender Policy commits us to a radical and ambitious agenda in pursuit of gender equity and women's human rights. However, in reality there is a considerable gap between the policy's ambition and its patchy implementation, with much to celebrate and much to lament. Despite the extensive discussion that took place before the policy was adopted, it is clear — with the benefit of hindsight — that part of the problem lies in the very different understanding of what the policy means.

This gap in perceptions first dawned on me soon after I took on responsibility for gender issues in the International Division. A few of us were trying to persuade a

key trustee and senior manager of Oxfam to invite some representatives of Southern women's organisations to the forthcoming Oxfam Assembly meeting to help cement new alliances in pursuit of women's human rights. Our efforts failed: we were told that if any of us thought the Assembly was going to give time to gender issues, we were wrong. Its purpose was to talk about what we mean by poverty, about our development approach, and to discuss whether Oxfam should work on poverty in the UK. Nothing to do with women's or gender issues, of course!

This is not to suggest that Oxfam trustees and top managers are anything other than fully in agreement with the need to achieve greater gender equity, and for Oxfam to do more to help some of the world's most disadvantaged women attain their human rights. The issue is where this goal fits with other goals, what priority should be given to specific gender work, and what it implies in terms of governance, working culture, human-resources policies, and resource allocation.

Some historical perspective is also needed. Oxfam in 1998 is a very different organisation to the one I joined in 1980. Then, overtly sexist behaviour was not only tolerated but openly exhibited by some, but by no means all, of the almost exclusively male managers. It would not be tolerated today. Oxfam does a great deal of innovative work on gender issues, with whole programmes turned around through the sort of transformational leadership described in other chapters.⁶

Multiple realities

Reality — past and present — is rather more complex than a linear progression from sexist organisation to one active on gender equality. Multiple realities have and do coexist. In 1979, the male manager who recruited me to Oxfam went out of his way in taking positive action to avoid ending up with an all-male three-person fledgling public-policy/lobbying unit, then called the Public Affairs Unit. Having failed to attract suitable women candidates, he went round the building asking for ideas on who to approach and was given my name as a failed candidate for a Desk Officer post on the Latin America desk. When I joined, I encountered sexual harassment which was mild by the standards of the City of London, where I started my career; however, it was all the more shocking given Oxfam's values.

When I became head of the Public Affairs Unit a few years later, the (male) recruiting manager, before offering me the job, launched into a long preamble on how he was going against his better judgement in not appointing one of the two 'chaps' who, despite their management experience, had none whatsoever in advocacy. On another occasion, when I was considering shortlisting a man for a vacant administrator post (having recruited two feminist women as researchers/lobbyists) the same manager rebuked me for trying to subvert 'the natural order'.

Today Oxfam still has at its apex a Corporate Management Team of five men and one woman, with men disproportionately represented in other senior management posts; but the culture is so changed, at one level, that success in recruiting women to top posts is prized. However, having been involved in recruiting for the current director and other top posts, it is painfully evident that, whereas relatively inexperienced men do apply, few women will.⁷

These contradictions — particularly our failure to challenge the prevailing gender-biased, anti-carers' working culture — make one feel that in terms of effective Gender Policy implementation, for every two steps forward, we take at least one, sometimes several, steps back. This was brought home to me most vividly in the recent discussion on Oxfam's values, conducted as part of a fundamental review of Oxfam's future direction. In a meeting of influential trustees and staff, I argued for gender equity being central to our values and beliefs, in line with the agreed organisational Gender Policy. I was reduced to stuttering, inarticulate disbelief when asked: 'why gender?'

Given the prevailing attitudes in British society, and the anti-feminist backlash to which Ines Smyth refers in her article, perhaps it is hopelessly optimistic to think that we should be able to build on what is there, rather than to keep rehearsing first principles? Gender specialists have rightly identified the recruitment of gender-aware staff, particularly managers, as potentially the single most effective transformational strategy. The job descriptions say all the right things, but although some key appointments were delayed because the best candidates lacked skills in gender analysis, this is more the exception than the rule. I know that I have recruited advocacy staff for their knowledge of key targets, political skills, and macroeconomic analysis, and been prepared to give them the 'benefit of the doubt' on gender analysis and commitment to gender equity.

Leadership: what are our real priorities?

All our experience bears out the critical importance of strong and consistent leadership. Some of the best examples of transformational leadership in Oxfam are found at the level of programme officers and middle management, rather than at the top (myself included), especially in terms of a consistent prioritisation of gender concerns.

Part of the problem is that in a large and complex organisation such as Oxfam, senior staff inevitably have multiple roles. As we wrestle, not that effectively, with multiple priorities, gender concerns fairly consistently get squeezed. Critical here is what is most valued at the top. I have not conducted an opinion poll among trustees or the Senior Management Teams, but I know what they value me for: of

my multiple roles, what is valued by most are the Policy Department's advocacy achievements, my leadership on engagement with the private sector or UK government, my role as a media spokesperson — not my lead role on gender issues in the International Division.

Our experiment with asking a senior manager to take on the gender lead role for the Corporate Management Team ran into similar problems. Bottom line for the deputy directors of the organisation (as we are constituted today) is our income, the performance of shops and Fair Trade activities, overall programme impact and speed of response in emergencies, effective human-resources policies, and sound financial management.

With no critical mass of gender enthusiasts at the top, Gender Policy implementation tends to be approached as one more item on the list of competing priorities, to be ticked off every so often, rather than as a perspective which should inform every decision we take and be integral to everything we do. As one organisational development consultant put it: 'The people at the top need their outlook transformed. This usually does not happen. Therefore gender is not institutionalised. This has become a cliché: but unless it happens organisations will continue to struggle with "add-on" management of gender'.⁸

Oxfam's gender specialists have long been aware that some of our pioneering work on gender has tended to be more valued outside than within the organisation. Why do we undervalue gender work? Part of the answer must be that we remain a male-dominated organisation at the top decision-making levels. But it is more complex: as Suzanne Williams argues in her article, there is a desire at the top of the organisation (which I share) for Oxfam to be able to state more clearly what difference we are making to the lives of poor women and men — in other words, to be able to demonstrate visible results. The problem with the struggle for gender equity is that we are in for the long haul. It is harder to demonstrate tangible, immediate impact, and it involves a process of change which necessitates investing resources in changing Oxfam itself (through capacity-building, developing tools for gender analysis, investing in an exchange of learning across programmes, and so on).

Oxfam is at the moment in a critical phase of transition. Our role for many years has been that of a Northern funding agency (transferring resources from North to South). The values governing this role have been simply to relieve poverty, not to 'interfere' with more complex issues of human rights and social justice. However, as Oxfam has evolved we have become a more complex and relevant organisation committed to working in alliance with others to promote social justice and protect human rights (through a range of strategies, including advocacy and building local capacity). The problem is that the values shared by many (but not all) of our most influential trustees and senior managers are that of

the funding agency. In other words, money spent on ourselves, on processes such as facilitating networking between women's organisations to build common advocacy agendas, or investing in developing staff competencies in gender analysis, is money diverted from 'the poor'.

With some of the sceptics, a rights discourse will get us nowhere. It is more effective to emphasise the 'efficiency' argument, which is more acceptable to those who are rooted in Oxfam's original 'funder' role, and who resist our adoption of a more complex role in social justice and human rights. This involves citing the uncontested fact that women make up 70 per cent of the world's poor, and giving out the message that if we are serious about tackling poverty, then on efficiency grounds we have to be serious about gender.

At the same time, the more strategic approach of many trustees and senior-level decision-makers in Oxfam accepts that it is more cost-effective to promote far-reaching policy change of potential benefit to millions of poor women, men, and children than to fund atomised community-level projects. But the legacy of suspicion of money spent on organisational transformation, to equip us to act as an effective change agent on gender equity, remains alive and kicking.

Performance management

There is a lack of consistent leadership which is necessary to bring about a more holistic approach to gender issues, and this explains what we see in Oxfam: centres of energy and best practice in some places, inaction in others. We lack incentives to reward best practice or to impose sanctions against managers who fail to incorporate a gender perspective. We are still in the process of defining quality standards, as is evident from the lack of clear benchmarks documented in the gender mapping exercise. In recognition of the problem of lack of consistency in management approaches to gender, we have drawn on the suggestion that managers include an appropriate objective on gender-awareness in individual performance objectives. The Corporate Management Team agreed to manage performance on incorporating gender in one's work in this way, but their decision was not followed through. In the International Division, an edict was issued, but it descended like a 'lead balloon' (as one colleague put it) and sunk into oblivion, amidst a welter of competing messages.

Our experience suggests that edicts count for little unless managers are resourced and supported to follow through on them. As Visha Padmanabhan comments in this book, some of the more lasting change has been stimulated through investment in horizontal exchanges on best practice such as the staff network AGRA,⁹ which can have an invaluable demonstration effect on others.

Gender specialists and senior management

The single most important resource for ensuring that gender issues are integrated into Oxfam was the energy of the pioneers during the 1980s, and the subsequent investment in a specialist gender unit (initially called GADU), which was set up in 1985. As the person who wielded the axe in what Suzanne Williams calls, in her article, the 'institutional execution' of the Gender Team in 1996, and who acted as midwife in its rebirth in the merged Gender and Learning Team, I fully agree with her that it remains essential for Oxfam to have a core of gender specialists.

We need gender specialists to support managers, programme staff, and partners, and to keep challenging us by bringing in fresh and innovative thinking. But managers must take the lead, not abdicate responsibility to the experts, and create an environment where the specialists can engage productively with others to bring about change. It is clear that to be able to do this effectively they need to feel trusted, not constantly threatened by repeated restructuring and the need to 'justify their existence', which can lead to unhelpful cycles of blame and mutual recrimination. With the benefit of my experience of managing gender specialists, I can say categorically that none of us should underestimate the sheer exhaustion, emotional scarring, and the potential for long-term burn-out as a result of fighting recurring battles on gender issues. At their best, the gender specialists have been creative, strategic, supportive of colleagues and quick to seize new opportunities (such as advocacy and networking around the Beijing conference, strategic planning, innovative publishing and cross-programme learning initiatives). At their worst, they have been conflict-ridden as a team to the point of paralysis, much given to blaming others and feeling victimised.

My experience is that the gender specialists generated mixed emotions throughout the organisation, ranging from strong appreciation and admiration to resentment. For some colleagues, especially isolated women programme officers and country representatives, the gender team could never deliver enough; as a result, these colleagues in the field alternately felt supported and let down as the Gender Team did or could not meet their needs. At the other end of the spectrum, some managers resented their intrusion; and even colleagues in their own department working on advocacy have been dismissive or angry as their attempts to integrate gender analysis into their work were dismissed as not good enough.

Differences in working culture have added to the problems. Lobbyists, working to immediate deadlines imposed by government, parliament, or the media, have been dismissed by gender specialists as task-obsessed, remote from the field, and have had their values and identity challenged. Lobbyists, in turn, have undervalued the gender advisers' knowledge, dismissing them as process-oriented, out of touch with the real world of Northern decision-makers, and low on visible

results. The atmosphere of low levels of trust and high levels of mutual suspicion and miscommunication that can ensue is not a fertile one for moving forward on gender issues, and personally challenging to me as their department head.

The most challenging aspect of being responsible for the integration of gender issues in the International Division has been learning how to work productively with gender specialists, whose frustration with slow progress and with the organisation for not living up to its ideals needs to be channelled somewhere. My first mistake was to underestimate the legacy of low levels of trust and the emotional damage that tended to make the team to close in on itself — a natural defence mechanism. Most difficult for me as a feminist was to have my motives constantly questioned and my performance always found wanting. I drew some comfort from the literature and from a consultant who had worked closely with the gender advisers; she reassured me that women gender pioneers always expect more of other women. Having lived through the depressing years of Thatcherism which yielded nothing for women, intellectually it is easy to understand other women's profound mistrust of the few women who do become senior managers: have they not 'sold out' to the prevailing culture and started behaving like men in a man's world? Was I really just another of these 'femocrats', with no real commitment to organisational transformation? At an emotional level, this was hard.

Motherhood and the glass ceiling

The crisis hits when the personal comes up against the demands of a seemingly immutable organisational culture. It is here that our fine words about commitment to gender equity ring most hollow.

Motherhood is said to be the largest single determinant in the failure of women to achieve parity with men.¹⁰ Women throughout an organisation such as Oxfam suffer the consequences of working long and unsociable hours, and the effects of this on family life. For many women in Oxfam this means sacrificing your children by not being there for them, or so preoccupied with work, that you're there in body, but not in mind. Promotions do not make the situation any easier, and my experience has been that each promotion has significantly increased the pressure on my family life. Who would want to be an organisational media spokesperson if every phone call in the evening or at the weekend might send you rushing around organising complex child care and 'dumping' on your partner yet again? I am haunted by the memory of leaving my youngest son to scream as I tried to sound 'professional' on the phone to a trustee who caught me at home in the evening. How can we talk of lofty ideals and working for a 'caring' organisation as we damage those who are most vulnerable and precious to us?

I am grateful that Oxfam's top management in 1987 responded positively to a staff initiative and set up a workplace nursery. I benefited directly, secure in the knowledge that my two sons were being well looked after, that they were near me and also part of Oxfam, given its centrality to my life. I can think of at least a dozen women colleagues who have made very major contributions to Oxfam's strategic direction in recent years who had or have their children in the nursery. It was an important factor in encouraging a number of us to continue working for Oxfam.

The nursery's success has meant that almost since its inception, demand for places has far outstripped supply, limiting its potential in attracting new staff. While on maternity leave in 1990, I gained direct insight into the barriers to actively discriminating in favour of women as I drafted the allocation policy for nursery places (having volunteered, not disinterestedly, to speed things up). I have doubts that we have managed the nursery as the strategic asset it is. We started it in a tentative way, restricting it to small premises that have made it less economic to run. As a result, the fees are prohibitively high for some of the least well-paid staff. At times it has been managed alongside the car park and print room, not as an integral part of a human-resources strategy designed to attract and retain working mothers. Moreover, the workplace nursery, invaluable as it has proved for some, is of course only part of the solution. It raises issues of fairness, because most Oxfam staff — especially those not based in Oxford — cannot benefit. It eases the practicalities of going back to work after maternity leave, but it does not help women regain confidence in getting back on top of a job after an extended absence.

For many of us, the real tensions between work and home only begin when our children start school. Then, their emotional and practical needs — to be fetched and carried between different carers and activities, especially during the school holidays — really make life the sort of challenge that too few men have ever experienced. This is an important gender issue, because it primarily affects women's career opportunities, but also a growing number of men's. More and more men, particularly those who are attracted to working in a not-for-profit organisation such as Oxfam, want to share the demands of parenting and give quality time to their children. A number of senior male managers in Oxfam are very much victims of its working culture and the expectations of their peers. Some are acutely aware that their wives are sacrificing their careers, but have not yet reached the critical mass needed to effect change. For women, the strains on personal relationships can be even worse. If you are fortunate enough to have an exceptional partner who is prepared to take on the lion's share of looking after the children and sacrifice his prospects of interesting paid work, you run into additional problems. In going 'counter-culture', a man takes on a considerable burden, because so much of male identity and esteem is tied up in the world of work. Every additional demand to accommodate your job can add significantly to stress levels.

Oxfam GB will continue to find it hard to attain the diversity among senior management through recruitment, with a better balance between women and men and people of various ethnic backgrounds and nationalities. I believe that this will block our effectiveness as an organisation. Having been the only woman on the International Division's Senior Management Team for a number of years without making a perceptible impact on its working culture, I see major differences now that we have achieved a critical mass of three women in a team of seven. Among these is the additionality brought by women's emotional intelligence: the newer women members of the team actively challenge us and are succeeding in 'outing' some of the emotional undercurrents that have blocked our effectiveness as a team.

Conclusion

Implementing a gender policy which necessitates organisational transformation is fraught with difficulty and requires strong and consistent leadership. Gender specialists have a vital role to play and need effective support in their inherently challenging role. Oxfam can rightly celebrate some pioneering work on gender. At the same time, we have a lot to gain by owning up to and reflecting on our failures. 'Success has many parents, failure is an orphan,' as it is said.

Arguably the biggest challenge facing us is one that faces society at large, to which there are no easily palatable solutions: How do we transform our organisational cultures to be more family-friendly, to create an environment in which more women and people of a diversity of ethnic origins can succeed as senior managers? Moreover, how do we create a better balance between the demands of work, our responsibilities as carers and our desire to participate in our children's early lives, and the need to have time for personal relationships?

Having just experienced the sense of deep loss after the death of a very dear colleague, Christine Whitehead, who felt that the stress of being pulled simultaneously in these different directions contributed to her illness, I know I for one owe it to her to do my bit to find some answers.

About the author

Dianna Melrose is Oxfam GB Policy Director and gender lead person for the International Division, currently on a two-year secondment to the British Foreign Office. She joined Oxfam in 1980 as a researcher/lobbyist, and became one of the small but expanding number of women senior managers. She is a mother of two sons, both of whom spent their earliest years in the Oxfam workplace nursery.

From infrastructure to people: Experiences from Cambodia

Visha Padmanabhan

Introduction

When I look back at the history of Oxfam GB's Cambodia programme, it is not surprising that it was difficult to address gender issues. When I arrived in 1993, in an intensely political environment, the emphasis was still on relief and reconstruction, with a male-dominated government institution as Oxfam's counterpart which placed a heavy emphasis on technical work (often seen as a male forte). This was not a congenial environment in which to promote gender issues. A gender perspective was missing not only in the technical programme, but within the overall management perspective.

Over time, Oxfam's programme in Cambodia moved from high-profile relief and reconstruction work to a longer-term approach with a focus on community development. This paved the way for the introduction of a gender perspective into our work. This article considers some of the challenges of introducing gender concerns into a very male-dominated technical programme, and some of the strategies through which this was achieved in Cambodia.

I started in Oxfam GB as a Programme Officer in South India in 1985. It was a new experience for the staff of the then South India (Bangalore) Office to see a woman in a role which had formerly been taken exclusively by men. There were doubts about my ability to cope with stressful travel schedules, to deal with drivers, to stay alone in a hotel, or simply to deal with project partners, who were then mostly men. It was also a challenge for me to establish my own working style without being undermined by the dominant culture of the India programme. There were four women programme officers in India then, and we felt the need to

start our own support group. Thus the Women in Development group was set up, which was later broadened to address gender issues not only in the programmes but also in the workplace. This group was the beginning of Action for Gender Relations in Asia network (AGRA), which was to become a crucial source of support for me, particularly when I took on the management role of Regional Representative; the first Indian woman among six male representatives at that time.

In 1992, I was the first (Indian) woman to move to Oxfam in Zimbabwe as Deputy Representative. Appointing a Southern woman from another developing country to a senior management position was a breakthrough for Oxfam. We had come far from the days when one of my male colleagues in India told me that if we kept talking gender, we might not be promoted: instead we would be isolated!

The path has been hard. I was either branded as 'too strong', or made to feel that I was not an easy person to deal with. But I have learned from a wide base and gained a good understanding of gender issues in development work from a broad cross-cultural perspective. It has given me an insight into the attitudes of a range of staff. For me the need to take on aspects of the gender and development debate is clear, and it is this commitment that gave me the energy to take on the challenge of the Cambodia Programme when I became Country Representative in 1993.

Background to Oxfam's programme in Cambodia

Cambodia during 1979–85 was marked by the end of the Pol Pot era, famine, the trade embargo by the West, and only limited aid from the Soviet block. This all led to strong control by central government. There was no free contact between Cambodians and foreigners. The very contact between people which is so vital for good development work, and particularly for an understanding of the intricate gender relations, was not available. Oxfam's intervention in Cambodia was unique and challenging. Up to 1985, Oxfam supported government-implemented infrastructure construction, provision of food aid, emergency supply of seeds and agricultural tools, and a rural water programme. However, in 1986–89 the government implemented economic reform. This was a major change in the environment in which Oxfam pursued its work. The infrastructure work continued, with major rehabilitation of irrigation canals, drilling wells as part of the rural drinking-water programme, emergency aid to displaced people, support to a technical training college, and so on. The earlier approach of support for the rehabilitation of the war-torn economy, and international campaigning to change policy towards Cambodia, was still of major importance.

Between 1989 and 1991 the fighting continued. However, after the signing of the Paris peace accord, various agencies started to deliver aid. An important

addition to Oxfam's programmes was support for the first local organisation (KHEMARA) to be headed by a woman, and support for the health projects of another international organisation. A major breakthrough was employment of Khmer staff and consolidation of the country office. The year 1992–93 was crucial, in that it marked the preparations for elections and the return home of refugees. Sporadic fighting continued, and the economy continued to be unstable, but the influx of multilateral and bilateral aid and aid personnel continued.

There are many key issues to address from a gender perspective in Cambodia, including mental health, violence against women, and women's participation in politics. Cambodia's active adult population has a high proportion of women, but they have been conspicuous by their absence from politics. Following the 1993 elections, there are only a handful of women in the national government, and almost no women representatives at provincial and district level.

Managing the Cambodia programme

When I took over in Cambodia, one embassy official commented, 'You are a woman, you are Asian and from a developing country, how did Oxfam appoint you?' At times I had to use subterfuge to be involved in the technical discussions dominated by male colleagues. Since I knew that my predecessor had had a hard time (even as a man) with the technical team, I thought it was best to approach the problem in a positive way. For example, during a group discussion on the integration of infrastructural work into community development work, one of the senior technical staff started explaining some of the finer details of the work to another male programme officer, while others were left out. When I asked what they were discussing, the answer was 'Oh nothing, some technical stuff.' Although I was angry, I kept cool (with great difficulty) and said 'Very good, then you need to explain to the group, as the purpose is for all of us to learn.' This not only made him repeat what he had said, but it also ensured that women were included in discussions about technical issues. This way slowly we became more interactive, although of course every now and then we had these minor confrontations, which strengthened our commitment to address gender concerns.

Similarly there were occasions when the UN consultants or World Bank consultants, along with a Cambodian government ministry, would invite international organisations for consultation. Once when I raised a question of women's role in the socio-economic survey form, they responded with laughter, and the minister of planning said, 'Oh, in Cambodia, women are the home ministers and they handle the cash, we do not have any say ...'. Everybody laughed. I was hoping that the so-called high-profile consultants would explain, but to my surprise they

also stayed quiet. When I took a second opportunity and asked another question concerning women, they said that they would follow it up and get back to me. What I found is that, if one asks too many questions (particularly if they are gender-related), one is either made to feel isolated and stupid, or given a false assurance of future consultation — but nothing happens afterwards.

One of the key lessons from my experience in India had been the importance of forming a peer-group support network (such as AGRA) to withstand some of the resistance or hindrances encountered when trying to address gender issues. Informally I started building a support group of women who headed agencies in Cambodia, and we started listening to each other and sharing some of the management problems. This confidence-building and mutual understanding helped a lot, especially because all agencies attended the same meetings and worked with the Cambodian government or communities on similar projects.

For management purposes, Oxfam's organisation-wide Gender Policy was essential in Cambodia. It was translated into Khmer, and all staff were given a copy along with their job descriptions. In addition, a letter explaining the nature and role of AGRA (East) was written in Khmer as a hand-out for new staff and provided along with the contract. This was a very useful way to make it clear that managers had a responsibility to incorporate a gender analysis into all their work. I used this fact as the trump card with resistant project partners and government counterparts (who were mostly men), to explain our policy, beliefs, and understanding of development work from a gender perspective. If the partners were not in tune or did not make an effort, I did not hesitate to intervene and impose conditions on the provision of financial or non-financial support.

Within Oxfam, I felt that the male technical staff were less resistant once they were made to understand that addressing gender relations is an institution-wide mandate. The Gender Policy, and the training and research work subsequently undertaken by the Cambodia office, helped a great deal. A programme officer was given responsibility to ensure that matters concerning gender relations were followed up, and that staff were kept informed about the activities of AGRA East. Maybe my own presence as a woman also helped.

Given the shortage of local staff, priority was accorded to basic investment in staff development and capacity-building, in order to increase the number and quality of national staff. Recruitment processes, including advertisements and interviews, all included explicit gender-related questions. Specific time was devoted in staff meetings to helping everyone to understand the Gender Policy, and gender training for all staff became a crucial starting point. Besides this, assertiveness training and training in negotiating skills were also provided, so that women staff (who outnumbered men in the office) were provided with appropriate support. Monthly staff meetings became the place for raising issues

and discussing problems and concerns related to gender in the workplace. Similarly at social events we made a point of including male and female relations of members of staff, and this also became a way of creating awareness.

Working relationships for women staff responsible for supervising or managing the male staff became a regular point of discussion. It was necessary to think critically about cultural assumptions about authority and gender. Also, since respect for older people is an important feature of Cambodian culture, these discussions enabled younger Cambodian women to be assertive without feeling that they were failing to respect their elders.

Transforming the programme

When I arrived in Cambodia, I found that the planning and implementation of large-scale rehabilitation projects was undertaken at the national level, with little or no participation of the actual beneficiaries. There had been little analysis of gender issues in Cambodia at the time. In spite of the process of political and economic liberalisation, which has enabled development agencies to work at province and commune levels, programme planning has largely remained top-down, with a continued focus on material aid and technical development.

I do believe that unless women are fully involved in and benefit from projects, there is no meaning in the work. This business is serious: studies of the situation in Cambodia show that 65 per cent of the adult population in the post-war years was female. A large number of households were headed by widowed or single women. In 1989 and 1994, the study of a canal-building project highlighted the specific and different problems of women, especially single or widowed women, who were shown to be among the poorest. It showed the double burden of women, who had to support their families economically as well as caring for their households. It is Oxfam's responsibility to make sure that women are included in the development process and benefit from the programme, and also own and decide the future of it.

With the change in the working environment in the early 1990s, Oxfam's programme began to shift towards development of the community. Khmer staff now included a couple of women, and gender training was held for the first time for all staff. Through these efforts, the approach became more strategic in operation and response, with a longer-term focus on incorporating a gender perspective into programme and planning.

From 1992 to 1996 Oxfam adopted a three-fold strategy in Cambodia: a small operational community programme was implemented in a few villages in two provinces; financial and intensive technical support was given to other local-level organisations; and training was provided for staff, drawing on the

lessons from the operational community programme, in order to strengthen the team's analysis of poverty. The community-development projects brought staff into direct contact with poor villagers (many of them women-headed households) and their problems related to food provision, income, and indebtedness.

However, it was not easy for Oxfam in Cambodia, when refining its whole programme, to translate the information and knowledge it had acquired about gender relations into programme work. A study was initiated to gather gender-focused data at different levels (from government and multilateral donors, from international and local organisations, and from the communities) in order to improve our understanding of the critical gender issues related to poverty, and how people cope with them in the Cambodian context. This gender-focused data enabled us to integrate the gender issues better, through problem analysis and programme planning. The study also provided the opportunity to understand how other NGOs in Cambodia were addressing gender issues, and their different approaches to integrating gender-related criteria into their programmes.

Through these processes, staff developed a clear idea about the concept of gender and about the link between gender and development in Cambodia. This understanding was strengthened in a workshop which provided all staff with feed-back from the study, and gave a gender analysis of the programme. In addition, all the government counterparts, men and women — mostly men — received gender training in Khmer from the community development staff. This training was very effective, because it addressed the Cambodian situation and made a lot of sense to those working on projects in which Oxfam was involved.

The incompatibility of the established technical programme with the newly initiated social component was the major dilemma. For example, putting in pumps and reaching targeted numbers of pump installations lends itself to short-term aims and objectives, but education about water use involves community organisation, which requires substantial time. In order to develop a gender perspective in the Cambodia programme, the decentralisation of the technical programme became necessary.

The community development programme had to focus carefully on ways of providing space and support for emerging local organisations, without making it seem that Oxfam was competing with them to implement the project. Nurturing and supporting community initiatives in a country where there had been no history of local organisations was a great challenge. Often the work had to be done within the limited human-resource capacity available in the country. There was a lot of apprehension among expatriate colleagues (particularly while the major water programme was being handed over) when expansion and funding of local organisations was gradually increased. This approach required careful planning and nurturing through funding and non-funding support

services from Oxfam. In this way the so-called technical intervention was integrated into an approach based far more directly on an analysis of community needs, with full community participation.

It is also important to recall the South-South linking initiatives of Oxfam's Gender and Development Unit (GADU), which were part of the Women's Linking Project, discussed by Candida March in her article. These links helped boost gender issues in the programmes and at the office level, and we were able to share the experience with our Cambodian counterparts, with the wider NGO sector, and with the Cambodian women's ministry. This gave Oxfam the opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the Cambodian government's documents for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. In a way, the changes that I was making in the programme and management style in Cambodia coincided with pre-Beijing events, which helped to further the positive change towards enhancing gender issues in the programme and at a personal level.

Conclusion

It is now one year since I left the Cambodia office, but I feel very proud that the staff have continued to be committed to the organisation's approach. Sustaining progress towards gender equity is a great challenge in the constantly changing and complex environment in which development work is to be carried out. I strongly believe that there must be mechanisms and appropriate institutional structures to suit the changing needs of each situation.

From my very first day I stated to staff that I was an outsider who could share ideas and help them to think through issues, but ultimately making a choice to change the situation was the responsibility of Cambodians. The responsibility to address gender concerns is now a part of each individual's job in the Cambodia programme. The programme has laid the foundations for a central gender perspective by changing the programme to make it appropriate to the changing needs of men and women. This perspective has added value to the programme itself, and I don't see the issue of gender equity disappearing in Cambodia — although of course the intensity of the team's commitment may be modified.

About the author

Visha Padmanabhan is Regional Representative, Caucasus, for Oxfam GB, based in Tbilisi. Over the last ten years she has worked for Oxfam in various capacities in India, Zimbabwe, and Cambodia. She has a continuing interest in gender perspective in both development work and management structures.

Gender: Assessing the impact¹¹

Elsa L. Dawson

Introduction

The evaluation of Oxfam GB's multi-million pound Great Lakes emergency programme argues that, given the lack of data on the actual impact of our interventions, nothing can be said about impact. (This is not to say of course that impact did not occur. We just have no written record of it.) The evaluation goes on to state 'it seems reasonable to conclude that the speed of the Oxfam water response in providing clean water in adequate quantities had a marked impact on the well-being of beneficiaries, particularly in "saving lives"' (Collins et al. 1997).

The question to be addressed in this article is: how do we know we are actually achieving positive changes, or at least contributing to changes, in the lives of the women we are trying to benefit? Do changes in the gender division of labour and in the relationship between men and women lead to improvements in their well-being? How do we know that such improvements are really occurring?

Central to our strategies for changing gender relations are the notions of empowerment and building up the capacity of women and the organisations representing them. But can such things actually be measured? How do we know whether any of the changes we note in the lives of women beneficiaries are really attributable to Oxfam? Changes in their lives are part of complex wider processes that surround our projects and programmes, and it is often hard to distinguish what is due to our interventions and what is due to other changes.

Within Oxfam GB, we are increasingly asking these questions. Our major institutional donors, such as the UK Government's Department for International Development, are also making mounting demands on us for evaluations

which include an assessment of impact achieved. In addition, the rising competition for public donations, and the ever more critical eye of the media, combine to produce escalating pressures on organisations such as Oxfam to come up with concrete evidence of benefits accrued as a result of the funds entrusted to us.

What is impact and how do we measure it?

We have defined impact as 'sustainable changes in living conditions and behaviour of beneficiaries and the differential effects of these changes on women and men' (Oxfam and Novib 1994). However, we have also noted that the sustainability of changes cannot be guaranteed, especially in complex political emergencies. It is generally agreed, nevertheless, that impact is more than immediate outputs and effects.

Oxfam has supported a number of initiatives in Kenya promoting conservation or 'organic' agriculture. A review in 1997 to assess the impact of this approach on food security and the livelihoods of rural people found that the sale of vegetables and milk had an important effect on the income and position of women in households. Less expenditure for vegetables meant that women had less reason to ask men for money, and there were many indications that women kept at least some control over the money they earned from the sale of these products. 'Some women had also gained status and confidence through their involvement in the training of other farmers and the management of the community groups through which the work was carried out.' (Neefjes et al. 1997)

Accurate assessment of impact is dependant on a number of key tasks being implemented effectively throughout the life of a project. For example, if a baseline study has not been carried out at the beginning of a project, changes occurring as a result of the project will be more difficult to establish. If no clear objectives have been set, or if the ones set do not correlate with the problems identified, defining impact will be impossible. If no information about the indicators which were identified in accordance with the set objectives was gathered during the project's implementation, again the job of impact assessment will be more difficult, relying on interviews of beneficiaries and staff after the activities have taken place.

Adopting a gender perspective to impact assessment means examining these changes through a 'gender lens', determining which of them have had a positive effect on women, and on their unequal relations with men. Negative change is also important to consider and learn from, as are unintended and unexpected changes. Recording and using negative or unexpected change can often present problems of honesty and transparency, particularly when reporting to funding bodies, but both form an essential part of impact assessment.

In this article we consider some of the constraints we have encountered in measuring impact involving benefits for women and girls (many of which are equally a problem in assessing change of benefit to men), and the ways in which Oxfam has addressed these constraints.

The challenges of assessing gendered impact

Measuring the intangible

Measuring impact in relation to women is particularly difficult, because we lack clarity about what we are hoping to achieve in the longer term. What is our vision of the role of women in an ideal world? Our Gender Policy states that we have an explicit commitment to address 'gender-related inequalities' as a prerequisite for 'achieving sustainable development and alleviating poverty' (Oxfam 1993). But is this sufficiently clear to all our staff as a basic direction for their work?

Our projects often aim to achieve the complex goals of women's empowerment and participation, and the fulfilment of their rights. But how do we measure such intangible elements as empowerment? There is confusion about what 'empowerment' actually is. It is an abstract concept, capable of being interpreted in many ways. When we attempt to translate the word into other languages we realise the complexity of the notion. Rowlands (1995) has described it as follows:

Bringing people who are outside the decision-making process, into it. This puts a strong emphasis on access to political structures and formal decision-making, on access to markets and incomes that enable people to participate in economic decision-making.

She also provides a definition with a more developmental focus:

A process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination. (quoted from Keller and Mbewe 1991)

Rowlands points out that the empowerment process is not necessarily linear, but more like a loop or a spiral. Certain activities may be empowering in one way and disempowering in another, especially if the different kinds of power she mentions (power over, power to, power with, power within), and the two spheres of individual and collective power, are taken into account. There are also many different areas of life in which women can become empowered — the political, the economic, health, education, the home. Significant changes often take place within people's homes and are thus difficult to observe.

Whose reality counts?

However, what do empowerment and participation signify in the vast range of contexts in which Oxfam-funded empowerment initiatives are carried out, particularly when we take into account our women beneficiaries' own perspective? We have learned to be keenly aware that theirs may be different from our own.

What actually constitutes impact varies markedly depending on who you are talking to. We have found significant differences between what Oxfam staff and our public supporters consider to be impact, and what women beneficiaries see as changes in their interest. We also find variations between the perspectives of our beneficiaries themselves, and between them and the women of other sections of society in their countries, who may belong to different classes, ethnic groups, castes, and even age-groups, or even play different roles, such as daughter-in-laws and mother-in-laws, carers of the infirm and small children.

But whose opinion really matters? Obviously, it is the women beneficiaries of a particular project to whose views most significance must be attached, since the project is intended to assist them. Where our systems are not sufficiently participatory, our beneficiaries' views are inadequately involved and recorded, and outsiders' views may be artificially imposed. We must always ask prospective women beneficiaries about their criteria for well-being, which might well be different from our expectations, and might not necessarily include participating in a women's organisation — as our project proposals so often seem to assume.

Other interests, such as those of a partner organisation implementing a project, other NGOs working in the area, other communities not directly targeted by the project, and those of local government agencies, also have legitimate claims to be taken into account. It is not easy to develop systems which can identify and recognise differing points of view, and to assimilate them into the final assessment.

Problems with participation

Participatory approaches are important in order to gather accurate information on the complex process of development. This is particularly vital in the case of women, whose views may not have been picked up in written descriptive studies or whose voice may not have been heard in community meetings. Talking to women in small groups, or on an individual basis, can ensure that their views are heard. Such groups can take account of the various views which we have noted within different groups of women (women of different ages, levels of education, marital status, class, and so on), and according to their roles in society.

But many of our projects now go beyond seeing 'participation' as merely consulting women on their 'problems'. Ways are being found to ensure their 'full participation in the analysis' (Roche 1993), in order to record their problems from their perspective.

In many development projects, empowerment seems to mean merely participation in communal activities. Although inviting women's participation seems ideal in principle, we always have to be aware that we are taking up their valuable time, time that might otherwise be spent earning an income, looking after children, and perhaps most importantly, relaxing! Many development interventions ostensibly aimed at assisting and empowering women actually increase women's burden of work in encouraging them to participate in communal activities. It is only where such activities are actually increasing women's active participation in decision-making, that empowerment could be said to be occurring.

For example, as a mother of one child working full-time, I certainly have no time or energy for political campaigning or any extra work. And I am lucky enough to have a flexible employer and workplace nursery care for my child. Does this make me an 'unempowered', 'non-participating' woman, unconcerned about her rights? Who is to look after children in the ideal world we are working towards? What about their rights, for example, to adequate care, especially in the case of girl children, who in developing countries so often end up looking after siblings while parents are at work instead of receiving an education or playing? What would the women we are trying to assist really consider to be a step up the ranks of well-being?

Sustainable change

How sustainable are the positive changes brought about by our projects? An important element of the word 'impact' is something that is 'durable', and impact assessment includes the search for changes which will be sustainable over many years after the completion of an initiative. But how can this be measured in the short-term? If we carry out measurement during or immediately after completion of a project, the future of the process is uncertain. If we go back and do so after a certain number of years, much information may have been lost in the meantime, and the causal relationships will have become more complex and more difficult to identify. What can be attributed to the project, and what is rather due to other contextual factors becomes much harder to distinguish.

Practical solutions

Many staff running Oxfam-funded projects now aim to collect information throughout the implementation by monitoring the indicators set in the project design, so that impact can be judged. Some establish new indicators together with women beneficiaries to reflect the empowerment process and positive changes

which are being brought about from their point of view. However, this task is cumbersome, because the amount of information amassed is often beyond the capacity of staff to deal with and analyse.

The use of 'frameworks'¹² has in many cases enabled staff to collect and organise relevant information for monitoring and analysing impact quickly and efficiently. It must be emphasised that frameworks are tools to be adapted in various contexts, not a replacement for commitment to gender equity and an understanding of gender inequalities. One such tool is the Gender Analysis Matrix, a simple, systematic instrument for determining the different impact of development interventions on women and men, developed by UNIFEM. This matrix is easy to use with participatory techniques, and covers the main areas of information required in order to detect gender-specific impact, including women's empowerment. Applicable at different stages in the project cycle, it has proven an especially useful tool for our project staff and counterpart organisations.

The Capacities and Vulnerabilities Framework, although designed specifically for use in emergencies, goes beyond such contexts in its emphasis on thinking about the capacities of potential beneficiaries, not only their vulnerabilities. Many project staff have put to use the ideas developed by Naila Kabeer in the Social Relations Approach (1994), which emphasises the culturally and contextually defined structures of gender relations. The Harvard Framework for gender relations (Overholt et al. 1985) contains a checklist of questions regarding women's and men's activities, access, and control, and influencing factors which Oxfam staff have found useful.

The time and resources available to Oxfam for carrying out impact assessment activities are limited, especially if a project or programme is small in terms of budget and staff, and/or of short duration. Development projects funded by Oxfam tend to last between three and ten years, have relatively low budgets compared with those implemented by the large international agencies, and have limited numbers of immediate beneficiaries (apart from our large-scale emergency and advocacy work). Systems and frameworks which are easily and rapidly applicable, and cheap to implement, have been useful in developing methods of monitoring the impact of our work. They are not, however, an infallible panacea and must be used with awareness and analytical ability in order to be successful.

Fundamental questions ...

Ironically, a fundamental constraint on measuring the impact of our work is our staff's intense moral commitment to their activities aimed at the relief of poverty and distress. This leads them to see such routine tasks as measuring their work as

an administrative task of lesser importance, understandable when they are faced with situations of acute human suffering. Tasks related to project activities and funding administration are constantly given greater priority. They do nevertheless feel acutely the need to learn from experience, and seek methods that can efficiently provide them with greater possibilities of doing so.

We may actually be over-complicating what is actually a very simple question which we need to ask different stakeholders — ‘What has changed in women’s lives and why?’ — and to record the answers. Perhaps the biggest stumbling block to assessing our impact is monitoring, gathering, and documenting information on preset indicators. John Rowley et al. (1997) have hypothesised that managing ongoing work in Oxfam does not receive the same rewards as starting new initiatives, and that this why, for example, we do not have properly documented information about the impact that our Great Lakes programme has had on women’s lives. We need to develop new and effective methods of monitoring our programmes, and ways of supporting and motivating staff to do this.

We are aware that we will never be able to report with absolute accuracy on the achievements of our work in relation to women and gender. All we can provide is our best judgement, and continually learn about what seems to have benefited women and girls, and what has not, or produced negative effects. Nevertheless, the discipline of having to report this may force us to be more rigorous in our efforts to seek out projects which will achieve more real positive change for women and girls, of direct relevance to their everyday lives.

About the author

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A rose by any other name: Feminism in development NGOs

Ines Smyth

Introduction

Since arriving at Oxfam GB over two years ago, something has struck me about the way we work: the ease with which we use the term gender, and the reluctance to employ the terms ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ in our work. As is the case with most development agencies, much of the writing and discussion within head office are notable for the absence of these words. We have a Gender Policy, agreed in 1993. We write and talk about gender-sensitive policies and strategies, of gender work and gendered activities or approaches. But on feminism, feminist policies and strategies, or on feminists, there is a resounding silence. This is despite the fact that, to different degrees, staff in the various regions where Oxfam works engage with feminist ideas and bravely attempt to translate them into practice.

In this article, I argue that ‘most development agencies shy away from the language of transformation’ (Parpart and Marchand 1995, p.15). Not only the language, but the substance of feminism as a transformative project, seems to be misunderstood, feared, and thus shunned.¹³ I recognise that an explicitly feminist language is not always appropriate or useful in our work, and that, in most communities and environments, it is possible to ‘use feminist concepts with the language of the people we are working with’ (Becky Buell, personal communication 1997). However, development organisations which value learning must consider the insights which feminist concepts offer. In my view, their neglect to do so is linked to their failure to interact with local women’s movements. As a result, Oxfam and other donor organisations are not aware of how relevant these groups’ thinking is to development debates.

A personal and professional dilemma

This reluctance to speak of feminism worries me, because I joined Oxfam partly in the hope that this would solve a personal and professional dilemma. In common with many western feminists, I saw in feminism the possibility of making the personal political. In my previous job, as an anthropologist working in the field of development, I had come to realise the dangers of analytical and political generalisations which take as their starting point the experiences of western, often white and middle-class, women. Perhaps the most challenging contemporary feminist debate is that on the dominance of 'western feminism'.

Chandra Mohanty (1988) makes one of the best-known contributions to this debate. She asserts that western feminists depict all women in developing countries as forever poor, oppressed, and passive. By perpetuating negative stereotypes, western feminists become part of the oppressive systems they denounce, and undermine the possibility of alliances between feminists of a range of identities and backgrounds. The 'gender experts' in development organisations are under fire from similar analyses: they are seen to be complicit in the denigration of indigenous knowledge, for example by accepting planning frameworks as universally applicable and as superior to any other form of problem-solving. The hegemony of western feminism, and its consequences for women's equality throughout the world, presents perhaps the greatest personal and professional challenge to those in the North who, like myself, work on gender and development.

It has been pointed out that individual feminists can seek a solution to this dilemma by engaging in various forms of micro-politics (Parpart 1995). This means being active in struggles which are 'embedded in the daily lives of individuals', in order to redefine the practices and discourses of the institutions they inhabit. This form of feminist activism can involve individuals in all aspects of their identity, such as gender, class, race, and so on. This position is adopted by those who are attempting to bring gender 'home' to development institutions. Micro-politics are said to offer the possibility of avoiding feminist post-colonial domination, and to be valid cross-culturally. Presumably micro-politics are not proposed as an alternative to 'collective action by women' (Parpart 1995, p.19) which many, including myself, believe to be one of the fundamental tenets of feminism, despite its conceptual and practical difficulties.

Another answer to the problem of western feminist hegemony argues that women's groups and movements in the South have their own voices, through which they are able to 'resist and delegitimise dominant discourses' (Marchand 1995, p.71). This resonates with proposals by feminists from the South to establish alliances of women's movements that span differences of geographical location and power (Sen and Grown 1987).

The two answers are obviously complementary. But while the first is open to me as an individual, the second must be adopted by the organisation I work with, by recognising and fostering the potential of women's organisations in the South. In my view, Oxfam has been slow to support, financially or otherwise, the practical, analytical, and conceptual work of feminists and their organisations. I consider that this is one of the main reasons why, at least at head office, many find it hard to speak of feminism. As one colleague pointed out, 'the language of feminist thought is tough to get through if you are not accustomed to it, and it is hard for non-feminist organisations to translate important concepts into their policy and communication work' (Becky Buell, personal communication 1997).

Fear of feminism

Currently, most people in Oxfam seem to be more comfortable to speak of 'gender and development' (GAD) than of feminism. Of course there has already been a shift from the less political language of 'women in development' (WID) which preceded it. In many parts of the organisation, the demise of WID and the rise of GAD have been accepted, and the limitations of isolated 'women's projects' acknowledged — as can be seen from many articles in this book, including Alice Iddi's. But even if a gender relations analysis is now recognised as an indispensable tool for understanding inequality in our societies, this does not necessarily mean that people embrace the political agenda of feminism. Feminism, in its many variants, is rooted in the recognition of women's oppression at all levels (Moore 1988); 'feminism is not a one-dimensional social critique, but a multi-layered, transformational, political practice and ethics' (Wieringa 1995, p.3). I think it is from this notion of feminism as political practice, as well as from the language of transformation, that most development organisations—including Oxfam—shy away.

Feminist debates

Publishing in Oxfam has provided notable exceptions to the silence on feminism in Oxfam generally: *The Oxfam Handbook of Development and Relief*, *The Oxfam Gender Training Manual*, and the recent book on women's empowerment by Jo Rowlands (1997) all present strong challenges to this pervasive caution, while Oxfam's international journal *Gender and Development* has consistently engaged with feminist debates, their relationship to development, and to Oxfam's work.¹⁴

Yet internal reports, correspondence, and much unpublished 'grey literature' which circulates in Oxfam are mostly silent on the subject of feminism. Within the Policy Department, where I work, a recent catalogue of internal papers on a

range of subjects lists 192 documents; of those, only two mention feminism. Similarly, in my experience, feminism is not really discussed in corridor, telephone, and e-mail conversations, correspondence, and at meetings, while people are relatively at ease with terms such as gender, gender policies and strategies, and even with the new usage of the verb 'engendering'.

Oxfam's projects

A search of the Oxfam database, which lists all projects supported by the organisation since the early 1990s, is also instructive. It reveals that less than 100 out of over 15,000 entries use the terms 'feminism' or 'feminist' (or equivalents in other languages).

The projects database has obvious limitations as a source of information on attitudes at Oxfam House, because most entries are based on proposals submitted by partner organisations — but the summaries are written by staff in Oxford. I suggest that Oxfam staff perceive a dominant non-feminist stance in the organisation, and conform to it by opting for the less confrontational language of 'gender' and 'women'. I have confirmed that proposals employing controversial language are re-phrased and toned down in order to secure approval for funding. How often this self-censorship goes further than merely the choice of wording and affects the actual choice of partner organisations or project activities, probably depends on a variety of factors. But this phenomenon will certainly have a profound impact on the nature of Oxfam's work.

Other issues follow from the results of my database search. First of all, the degree of Oxfam's overt engagement with feminist practice and ideas varies considerably in various regions of the world. For instance, the Latin American and Caribbean region appears fully conversant with, and active in, explicitly feminist initiatives. This may be due to the region's vigorous tradition of feminism, but it is also due to programme staff who responded sympathetically and creatively to particular opportunities.¹⁵ In other regions and countries, for example in India and Lebanon, an equally challenging dialogue with local feminist organisations and fora appears to be taking place. Elsewhere, there is less overt engagement, although individual members of staff were, and still are, deeply committed to feminism and active in feminist initiatives, networks, and organisations.¹⁶

Oxfam has engaged in some explicitly 'feminist' initiatives as an organisation. Before and after the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, there were considerable exchanges and discussions with women's organisations on the themes of the Platforms for Action, in many countries where Oxfam works. However, these various forms of engagement have not all been recorded centrally, and the ideas which sprang from this engagement with the international women's

movement have rarely been followed up fully (see Candida March's article on Oxfam's Women's Linking Project), nor have they become common currency in the organisation as a whole in an explicit and influential manner.

Entering the household

The projects database reveals another sign that many in Oxfam — at least at Oxfam House — are uncomfortable with feminism as a concept. I perceived reluctance to look at the household in our development work. It is generally agreed that feminists have made the personal political, and extended the boundaries of what constitutes social reality and policies into the private sphere (Clough 1994). It is also acknowledged that even after the importance of this sphere of social life has been formally accepted (UNDP 1995), most northern NGOs, including Oxfam, have been unable or unwilling to enter it. As White (1997) points out, so-called 'women's programmes' often extend women's working hours. Yet organisations which promote such programmes do little to encourage men to relieve their wives, sisters, or daughters of this increased burden by sharing responsibility for housework or other traditionally 'female' tasks. This neglect demonstrates development agencies' unwillingness to challenge norms and practices dominant within the household, especially when doing so would question male roles and privilege.

Violence against women

Another illustration of development organisations' unease with feminism is the long period of time that they have taken to recognise violence against women as a development issue. Oxfam's mandate is to 'alleviate poverty, and relieve distress and suffering'. Statistics and qualitative information about the universality, incidence, and severity of domestic violence (UN 1989, Caputi and Russell 1992) document the scale of the distress and suffering it causes to vast numbers of women. In several countries, Oxfam supports activities and organisations which work with survivors of domestic violence, often addressing legal and welfare aspects of the problem.

In various parts of former Yugoslavia, during the recent war and its aftermath women have been subject to intensified violence. One of Oxfam's strategic aims in former Yugoslavia is 'to empower women to challenge the causes and alleviate the effects of gender-based suffering caused by patriarchal structuring of society and exacerbated by armed conflict'. Oxfam has also gained experience in combating violence against women in South Africa through supporting programmes such as People Opposing Women Abuse, which provides services to women who have experienced sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. More recently, Oxfam has supported the Programme for the Survivors of

Violence in KwaZulu Natal, which confronts men's violence in the community and seeks to educate the perpetrators, rather than only target women.

Unfortunately, Oxfam supports few programmes which, in my view, explicitly address gender-related violence. Our work on domestic and other gender-related violence is not the outcome of a systematic analysis of its causes and consequences, nor of an organisational strategy, which would ensure that priorities and directions are set, and impact is measured. Formulating a strategy on gender-related violence appears all the more pressing in the light of Oxfam's growing interest in post-conflict concerns such as rehabilitation and re-integration of soldiers into communities.

Reasons for rejecting overt engagement with 'feminism'

Defence of local culture

One of the most frequently voiced concerns within Oxfam about gender equality is that this perspective imposes priorities and world-views which are at odds with local values and cultures.¹⁷ I cannot fail to note a double standard here. As Metha puts it: 'Why is it that challenging gender inequalities is seen as tampering with traditions or culture, and thus taboo, while challenging inequalities in terms of wealth and class is not?' (1991, p.286) Despite the paradox, in my experience the fear of imposing inappropriate, western views and practices on gender continues to be keenly felt in Oxfam's head office. The absence of feminist language implies that this would be even more unacceptable in ethical terms than the language of gender, and more dangerous in terms of programme strategy.

Acceptance of 'pop-feminism'

I suspect that development agencies' reticence to use feminist terms and ideas is partly a result of their unconscious acceptance of what Eisenstein (1997) calls 'pop-feminism'. In most western countries, many of the issues which, 20 years ago, only concerned the women's movement — a sizeable, but still comparatively limited number of women — are now widely discussed. Equal opportunities at work, sexual harassment, and violence against women have become 'mainstream concerns' (Mann 1997). However, according to Eisenstein, their popularisation occurs hand in hand with an extreme simplification and misrepresentation of feminism. 'Western feminism' has been depicted globally in a way that ignores its diversity and its complexities. Ironically, pop-feminism both sanitises feminism's radical roots and demonises them, by presenting to global audiences skewed versions which emphasise individualism, female supremacism, 'victimhood', and an over-preoccupation with sexuality. I am not denying that variants of

western feminism may suffer from these flaws, nor am I rejecting the validity of some of the criticisms of western feminism mentioned earlier. I am merely suggesting that some of our organisations, in their reluctance to consider feminism seriously, appear to have accepted such myths.

Perhaps the most detrimental aspect of such perceptions of feminism is that they ignore feminism's rootedness in women's specific experiences: 'Feminism itself refers to political movements that emerge in specific historical conjunctures, and we may expect various forms of feminisms to bear the mark of their political, cultural and historical context' (Gal 1997, p.31). It is obviously wrong to assume that western feminism is applicable and relevant to other contexts, especially when we consider the unequal power relations between western countries and the developing world. But, as Gal's statement indicates, there are many feminisms, each with its distinct history, problems, and achievements.

Anxiety over feminism as a political project

Resistance to feminist thinking and language is often justified by saying that Oxfam, as a charity, cannot embrace any overall political project. In fact, all of Oxfam's work recognises a political element in the complex causes of poverty, and addresses this in its advocacy and community-development work. But the thinking is that by grounding our work in our own experience of the complexity of women's and men's poverty, and its causes, we will stay within the boundaries of the laws governing charitable activities. Moreover, while this reason for refusing to debate feminist ideas using feminist language might be understandable as an explanation of the less than wholesale acceptance of feminism as a political agenda, it is not sufficient to justify the uninformed dismissal, fear, and scorn of feminist ideas which I have encountered in Oxfam.

Closet feminists

I suspect that in many cases, individual staff members are reluctant to debate feminism in the office because they have made a tactical decision not to do so. This is because they wish to carry out work which may be inspired by feminist principles and practices, in an environment inimical to them. Sadly, the earlier practices of the specialist unit in Oxfam's head office (the Gender and Development Unit, later re-named the Gender and Learning Team) may have contributed to the problem. By claiming for itself exclusive expertise and responsibility for feminist analysis, it may have stifled the emergence of creative, open debates from other locations within the organisation.

Staff members have sometimes solved these situations by becoming ‘closet feminists’, who continue working and interacting with feminist organisations and ideas, or who support women to gain a stronger voice and increased legitimacy within social movements, but who avoid the overt language of feminism. In these cases, the neutral terminology of gender has helped otherwise more radical thoughts and initiatives gain acceptability. A gender discourse can offer both a valid set of tools for the analysis of social relations, and the possibility for feminist practice and thinking ‘in disguise’. For some Oxfam staff, this has created the space to develop feminist practice, in ways which are both relevant and acceptable to different external and internal contexts.

However, this strategy is not without its price. One of the consequences has been to allow the organisation’s dominant anti-feminist culture to remain largely unchallenged. In addition, work carried out firmly within feminist principles and practices has not been acknowledged as such, and important learning opportunities have been lost. Similarly, the practice of ‘closet-feminism’ within Oxfam has at times alienated feminists outside the organisation, and discouraged those inside it. For instance, Oxfam’s Middle East office in Beirut organised a recent workshop for staff and partner organisations to explore the concept of gender, and gender-planning methods. Participants from local women’s organisations perceived this approach as an anti-feminist ploy, aimed at validating and strengthening—in theory and practice—dominant gender roles.

Conclusions

Organisations such as Oxfam find it safer not to use the language and practices of feminism. One possible explanation for this is that most development organisations are not engaging with the ‘feminisms’ represented by women’s organisations worldwide; another is that they may be reacting to mass-marketed pop-feminism. Anti-feminist attitudes within development organisations, and the belief that feminist language and thought would clash with local cultures, also provide an explanation. The reaction is to remain safely within the boundaries of the less contentious gender and development discourse.

I do not propose that development agencies such as Oxfam should become ‘feminist organisations’, with the sole goal of struggling against patriarchal structures and norms. Also, I do not deny that a gender discourse can be radical and transformational: gender and development can be about strategies to redress gender based inequalities and hierarchies of power (Macdonald 1994). In my opinion, the language of gender and of feminism are complementary, rather than either antagonistic or synonymous.

But a rose by any other name may not smell as sweet. I maintain that the lack of explicit and critical engagement with feminist terms and ideas in development organisations inhibits them from participating fully in debates about different forms of social mobilisation. At the practical level, their attitude means that they fail to give sufficient support and opportunity to individuals and groups among their own staff who are dedicated to feminism in its many forms. Similarly, it prevents agencies such as Oxfam from working together with the feminist organisations in the South which are formed as a result of local analyses of women's circumstances - however different their feminism may be from western feminism. These are also the very organisations which develop powerful critiques of local culture, and who would thus offer a way out of the 'gender and culture' dilemma in which so many development organisations seem to be stuck.

About the author

Ines Smyth is a social anthropologist with a PhD from University College London. She taught development studies in several academic institutions before joining Oxfam in 1996. Her areas of expertise and interest are gender theory, gender and industrialisation, and reproductive rights. Among her most recent publications are *Searching for Security: The Impact on Women of Economic Transformations* (edited with Isa Baud), Routledge, 1997.

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Personnel management in crisis: Experience from Afghanistan

Sue Emmott

Introduction

In September 1996, the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban forces took control of Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, and immediately prohibited women from working and girls from going to school. Oxfam GB was thus faced with an extreme and direct challenge to its institutional Gender Policy. The abrupt change from a situation where women were actively involved in the relief and rehabilitation process in their country both as employees and beneficiaries, compromised Oxfam's principles to the extent that the programme was suspended.

The main focus of this case study is on human-resource management. I describe the attempts to develop a gender-sensitive programme with both men and women, and the response of agencies and individuals in the wake of the Taliban take-over. In an Oxfam programme, teams are multi-cultural, composed of both national staff and expatriates, and the issues affecting them are often very different. Balancing the varying needs and the power relations in such a team is one of the most difficult tasks facing a manager (especially a woman manager), and there are no easy solutions on offer here.

Oxfam's mandate and Gender Policy

The fact that Oxfam GB had a Gender Policy placed it in a unique position among international agencies in Kabul when Taliban forces took over the city. Although the effects of an extreme form of Islam were felt by all agencies, it was only Oxfam

which had both a desire and an obligation to address the issue of gender directly. Within Oxfam, this was also the first time that the Gender Policy would be tested in such a public way.

The Oxfam Gender Policy states that sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty cannot be achieved unless gender-related inequalities are addressed. It acknowledges that gender-related oppression varies according to context, as do women's opportunities for involvement in development, and indicates that Oxfam's responses to the issues will be sensitive to local circumstances, respecting the capacity and strategies of local women for change. Of the five objectives of the Gender Policy, two are particularly relevant to the Afghanistan programme. One commits Oxfam to developing positive action to promote the full participation and empowerment of women, in order to ensure that men and women benefit equally in development. The other commits Oxfam to confront the social and ideological barriers to women's participation and encourage initiatives to improve their status and basic rights.

At field level, having established a programme in Kabul based precisely on those objectives, it was clear that we could not ignore Taliban's edict that women were not allowed to work and girls not permitted to attend school. Within a few days we had suspended the programme, pending negotiations with Taliban, on the grounds that we could not achieve our aims without female staff. In addition, after full discussion with all the male staff, we requested them to stay at home until such time as their female colleagues were permitted to return to work. In Kabul such an action was possible, because women have long been active in the workforce at all levels, and all our male staff had wives who worked and daughters who attended school. A capital city is very different from the rural areas, and one of the main problems of Taliban's edicts was the imposition of rural, tribal norms on an urban and often liberal-minded population.

Having worried about their future during 17 years of war, and seen women play a crucial role while many men were fighting, many Kabulis realise that the country cannot recover without the participation of women. However, under recent regimes, it is a rare person who feels able to speak out against abuses of basic rights, so there was a sense that Oxfam could and should say what local people themselves would like to. During the following months, all aspects of policy development were fully discussed with all staff, to ensure that it was their needs which were being met and not the organisation which was pursuing its own agenda. This was important because, in the NGO co-ordination forum, there was a dominant tendency for aid workers to speak about what they thought Afghans wanted, rather than what they actually wanted. This was particularly true of cross-border agencies, hostile to, but ignorant of, the previous communist regime in Kabul.

Although the decision to suspend the programme was taken quickly, it was discussed in fine detail both in Kabul and in Oxford. From the outset it was known that, although we wished to negotiate with Taliban for the return of women to work, the cultural and religious distance between such a fundamentalist movement and a liberal Western aid agency was likely to render negotiations impossible. Therefore, we had to agree that, in the absence of a change in the situation, Oxfam would either withdraw from Kabul or maintain the suspension of its programme. Given that Oxfam's mandate is to relieve poverty, distress, and suffering, we also had to be confident that a long suspension would not harm the very people we were aiming to assist.

In terms of the programme, although we had conducted a very successful winter relief programme, which had proved that it was possible to reach women beneficiaries through women staff with the full co-operation of men, the main strategic aim was sustainable rehabilitation, rather than emergency relief. There were other agencies who had greater capacity in relief work and had been in Kabul longer, so Oxfam had decided to focus on restoration of the city water supply, which would have long-lasting benefit for a large number of people. Essential community-level surveys, communication and education work with and through women would be impossible under the Taliban regime, and, as water had not flowed through the mains for four years and the programme was proceeding very slowly anyway, a suspension for a few months was felt to be relatively harmless. In line with the Gender Policy, and on the basis of sound experience, Oxfam believed that a water programme could not succeed without the participation of women. Furthermore, Oxfam was likely to be the only agency willing to speak out, and it seemed to be important that someone did.

Communicating the reasons for suspension was very difficult. With Taliban it was almost impossible, because their beliefs about the role and status of women are at opposite ends of the spectrum from Oxfam's. But it was also very difficult to communicate our policy to other agencies. The decision to suspend work was greeted with both admiration and distaste. Among those who attended co-ordination meetings there was a wide variation in understanding of development issues in general, and gender-related concerns in particular. The quality of debate was therefore often poor. Some agencies, having accepted the conventional view that it is difficult to work with women in Islamic societies, employed few or no women. Some did employ women, and regretted the ban, but did not see it as in their interest or within their power to contest it. At first some quietly defied the ban. With such a wide range of views and responses, it is not surprising that agencies were variously grateful to Oxfam for raising the issues they themselves preferred not to, or resentful that attention was being drawn to them if they carried on as normal.

The debate in Afghanistan has been a muddled one. For most agencies and aid workers, the gender debate is about women and women's programmes. When the subject of women's rights is raised, other agencies usually respond by arguing that men as well as women are affected by Taliban policies, being forced for example to grow beards and pray in the mosque. Gender, it is argued, cannot be viewed in isolation from human rights in general. For Oxfam, gender is about the relations between men and women. In some Islamic societies, it is impossible to work with women and men together, but that was not the case in pre-Taliban Kabul. In our programme, although only women were able to gain access to homes and to women, they could not work effectively without the support of male colleagues for logistics and security, nor without the facilitation of their work by male community leaders. The programme in Kabul was about meeting the needs of women and families by respecting and working within the roles they define for themselves. It is only after trust is developed that it is appropriate to work sensitively in a way which furthers empowerment.

Gender and human-resource management

In all Oxfam's work in Afghanistan, gender relations had been a key theme. From the beginning of the programme in Kabul, it was the intention to ensure that women and men had equal opportunities to work with us. Although many women had paid work in Kabul, and would like a job with an international agency, it was not easy to recruit women with relevant skills and language capability. Therefore, in addition to advertising it was necessary to make special efforts to 'headhunt' suitable women, using whatever networks were available. Rather than require experience for a particular job such as administration, which would exclude women candidates, the criteria were set as a good standard of English and an aptitude to learn. For programme staff, although communication was difficult and their own learning hindered because materials are in English, we recruited capable, skilled women with little or no English, and a translator to assist them. In many agencies, the women who are employed are those with good English who often have no work experience. It is also the case that translators, by virtue of being able to communicate with expatriates, are often promoted to powerful positions, while more senior women are by-passed. For work with communities, the most important characteristics are empathy, sensitivity, and maturity. Of course, this can mean that standards have to be relaxed, for example in report writing, but it is important when recruiting to remember whose needs are really being served. Many a potentially good programme for women fails because programme officers are recruited on the basis of fluency in English rather than experience.

Because the programme in Kabul was new, it was possible to achieve a good gender balance among the staff. In established programmes, where men are predominant, it is very difficult to alter the balance, and it is usually possible to recruit women only when male staff leave. Some agencies in Kabul had set up programmes during hostilities, when it would have been impossible to employ women, and this created a situation which made gender-fair recruitment later on more difficult. A feature of countries in conflict is that paid employment is scarce, and those fortunate enough to have jobs with well-paying agencies tend not to leave, so male domination can become entrenched. Even where a positive effort is made to recruit women, it is critically important to provide the kind of environment in which they feel comfortable. A lone woman can feel alienated and unsupported — a point which applies equally to Afghan women and expatriates.

Not only women were recruited to work for Oxfam on the basis of an Equal Opportunities Policy. We made efforts to recruit disabled people, also successfully. We hired a woman teacher, severely disabled during a rocket attack, who had begun a very promising project with disabled women. But it was Oxfam's effort to recruit women, and the success of their involvement as programme staff, office staff, cooks, and cleaners which strengthened the desire to protect their rights by suspending the programme rather than see them so disenfranchised. In the early days, word spread very quickly that Oxfam had sent the male staff home because the women had to stay home. There is no doubt that Oxfam's women staff felt enormously supported by this move, and women in other agencies also felt encouraged that such a stand was made on their behalf. In my opinion, it was an essential part of communicating the message that our women staff were genuinely equal to the men, so much so that the programme could not run without them. In the early days it was not difficult to adopt such pure principles. In contrast, some other agencies immediately recruited men to take women's jobs.

The genuinely gender-friendly environment in the Oxfam office had been enjoyed by all who worked there, so the absence of the women was sorely felt. Although the women were the main sufferers, the male staff in the office felt the absence of their female colleagues acutely and were very genuine in their praise of the women's roles. One of the male staff poignantly observed that men and women in society were like the wings of a bird. Without one wing, a bird cannot fly.

Expatriate aid workers and gender issues

Most aid workers in Afghanistan are men, and they are generally reluctant to attach particular importance to women's involvement in the relief and rehabilitation process, for fear that it will damage co-operation with the authorities. This

has been the case since the early 1980s, through the long 13-year *jihad* (Holy War) of the *mujahideen* against the communist government. Soviet forces occupied various cities of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1993 and, although the position and status of many women improved greatly, the introduction of education for women had been at the heart of the resistance. Among the three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan, education programmes for women were fiercely resisted at first; but gradually they became accepted, and female expatriates have been able to design and manage programmes with some success. However, men's perceptions of what types of project are possible with women still tend to determine what programmes are attempted. Perhaps one of the main obstacles to a good gender-oriented programme is the tendency of male aid workers to make assumptions about limitations, rather than to test those assumptions carefully and gently push the boundaries. In the worst case, this means that women are effectively excluded, a point which applies equally to Afghans and expatriates. In the case of internationally recruited women staff, it has often been their male colleagues who exclude them from certain postings or refuse to allow them to meet with the authorities. Yet, even in Afghanistan under Taliban, it has been the exception rather than the rule that women have been rejected by male colleagues.

These points have major implications for the management of programmes in Afghanistan. My appointment, as the first female representative in Afghanistan, was the result of enlightened management at headquarters and the rejection from the outset of the predominant view that a woman could not do the job. One of the advantages of an Equal Opportunities Policy is that it shifts the responsibility for deciding whether or not a woman can do the job to the woman herself, rather than the appointing manager. In other less enlightened or less professional agencies, women would not be considered for senior management positions. Indeed, in Kabul during co-ordination meetings, some men were quite open in their view that, if Taliban refused to meet women, the agency should send men in their place. In fact I was never denied the opportunity to meet Taliban authorities (although some women have been excluded in some locations), and I worked to ensure that my male colleagues would support me in the event that I was asked to leave a meeting. There had been an unfortunate experience in Herat in which the one woman Programme Manager was requested to leave a meeting by Taliban, while her male colleagues remained silent and continued without her. Taliban have never prohibited expatriate women from working, provided that they adhere to a modest dress code.

Male expatriates tend, therefore, to accommodate restrictive views almost automatically, and fail to push the boundaries of acceptability unless they have no choice. In that respect the presence of increasing numbers of women working in Afghanistan, regardless of the regime in power, has the potential to make a lasting

impact on Afghan women. One of the most rewarding aspects of my role as Representative was to be seen as a role model by aspiring Afghan women. They would observe, from experience with other agencies, that Oxfam was different, in that it did not just talk about gender, but made real efforts to involve women beyond those recruited specifically for a women's programme. These effects are far-reaching, as evidenced after the suspension when, it would seem, my name and Oxfam's became well known as the supporters of women. (After women were ordered to stay at home, their sources of news were male family members who went outside, and the radio, which reported intensively on the situation of women in the early days.) In advocacy terms it is highly likely that a woman manager has more power than a man.

The most difficult aspect of being a woman manager in Afghanistan was not the constraints imposed by fundamentalist Islam, as most people imagine. It was the difficulty of managing expatriates, and men in particular. My perception of Afghan Islam is that the criteria for acceptability are one's competence in the job and one's perceived sincerity and integrity. Male or female identity is then less important. However, where Afghans are accepting, expatriates may reject, and some of the most difficult challenges to my authority came from older expatriate men who had difficulty in being managed by a woman. They seemed to be from a different 'gender generation', and they justified prejudices which would be unacceptable in a Western context by arguing that Equal Opportunities had little place in a fundamentalist environment.

Although there are certainly difficulties in being a woman manager, there are also some advantages. My impression, in dealing with government officials or checkpoint guards or warlords, is that they are less suspicious and do not expect women to have ulterior, political, motives. They also seem more prepared to discuss failings in the system which prevent aid being effective, without feeling that they are losing face. I was always received very politely in contrast to the experience of some of my male colleagues, especially the younger, more aggressive ones, who often found doors closed to them. The main disadvantage for me was my relative lack of access to informal tea-room discussions, but this is not so different from the old-boy networking which goes on in bars in the West. What is interesting, however, is that male aid workers' perceptions of the difficulties of being a woman manager are different from the reality; and their perceptions can be easily translated into unequal opportunity.

In terms of threat to my authority, the greatest challenge came in the management of security. At Oxfam headquarters there is a belief that security guidelines can be drawn up and implemented through a rational process which everyone agrees to. This is far from being the case, and human nature is such that people deeply resent curfews, dress codes, or alcohol restrictions and will flout

them regardless of the risk to themselves or others. Men, in particular, often have a fascination with war and guns, and an almost naïve belief that they can do as they please without coming to any harm. As a manager, with attacks on aid workers becoming increasingly common, it is highly stressful to be responsible for staff security in such conditions, and the antagonisms which develop can find no outlet for safe expression in such confined environments.

In complex emergencies, especially those such as Afghanistan which are not highly publicised, it is extremely difficult to recruit experienced aid workers. The restrictions of lifestyle, especially for women, are a major deterrent, and job advertisements yield a very poor response. Far from making ideal appointments, agencies often find themselves scraping the barrel. It is often argued at headquarters that recruitment procedures should be improved, but the reality is that, with increasing numbers of conflict-related emergencies in the world, there are simply not enough experienced aid workers to go around. Although there are many things which would improve retention of staff, the bottom line is that the abnormality of the lifestyle and the stress mean that few remain more than two or three years. One of the main lessons I learned as a first-time senior manager, following two particularly problematic appointments, was that it is probably better not to appoint at all, to the extent that a planned project cannot go ahead, than to appoint inappropriately. The current debate about the need to professionalise emergency aid recognises the problem, but any possible solutions would require investment of resources — which the donors to the voluntary agencies are unlikely to support.

Ultimately, as foreigners in a country, we are symbols of our culture. In the tense and enclosed environment of Kabul, living under curfew, some expatriates need to seek release through parties and risky activities. In positions of far greater power than they could attain in their own countries, they feel they can behave as they wish, ignoring cultural norms and security guidelines. The partying behaviour of Western women, for example, out and about in the company of many different men, may not attract undue attention in some other cultures but, in fundamentalist Afghanistan, where women are always escorted by a male relative, they are perceived to be 'loose', and this can compromise a whole programme and create a highly antagonistic situation. Where they work with local women, they do not seem to understand how their own reputations may reflect negatively on their staff and possibly endanger them.

International women in Kabul were of two types: there were the party animals, often very young and on short-term assignments, and those who observed the restrictions and developed a commitment to the cause of gender and development; this often went beyond professional responsibilities to become a deeply held personal conviction about what is right and just. For my

own part, having established a new country office, recruiting all the staff and playing a key role in the development of a programme, my relationship with those colleagues and with the long-suffering citizens of Kabul went beyond the professional into the personal. It was therefore extremely frustrating that most aid workers found gender issues to be of marginal importance.

Not only do most aid workers have a limited understanding of gender, they also know little of the universal standards regarding equality and women's rights such as the UN Declaration on Human Rights and the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Where these are known about, as in the UN agencies, there is no mechanism for translating standards into action on the ground, and most field workers have felt ill-prepared for challenges such as the Taliban decrees on the status of women and girls. The result is that, rather than being guided by agreed principles, actions result from simplistic and frequently uninformed notions of cultural specificity.

Conclusion

Having a Gender Policy in Oxfam was invaluable in clarifying strategy and response when women's rights were restricted in Kabul. Although many people would not know the content of the policy exactly, every employee is bound to it in his or her terms of reference for the job. The framework for response was therefore set, in contrast to most other agencies, who struggled with the issue in a relative vacuum. For Oxfam, all that remained was to work on the detail of *how* to respond, rather than *whether* to respond. In human-resource terms, the appointment of a woman Representative, committed to maximising the involvement of women and supported by the Gender Policy, meant that the Kabul programme was gender-sensitive from the outset. In an unfavourable environment, special efforts had to be made to recruit, train, and support women and then to remain supportive of them when they were prohibited from working. It was important that Oxfam not only advocated gender-fair development, but was seen to be practising it.

As a woman manager I encountered many difficulties over and above those faced by men. Many are no different from those facing women managers in the West. However, the management of expatriates, both male and female, in a fundamentalist Islamic society which was a very restricting and very insecure environment, was extremely stressful and made me feel very isolated.

The Oxfam programme in Kabul remains suspended, more than a year later. During that time the Gender Policy has been subject to continuous challenge, but, in defining a set of core principles for Oxfam, it has helped to focus the debate

on those principles. The suspension has been both admired and criticised. The main criticism is usually that suspension helps no-one and may worsen the situation of those who most need help. In the end, much of the focus on gender is about strategic rather than practical gender needs, and women's rights have been so severely eroded in Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan that at least one agency has acknowledged the need to look beyond the short term and to face the challenge of the future.

About the author

Sue Emmott was the Oxfam Country Representative in Afghanistan in 1995/96. She is a nurse and midwife with a first degree in Social Policy and a Master's degree in Health Education. Much of her professional work has been in situations of conflict, always with a focus on gender issues. Following her management experience in Afghanistan, she studied for her MBA at Cambridge University and is now working as Health Systems and Institutional Development Adviser with the UK government's Department for International Development in India.

Rhetoric to reality: A psychological approach

Wendy Carson

Concepts of 'gender relations' instil fear and evoke resistance among both men and women. Perhaps this resistance evolves from the definition of gender itself.¹⁸

People are born female or male, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. They are taught what the appropriate behaviour and attitudes, roles and activities are for them, and how they should relate to other people. This learned behaviour is what makes up gender identity, and determines gender roles. Gender describes those characteristics which are socially determined, as opposed to those which are biologically determined. Socially determined characteristics can and do change over time and according to social and cultural factors.
(Williams 1994)

Change is a theme throughout this definition. Integral to change is the element of uncertainty, invoking fear and anxiety of the unknown. When fears and anxieties are not acknowledged, they may lead to resistance toward changing the familiar. Organisational change toward greater gender equality must acknowledge and address these blocking agents: uncertainty, fear, anxiety, resistance, and sabotage.

In this article, I will present from a psychological perspective examples of these agents at work within the organisational life of Oxfam GB, and how they affect the goal of changing it. Through the words of both present and past Oxfam employees, the article illustrates the dichotomy between the rhetoric of gender equity within Oxfam, and a rather different reality.

The basis for this contribution is information collected in 1995 for a case study of gender relations within Oxfam GB (Carson 1995). The study focused primarily on Oxfam's International Division. Participants were present or

former employees in the Oxfam UK/I head office and one of the African country offices. They included both men and women, with occupations ranging from country office watchman to corporate director.

Oxfam took a lead among NGOs in establishing a gender and development unit in 1985; it was also among the first agencies to institute a formal Gender Policy addressing both programmatic and organisational gender issues. This reflects Oxfam's awareness that, to provide a quality emergency and development programme, programmatic gender policies must be mirrored in organisational structures and processes. It is not sufficient to address gender relations in development work alone; promoting gender relations must be an integral component of organisational development.

A psychological approach to organisational culture

Examining the culture of Weber in Oxfam

In the nineteenth century, Max Weber developed a bureaucratic model of organising which has dominated organisational and managerial thought throughout this century. His writings were born out of the growing capitalist value systems of maximising profit by impersonalising the system. Thus, his description of 'rational' organisational excellence specifies a rigid hierarchy, top-down communication, specific role definition, rationality, and the separation of the public and private spheres of life. It is devoid of love, hatred, and 'all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation' (Weber 1978). Weber maintains that this method of organising is the epitome of efficiency resulting in technical superiority.

Jargon such as 'strategic management', 'minimum standards', 'rational arguments', 'workforce productivity', 'delivering', 'defending your corner', 'results-oriented', 'task-driven' and the 'non-professional connotations of emotion', which dominates the language of Oxfam staff, suggests the integration of some of Weber's bureaucratic principles in Oxfam's organisational culture. Compounding this impression is the view that being more effective at achieving operational goals at the expense of employee well-being is acceptable. This is reflected in this corporate manager's words:

When you look at what, over the last two years, we've managed to achieve in our programme overseas and in our fund-raising, we're now in a position where we continue to expand and, I believe, be more effective in fighting poverty ...

I think part of the price that Oxfam has paid is that we haven't spent as much time and attention on ourselves, internally, on our own human-resources aspects. That is why people are feeling the stress of change. But if you say that we're

actually here to fight poverty as the primary objective, then that's why I would say I believe, having the same decision, I'd do the same again, because we have been more effective at fighting poverty.

Many contemporary organisations continue to rely on rational scientific management or the 'machine model' of organising (Bowles 1990), having adopted, to a lesser or greater extent, Weber's theories. Rather than recognising the limits of rationality, the pattern of organisational development appears to be moving towards achieving greater rationality, systematisation, tightening, and codification. In other words, we are moving towards the Weberian ideal.

Explaining Weber with Jung

Rationality is a key element in Jung's theory of the personal unconscious. It is one feature in the description of the *animus*. The *animus* or 'masculine' aspect is defined by Jung as the rational, analytical, objective, and logical aspect of the human psyche. Conversely he describes the *anima* or 'feminine' aspect as the intuitive, social, feeling, and irrational aspect. These psychological elements are independent of biological sex and all individuals, male and female, have both the *animus* and the *anima* in their psychological make-up. In most individuals' psyches, however, either the *animus* or the *anima* assumes a more dominant position, leaving the opposing element to be pushed into the unconscious.

The second component of Jung's theory of the unconscious is referred to as the collective unconscious, which is the hereditary blueprint of the human mind's evolution. According to Jung, the collective unconscious represents the sum of human thought as it has evolved throughout human existence. Jung articulates the collective unconscious through archetypes, which, he argues, developed as a tool to structure our understanding of the world in manageable ways. Some organisational theorists have adapted Jung's theories of the personal and collective unconscious to describe and understand the behaviour of organisations (Handy:1991 and Bowles:1993).

Rhetoric versus reality

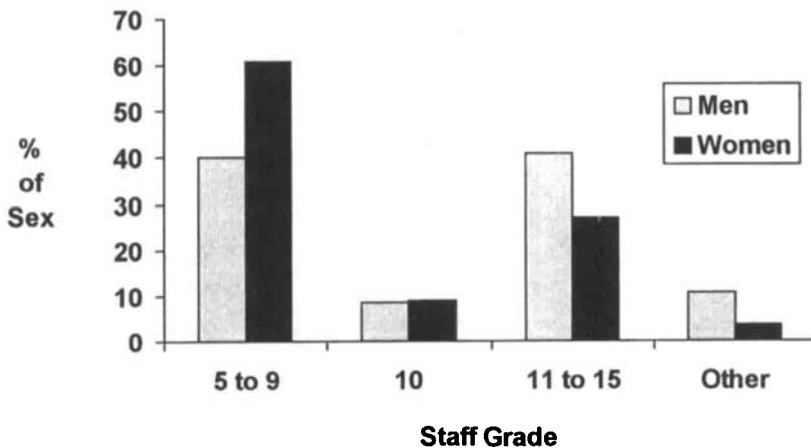
Despite a liberal and innovative policy rhetoric on gender explicitly outlined in the Oxfam Gender Policy, the perspectives of employees, both women and men, describe a reality not different from what research has found in other organisational sectors. Patterns of gender relations in the workplace such as vertical and horizontal segregation; the 'glass ceiling' at the level of middle management; the 'double shift'; equity models of equal opportunities initiatives; and an imbalance of confidence between men and women, are equally prominent in Oxfam.

Vertical and horizontal occupational segregation

Occupational segregation explains the division of paid work on the basis of sex. This can occur both within organisational sectors (vertical segregation) and between organisational sectors (horizontal segregation).¹⁹

At Oxfam's UK headquarters, 63 per cent of total employees are women, yet most of them hold lower-graded posts. This invariably translates into lower remuneration, less responsibility, lower status, and less influence on decision-making. Figure 1 compares the grades of women and men throughout Oxfam's UK headquarters. This figure clearly represents vertical segregation in Oxfam.

Figure 1: Oxfam staff distribution (staff grade by sex)



This phenomenon is often referred to as the middle-managerial glass ceiling: a barrier which allows women to see what occurs on the other, higher level, but which prevents them from ascending to those higher organisational positions. In essence, the glass ceiling effectively prevents women from participating in senior decision making. The glass ceiling in Figure 1, representing Oxfam as a whole, occurs at grade 10 (Oxfam GB's grading ranges from grade 7 to 15). For the International Division taken in isolation, the glass ceiling has shifted to grade 11.

Men and women interviewed for the study recognised that women could be found in the 'usual sectors such as personnel', indicating a form of horizontal segregation. 'Women's departments' tend to be those departments which are removed from any genuine decision-making power. They are often service- and people-oriented departments, rather than strategic, task-oriented departments. Tasks performed in these departments tend to mirror women's unpaid domestic and caring work in the home.

The double shift

One of the factors contributing to the strength and integrity of the middle-managerial glass ceiling is the prominence of the 'double shift'. The term describes how women engaged in full-time paid work outside the home are often expected by their partners and society to carry the 'lion's share of domestic responsibilities', leaving them less 'space to just sit and think about work'.

Unpaid domestic and child-care work in the home was identified as one of the most common and strongest barriers to gender equality in Oxfam. Women are expected to fit their career schedules around the demands of child-care. Conversely, men do not perceive the need to alter their schedules. If women want to work outside the home, they are often given the choice; however, it remains their responsibility to ensure the smooth functioning of home life (Newell 1993).

One employee described his distaste for unpaid work in the home when his partner's temporary illness necessitated his involvement. He expressed a reluctance to become permanently involved with this type of work.

In fact sometimes she is sick, the children are sick, I had to do the washing and the cooking all week and I didn't really like it ... Perhaps I was not used to it. But I didn't like it.

Other men recognise the inequalities present in parenthood and domestic work when it is considered 'women's work', and are committed to contributing 'their share'. One man describes his arrangement with his partner:

I have a rotating system of child-care with my partner, so I do Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays and have Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays free ... Romantically you might sort of think 'Well, we'll do everything together' but practically we're just desperate to try and get a bit of time to do something ...

Workload and the double shift

Ninety-six per cent of respondents were acutely aware of the quantity of work in their jobs. This was especially true for respondents based in the UK whose jobs required them to travel. The way in which respondents at head office approached their high workload was different from those in the African field office, where expectations tended to be more realistic (Carson 1995), but there is no doubt that workload is problematic for both men and women in both offices.

An indication of the workload is given in the daily routine of one woman who goes on to contemplate the effect on the personal relationships within her family:

Is it possible to do these jobs and stay sane? Because what I have been doing for the last six months is to go home between 5pm and 7pm. I then look after my kids until I get them to bed at 8pm. I then eat some food, very fast, prepared by my partner. I

then work from half past eight until midnight, or one in the morning, and sometimes two in the morning ... I think my family takes the pressure. The implication for my relationship is that I almost never speak to my husband, because he's a poor third after working. He's third after kids, work, relationship.

Women's attempts to juggle excessive workloads and domestic responsibilities lead to misconceptions and criticism regarding their commitment and choice. Our study found that women were often viewed as being less committed to Oxfam's goals as a direct result of their having to fulfil certain domestic and child-care responsibilities. One man's perception was that 'women would see work as less of a priority than men. Women tend to prioritise relationships over work ...'. Working the double shift means that women are unable to extend their working hours as much as men, who don't have the same burden of domestic and child-care work. One woman's comment supports this, revealing how Oxfam, unconsciously, values women's contribution less:

Rushing off to collect children from school is seen as a lack of commitment. If you look around the organisation, it is quite often the men who are seen to be committed and working late. And it is quite often the women who are absent because of their domestic responsibilities.

One policy-maker suggested, with respect to the very high workload which potentially disadvantages those working a double shift, that people have choices, to which there will be advantages and disadvantages:

Life is always a trade-off between any one individual's values, beliefs, what they want to do, what they don't want to do ... I make a choice to do something and there's pros and cons to it ... It's just choices people make. That doesn't mean to say that the organisation can't try and create a better environment but I think that at the end of the day, part of it is individual choice ...

Often organisations do not acknowledge the compromised choices in workers' lives, nor do they recognise that workers can be committed to their personal relationships *and* to their work. The rhetoric of being organisationally committed to improving gender relations in the workplace means compensating for the realities of inequalities, particularly the inequalities of unpaid work in the home.

Equal opportunities: Are they really equal?

The aim of equal opportunities initiatives is to ensure that the structural barriers preventing women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities from participating in paid work are removed. With regards to women, these initiatives have generally focused on positive action models to improve women's representation at all levels of economic activity.

Two models have predominated positive action initiatives: the equity model and the complementary contribution model (Adler and Izraeli 1988). By far the most popular model has been the equity model, in which women are assumed to be professionally identical to men, and effectiveness is measured against long-standing male norms. It is under this model that activities such as assertiveness training and career development have been designed to help women compete in the job market on a more equal footing to men. The message underlying this model is that for women to be successful in organisations they must display masculine values and behaviours. The phrase 'equal opportunities' under the equity model therefore is a contradiction in terms.

The less popular complementary contribution model makes the assumption of difference. Women's and men's contributions to organisations is assumed to be different and equally valuable, leaving the potential for women to make a unique, different, and valued contribution. Although proposals to re-examine job descriptions and recruitment qualifications to encompass women's potential had been made by Oxfam, the prevailing approach remains the equity approach. The emphasis here is on identifying 'the best qualified candidate', and equal-opportunities energies are channelled into developing strategies to improve women's competitiveness, as explained by this senior manager:

Selection for jobs has to be on the basis of the best qualified candidates.

Therefore, the challenge on implementing the Gender Policy is in what support the organisation can provide to enable women to stand a better chance of getting to be qualified applicants for a post.

What is overlooked in this analysis is that the definition of 'qualified applicants' has been constructed from male perspectives and norms. In this light, 'support' must therefore be translated as: 'How can we make women more like men?'

Confidence: Issues of invisibility, isolation, exclusion, and role modification

The final factor seen to perpetuate the existence of the glass ceiling is self-confidence.²⁰ This factor manifests itself by blocking women's attempts to break the glass ceiling, and by undermining women's chances of success if they do manage to break through. In Oxfam, self-confidence is clearly an issue. Sixty-five per cent of women in the study revealed that they suffered low self-confidence and self-esteem themselves, as well as observing it in other women. Despite the fact that men and women participating in the study were encouraged to discuss the same themes, none of the men expressed a lack in confidence or self-esteem.

The feeling of visibility seemed to be a contributing factor to levels of self-confidence. Ninety-three per cent of women interviewed for the study recounted their experiences of invisibility. Their stories told of not being taken seriously, of

being ignored, unheard — or not even bothering to try to get their voices heard, and ‘suffering with it quietly’. Apart from a few men who recognised the visibility of their own sex in certain situations, none mentioned the kind of invisibility that almost all of the women described.

Not recognising and valuing women’s different and unique contributions to an organisation, and expecting them to behave according to male norms, not only blocks their chances of breaking the glass ceiling. It also undermines the chances of success of those women who do manage to reach the other side. This often results in debilitating feelings of isolation, exclusion, and in role modification.

Women who have broken the glass ceiling are often perceived by their former peers as having abandoned women, contributing to their feeling of isolation. A manager describes this resentment and tension:

There’s a couple of women who I’ve had explode at me and shout at me and in a sort of fit of rage say ‘Well, we all know about you and managing women, you’re terrible at it’ and I suddenly thought, ‘Well, my God, is this really the case?’

Resentment also manifests itself through the exclusive behaviour of male colleagues. According to one woman, male colleagues regularly engaged in making a ‘whole new range of decisions’ either in the pub or during weekend activities from which she was excluded. Many women who find themselves working in a ‘masculine’ environment feel the pressure to adopt a more ‘masculine’ role in an attempt to become more credible.

The phenomena of glass ceiling, double shift, and pressure to conform to male values are particularly apparent in organisations which have developed their culture based on Weber’s definition of organising. Rational, logical arguments rooted in well-defined principles dominate Oxfam’s value system, leaving little room for other, equally valid methods informing decision-making, such as intuition. The priority placed on the ability to work long, uninterrupted hours, and the complete separation of work from domestic life, ultimately rest on a Weberian understanding of organisational ‘efficiency’. Understanding the organisational culture of Oxfam with the view to finding change means understanding the unconscious nature of the processes dominating Oxfam’s organisational life.

The processes of universal reason, characterised by judgement, rationality, discrimination, and objective interest, are reflected in the accounts of Oxfam employees. Conversely, attachment, relatedness, friendship, and subjective intuition were markedly lacking from the voices of Oxfam employees in their accounts of gender relations in Oxfam. Qualities which are essentially ‘masculine’ are dominant over ‘feminine’ qualities.²¹

It is clear that reconciling the rhetoric of gender equality in Oxfam with the reality presented is not simply a matter of restructuring or grafting new initiatives

onto the old culture, because such approaches tend to retain and reinforce the status quo. Nor is it a matter of abandoning scientific rational action in favour of intuitive relatedness. According to Jung, this strategy would only tip the balance towards the other, equally ineffective, extreme. The answer lies in the search for the right balance, in integrating the clearly absent 'feminine' qualities with dominant — and increasingly domineering — 'masculine' qualities.

Unfortunately, there is no 'magic bullet' strategy in achieving that integration. Bowles (1993) proposes a fundamental shift in organisational values and beliefs that requires a conscious confrontation with the ethic of mechanistic thinking and rational action.

It might suggest a flattening of hierarchies and dispersion of power in order to reduce distance between people, fundamentally an empowerment of all individuals in an organisation ... It might include use of human 'feeling' to dictate ethical action ... moving the organisation into relationship with the community as a whole.

Fear, anxiety, and resistance to change

Fear and anxiety are normal responses to the prospect of change. This was reflected in one man's perceptions of the kinds of changes involved in achieving greater gender equality:

On gender, generally I see one problem ... Are you going to start talking in terms of different roles for men and women? People think men should now do what women are doing and women should do what men are doing ... If people start picking up that gender is all about exchanging roles, problems might come in. People are trying to change things which have always been like that.

Resistance and sabotage, on the other hand, are destructive responses to the fear and anxiety of change. When fear and anxiety are channelled towards creative ends, the transition towards change is healthy and positive. When they are allowed to degenerate into resistance and sabotage, debilitating consequences can result for both individuals and the organisation.

Failure to take action is one form of resistance and has been described by Critchley and Casey (1989) as resulting from internal organisational fear. In Oxfam, there appeared to be a general failure to take action on issues regarding gender equality. A policy is instituted but implementation is delayed for one reason or another as observed by one man in Oxfam House:

If you look at the gender policies, how much they are implemented? They're always seen as, 'Oh, yes, we are forgetting about gender', and we add them at the end.

Resistance can also be construed in the subtle, intangible way in which gender discrimination manifests itself in Oxfam: as ‘assumptions about the sort of person we need to do this job — aggressive, self-starter, the sort who can make hard management decisions. Someone, unconsciously, sees a man as the person they want, even if they haven’t actually formulated it.’ In a politically correct environment such as Oxfam, where it is no longer acceptable to be ‘outright sexist or racist’, discrimination becomes entrenched as an unconscious resistance strategy, which is more difficult to eradicate.

Resistance, in itself, is a mild form of sabotage towards change. Male backlash (Smith 1982) is a more aggressive form of sabotage: it is a destructive response to intense fear. It occurs when men perceive their position threatened by efforts to enforce policy encouraging women into more senior, influential positions. It is a protective yet destructive response, often directed at women’s competence, working style, and knowledge, and designed to undermine their confidence. (It should be noted that both men and women can engage in destructive interactions.)

One woman member of staff describes how her self-esteem was undermined after she perceived a male colleague to be questioning her competence:

I felt close to tears at that point, because I was confused: what if he is right? What if it is my job and I just don’t know how to do it and that’s why I’m failing? ... I would feel that I wasn’t doing my job and I was failing and I was the weak member of the team.

Women begin to feel like the ‘embattled minority’ and the consequences can be severe as evidenced by one senior manager who chose to leave her position with Oxfam for health reasons related to the efforts to sabotage her. The poignant metaphors she uses to illustrate the consequences are very revealing:

I had no choice but to leave Oxfam in terms of personal health, but should I actually have left? ... It gives ‘the chaps’ the excuse to turn around and say ‘Women aren’t up to it’. It’s like they define the arena, they define the size of the lion, then they crow when you get chewed up.

These responses to fear and anxiety effectively comprise an approach to gender equality where people perceive themselves either as winners or losers. It is important to stress that the perpetuation of gender inequality in Oxfam is an unconscious process. Understanding that this perpetuation is not due to individuals consciously and maliciously plotting to sabotage efforts of change is the first step in developing strategies to overcome the pattern. Conscious efforts to recognise this unconscious nature and to design a win-win approach are essential if the creative channelling of fear and anxiety is to be achieved.

Conclusion

Few if any organisations have truly attempted the radical deconstructing and reconstructing process necessary to achieve fundamental shifts in values and beliefs. Providing a step-by step-manual of the initiatives necessary in this process is, therefore, extremely difficult. Exposing the unconscious behaviour potentially blocking organisational change towards greater gender equality, however, is an important first step to improving the organisation's effectiveness.

Oxfam's dominant organisational ethos has become preoccupied with enhancing performance to the extent that human consequences, particularly for women, are neglected. The pathway to greater rationalisation — where, in the words of the men and women interviewed, 'strategic management', 'minimum standards', 'rational arguments', 'productivity', 'defending your corner', 'results-oriented' and 'task-driven' management are the valued norm — often requires managers to suspend personal and ethical involvement in the pursuit of organisational performance and profitability, fitting with Weber's concept of efficiency.

In subjecting Weber's theories and Oxfam's dominant organisational culture to a Jungian analysis, it becomes clear that the rational bureaucracy is one with a highly dominant *animus* and a grossly underdeveloped *anima*. Jung maintains that only through the recognition and integration of an individual's unconscious can that person be considered 'well-adjusted'. It follows that a 'well-adjusted' organisation would strike a balance between *animus* and *anima*. Taking it one step further, for Oxfam to become a 'well-adjusted' organisation, integrating the *anima* into organisational processes appears to be of paramount importance.

For organisations such as Oxfam, whose objectives and rhetoric clearly indicate a concern for a more humane world, where exploitation of humans (regardless of sex, race, class, or socio-economic situation) or the environment is deemed unacceptable, adopting these principles might present a way forward in closing the gap between rhetoric and reality.

About the author

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Setting up the Oxfam nursery

The editors with thanks to Norman Clift

Nurseries have offered parents invaluable child-care facilities for some time, and, in Britain, can be found in churches, public meeting places, and recently even in shopping centres. But despite their obvious advantage for parents, they are still the exception rather than the rule. This is also the case in the workplace. Child-care for children below school age still takes place primarily in the home, with women taking on most of the child-rearing. This means that women give up their formal (paid) work, at least for a few years, at what is often an important point in their own careers. This has long been considered unfair: the assumption that women will take on the reproductive role of child-carer in the home disadvantages them in the workplace, and denies them equality of opportunity with men.

As employers, many development organisations aim to ensure that job applicants, staff, and volunteers do not suffer unfair discrimination. They believe that following a policy of equality of opportunity will benefit not only the individual but also enrich the whole organisation. A major concern of any equal opportunities policy is to address the difficulties faced by mothers of young children. There is an argument for the costs of child-care being borne to some degree by the employer, as these costs represent an investment in the productivity of the employed parent. A workplace nursery can be regarded as a legitimate production cost in the same way as the provision of a cafeteria, desks, chairs, and so on. This thinking was recognised at the time of setting up the Oxfam GB nursery:

Women are essential to the success of any enterprise. They occupy key jobs requiring talent, skill and commitment, yet even so, many employers evade the question of what their response should be to providing essential child-care facilities, without which women cannot work on an equal footing with men. In

focusing their attention on the costs such provision will entail, employers fail to recognise the enormous benefits to be derived from such provision by both employee and employer. (report made to the Oxfam Executive in 1986)

Workplace nurseries have often been assumed to have benefits only for women employees; but their benefits apply equally to women and men. A nursery enables both male and female employees to accept and carry out reproductive care, alongside their productive (formal) employment. Thus, the gendered division between productive and reproductive work can be challenged by both women and men.

The Oxfam nursery has been in existence now for ten years. The thinking behind its inception was, first, that a workplace nursery demonstrates the employer's acceptance of employees' need for child-care, and also of their role in providing it. A further rationale was that organisations such as Oxfam are committed to promoting social justice and gender equality through their development work internationally, and a workplace nursery reflects this wider support for equal opportunities and gender equality. In other words, a workplace nursery was seen as an important part of practising what we preach. Suzanne Williams, co-ordinator of the Gender and Development Unit in 1985, recalls:

We saw the nursery as a fundamental building-block in the struggle for equal opportunities and particularly access for women to demanding and senior jobs in Oxfam — and indeed, it has made an enormous difference to so many people's lives, enabling us to work in the confidence that our young babies and children were close at hand, safe and happy. (internal Oxfam document, 1998)

A central part of equal opportunities

The greatest obstacle to many women's employment and promotion prospects is still a lack of adequate child-care. Women with children form a substantial part of the labour force, but they do so against tremendous odds. In the UK, discrimination against women in the workplace is illegal, yet national statistics provide incontrovertible evidence that women with young children are still effectively discriminated against, because they are expected to take most of the responsibility for child-care. Little consideration is given to the fact that good-quality, reliable, and affordable child-care services are in short supply, and that this shortage results in unequal opportunities for women with young children.

Rona Alexander, Programme Manager in the Marketing Division, states that, the rationale in the beginning was Oxfam's commitment to equal opportunities, which was heavily invested in at the time. David Jones, the then Deputy Director, did a lot to get it going — with constant pressure from the union and vociferous activists. (internal document, 1998)

A positive investment for employers

Providing facilities for child-care can be a positive economic investment for employers. For example, many women who leave work on maternity leave are unable to return to their jobs because they cannot find adequate and affordable child-care facilities. This is not in the employer's interests, and it undermines the progress which has been made in establishing better employment rights for women on maternity leave. These women may have worked for many years; they are experienced employees with skills and training in key areas of an organisation's work. Their loss is a major loss for their organisation, because time and capital spent on training and maternity pay cannot be recouped if the woman is unable to return to work after having a child. Other costs incurred, for example in employing temporary staff for up to six months (or in some cases, up to a year), also cannot be recovered. Unsatisfactory child-care arrangements might force parents to leave their employment, which means added expense in recruiting new staff. A workplace nursery also benefits employers when recruiting new staff. Many candidates who are highly skilled and have knowledge of direct relevance will have young children. An organisation which is offering just conditions of employment can expect to attract the best staff and will be respected by the public and other organisations alike.

While the initial cost of setting up a nursery may seem high, the return for the employer more than justifies this expense. To quote Helen Auty, Personnel Manager of London Weekend Television (long recognised as an equal opportunities employer):

Some of the direct results of the provision of child-care facilities have been a reduced turnover of staff, a reduction of recruitment and training costs, and an increased stability among our staff, who are employed in a highly competitive environment. It is an integral part of our Equal Opportunities policy and has helped us to retain, among others, producers, casting directors, production managers, accounts assistants and photographers. This benefit has also increased our profile as a 'good' employer, enhancing a substantial list of desirable benefits in service.

Child-care in Oxfam: A case study

The nursery was opened in Oxfam House in Oxford in 1987. It was not feasible to set up nurseries in other locations; so, to ensure equality of treatment in all offices, a child-care allowance is available to staff in the UK and Ireland. But no provision was made for women working in country or field offices; in the case of more

remote field offices, it is often considered unsuitable for children to accompany their working mothers—although many men working in the same situations will be accompanied by wife and children (Carson 1995).

The experience of contributors to this book, including Dianna Melrose and Suzanne Williams, indicates that providing child-care for staff has benefited Oxfam GB by widening the field of personnel at head office and in regional offices in the UK and Ireland, enabling Oxfam to gain access to expertise among women and men with young children which would otherwise be denied. This point is also echoed by Susie Smith, now Deputy Director of Oxfam's International Division, who states:

The nearby provision of good quality child-care was a huge plus for me. It made Oxfam a particularly attractive employer, and enabled me to continue working throughout the early childhood years with as little disruption and difficulty as possible. It was a huge help in enabling me to pursue my career with Oxfam, and it was part of what made me want to do that. (internal document, 1998)

Child-care allowances and places in the Oxfam House workplace nursery have been made available to both men and women in the organisation, making the point that it is equally feasible for men to take responsibility for their children's care, and helping to break down the divisions between men's and women's established gender roles. However, in 1997 only women applied for the child-care allowance.

Parental involvement in the nursery

Oxfam's nursery was established on the initiative of a small group of staff members, and the involvement of parents has continued to be an important part of running the nursery. The thinking behind this was that a workplace nursery can benefit enormously from parental involvement: their ideas, concerns, and support are an important contribution. Parental involvement encourages a relationship of trust between parents and child-carers and ensures that parents feel comfortable with the surroundings in which their children are developing.

Perhaps most importantly, the relationship between parents and the organisation keeps open a line of communication between the organisation and the nursery. Issues of importance to the nursery are thus treated as central concerns in the organisation, ensuring that it takes continued responsibility for providing child-care. Parents are involved in the Oxfam workplace nursery through a voluntary management committee. This committee not only allows parents some involvement in the running of the nursery in which their children are being looked after, it also ensures that they (as representatives of the organisation) maintain a link between the organisation and the concerns of the nursery.

Allocation of nursery places

Because the demand for places far exceeds supply, allocation of places has been a consistent problem for many nurseries. A total of 663 of employees in the Oxford head office qualify for a nursery place, but there are only 23 places in the Oxfam nursery. This means that there is one nursery place available for every 28 eligible staff members. Clearly not all staff members will require nursery places, but there is considerable demand. This has been a cause of considerable anguish among staff and the nursery management committee, who decide how to allocate the very few places available. Allocation of places for the nursery must be regulated, but in doing so it is clear that some priorities must be established, compromising the ideal of fully accessible child-care for all employees with young children.

In discussions over allocation, some groups of employees can be prioritised over others, but it is important that no group is excluded. Priorities for the Oxfam nursery were initially identified in terms of the needs of the organisation, the children, their parents, and the nursery. For example, it was considered to be in Oxfam's interests to ensure that people taking up 'hard-to-fill' posts have priority access to nursery places. For the children, and particularly the parents, it is important to have siblings together. Children with disability or special needs and parents with disability were also put forward as priorities, as were single parents.

Inevitably, some issues that can be seen as very important can also be seen as beyond the scope of a nursery-places allocations policy. For example, the issue of parents on low incomes brings up problems of assessment: how does one take into account total household income, and how does one avoid the pitfalls of 'means-testing'? Yet the complexity of such issues should not be used as an excuse to ignore the problem, but as a reason for examining it on a much wider organisational basis. This example illustrates the importance of ensuring that discussions about the nursery maintain a central place in organisational priorities, as many of the issues that arise contain fundamental problems for the organisation.

Nursery places are allocated within the principles of a commitment on the part of Oxfam to be an equal opportunities employer. From the start, Oxfam based its provision of nursery places on the principle that no child, individual, or family should be excluded from the nursery activities on the grounds of gender, sexuality, class, family status, means, disability, colour, ethnic origin, culture, religion or beliefs. However, allocation of places in such an over-subscribed facility remains an area for discussion and debate. This is also connected to the next problem area — the thorny question of funding.

Funding

Despite the obvious advantages of a subsidised workplace nursery, the allocation and use of donated funds for child-care has to be very carefully considered. For a

variety of reasons, a workplace nursery that is self-financing is very difficult to achieve in any context. In particular, there must be a desire to maintain a nursery charge which is affordable for lower-paid staff.

Given that one of the purposes of a nursery from an organisational point of view is to help women continue in their jobs, affordable child-care is particularly important, because women are predominantly found in the lower-paid posts. There is often a delicate balance between buying child-care with a salary from (formal) paid work, and giving up paid work to look after children at no (formal) cost. Once the line is crossed, and the cost of child-care exceeds the salary from paid work, the whole idea of the workplace nursery is undermined, and access is denied to those women who are often in the greatest need. There is therefore a need for continued investment from employers. It has been argued that the level of funding has to be measured against the value of nursery provision to an employer. The British Civil Service now accepts this, based on a calculation that the cost of replacing a staff member is approximately one year's salary. The provision of child-care for working parents represents real 'value for money' for the organisation, and campaigners have argued that both the government and employers can do more to share the costs and benefits of child-care.

For a time, Oxfam used an innovative scheme to facilitate a reduction in nursery fees, involving a salary sacrifice/tax-reduction arrangement. Nursery users agreed to have their annual pay package re-allocated, which gave a smaller amount of taxed salary, and Oxfam was able to use the remainder to cover the costs of nursery provision. The effect has been that staff save tax and National Insurance on their child-care costs. The scheme was initially cleared by the Inland Revenue as legitimate, but subsequently this agreement was revoked, and we had to revert to the original arrangements. Schemes such as this should receive wider consideration as a means of encouraging improved child-care provision.

Practising what we preach

It is clear that a workplace nursery not only is a positive investment for employers and an important facility for the organisation and its staff, but also is highly relevant to organisations that are committed to promoting gender equity through their work. When the nursery was set up in 1987, it was seen as an essential part of the implementation of Oxfam's Gender Policy, which states a commitment to gender equity both throughout our programme work, and within the organisation. As Dominic Vickers, a fund-raiser in Oxfam's Marketing Division, observes, 'we can't ask governments, corporations, and our partner organisations to take gender issues seriously unless we also take them seriously in

the workplace' (internal document, 1998). It was felt that a commitment to gender equity in organisational programmes must be mirrored by the organisation's commitment to its own staff by providing a genuinely gender-equitable working environment. Ensuring that women are not constrained in their careers by child-care responsibilities goes a long way towards promoting a more equitable professional structure.

Provision of a workplace nursery could also be seen as part of a larger process of changing assumptions about gender roles. By providing necessary facilities for child-care in the workplace, we are enabling both men and women to take responsibility for their domestic lives as well as to be full and valued productive actors within the organisation. This responsibility is further enhanced when parents and staff are able to collaborate in the running of the nursery, as an organisational priority.

It is no longer necessary or expected that domestic (reproductive) tasks are separated from the (productive) workplace, with women taking on the unpaid responsibility for the home and children, leaving men free to operate as professional, paid, members of a workforce. A genuinely equitable workplace should begin a process of breaking down the barriers between reproductive and productive roles. The Oxfam workplace nursery, although over-subscribed and challenged in providing affordable child-care, especially for the lower-paid, has enabled women to continue with their professional lives as well as ensure that their children are cared for. But, perhaps more importantly, it has enabled both men and women to take responsibility for child-care without compromising their place in the workforce.

About the authors

Norman Clift joined Oxfam in 1981 following a working life in commercial organisations. While with Oxfam, he has been engaged, both as a volunteer and a member of staff, in a variety of human-resources roles. He is currently assisting in the work of Corporate Human Resources on a part-time basis.

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Notes to section II

- 1 Charles Handy (1988), *Understanding Voluntary Organisations*.
- 2 Bridget Walker (1994), 'Towards a Gender Strategy for Africa', internal discussion paper, Oxfam.
- 3 Yayori Matsui, 'Violence against women in development, militarism and culture' in King, Ursula (ed.) (1994), *Feminist Theology from the Third World*.
- 4 Please also refer to Wendy Carson's article in this volume for a discussion of the glass ceiling, and the experience of women who break through.
- 5 The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines 'feminism' as 'the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes'.
- 6 For example, see the article by Visha Padmanabhan in this volume.
- 7 See Wendy Carson's article for further analysis of this phenomenon.
- 8 Margaret Legum, 'The Right Time to Institutionalise Gender'.
- 9 Action for Gender Relations in Asia: see the article by Kanchan Sinha in this volume for more information on this Oxfam staff network.
- 10 Aminatta Forna (author of *Mother of All Myths*), 'Go Girls', *The Guardian*, 16 July 1998.
- 11 Some of the material contained in this piece has been published as a chapter entitled 'Assessing the Impact: NGOs and Empowerment' in Afshar, H. (ed.) (1998), *Women and Empowerment*, London: Macmillan.
- 12 'An analytical framework sets out different categories of elements /factors to be considered in an analysis; it draws attention to the key issues that have to be explored. A framework may outline a broad set of beliefs and goals, or it may be more prescriptive and give a set of tools and procedures.' See March, C., Mukhopadhyay, M., Smyth, I. (eds.) (1999), *A Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks*, Oxford: Oxfam.
- 13 Many thanks for the invaluable comments and suggestions given by Becky Buell, Deborah Eade, Francine Pickup, and Caroline Sweetman and Fenella Porter.
- 14 The implications of feminist debates for anti-poverty organisations was discussed particularly in the introduction to *Gender and Development*, Vol. 5, No. 1, February 1997.
- 15 It is worth mentioning by name at least some of those who pioneered feminist

work in the region: Suzanne Williams and Celina de Godoy in Brazil, Audrey Bronstein in the Andean region, Luisa Maria Rivera and Deborah Eade in Mexico and Central America and, more recently, Jenny Vaughan, Fifi Stubbs, Becky Buell. It is also indicative that those mentioned are all women, in positions of authority in the various country programmes.

- 16 That they are not mentioned here by name is due in part to practical considerations, and in part in respect to the fact that they may want to continue to work 'in disguise' (see below).
- 17 See *Gender and Development*, Vol.3, No.1 (1995) for various perspectives on this issue.
- 18 This definition of gender is only one definition of many. It should be used as a working definition to be referred to throughout the article. It is by no means intended to be universal or exclusive to all other definitions.
- 19 For further reading on occupational segregation please refer to Hakim (1979), Wilson (1995), and Stover (1994).
- 20 For further reading on this topic see Tanton (1994).
- 21 It should be noted that 'masculine' and 'feminine' are defined in the Jungian sense and should be thought of in terms independent of biological sex.

