

6. Developing Capacity to Achieve Gender Equality in Education



Teaching in a Dalit school in Uttar Pradesh, India

Failure to achieve gender equality in education is often blamed on 'weak capacity'. This paper illustrates the ways in which individual, organisational, and institutional capacity all play important roles in producing positive results for girls and boys. It is essential to recognise that these different forms of capacity are related, in order to prevent the disappearance of policies and strategies produced with the aim of achieving gender equality in education.

Defining capacity

The capacity of a country to deliver on commitments to gender parity and equality in education is determined by individuals and the organisations in which they work, and also the bureaucratic systems in which they operate. Improving the capacity to deliver on gender equality in education targets often entails capacity development at all these levels.¹ This paper focuses on transforming institutions and developing capacity of those working with education institutions, but it recognises that long term capacity building for civil society, communities and parents is also essential for taking forward gender equality.

Individual capacity

Individual capacity comprises the quality, skills, and commitment of each policy maker, administrator and teacher. Teachers must be able to teach both girls and boys effectively to ensure that gender inequalities are not strengthened in the classroom.

Senior administrators should be able to carry out gender analysis, to identify approaches as a result of this analysis, to help put these approaches into practice, and to monitor progress.

Gender training can play a significant role in building the capacity of administrators and teachers. Effective training needs both to raise awareness of gender issues and also to build the ability to carry out gender analysis over a sustained period as a normal practice. Training should ensure that all staff have an understanding of the importance of gender issues, in relation to their work. However, effective gender-training programmes also need to create specialists in gender issues, who possess the necessary skills for gender analysis, implementation, and monitoring.

Teachers can contribute to the achievement of the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) ('promote gender equality and empower women') by developing new skills and capacities. Through their direct actions they can challenge received ideas of how girl and boy pupils behave, raise awareness of gender issues, and protect children against abuse that is a result of their sex. They can also encourage girls to take subjects traditionally considered appropriate only for boys, such as mathematics. Teachers, however, often lack the training to campaign for gender equity in schools.

There is no template for effective gender training. However, its impact is likely to be greater when it is prioritised, and endorsed by senior-level administrators and politicians. It is also likely to be more effective when it is not treated as a one-off event, and is instead integrated into broader training and changes to the institutions' systems.

¹ **6. Developing Capacity to Achieve Gender Equality in Education**, Education and Gender Equality series, Programme Insights, Oxfam GB. December 2005

Some resources for gender training and analysis in education

These are some of the increasing number of good materials that are easily available for practitioners; they can be easily adapted by trainers to suit the local context and the learners:

Practising Gender Analysis in Education, Oxfam Skills and Practice Series, author Fiona Leach. This book draws on a number of well-known analytical frameworks from the gender and development literature and suggests modifications to suit educational settings, with case studies and examples. These frameworks can be used for analysing capacity constraints within the education sector.

A Toolkit for Promoting Gender Equality in Education, by the Gender in Education Network in Asia (GENIA). The toolkit provides a range of resources developed by the UNESCO Network for practitioners (especially 'gender focal points') to provide awareness of planning and strategy behind the development of a participatory gender workshop. It includes guidance and tools to create gender-responsive Education for All plans.

Resource Pack: Pedagogical Strategies for Gender Equality in Basic Education. Developed for a teachers' workshop in Kenya, it provides a brief and accessible introduction to gender approaches and skills to enhance gender-sensitive ways of working for teachers with practical activities and definitions.²

Organisational capacity

In order to enable teachers and educational administrators to work effectively, the organisations in which they work (for example, schools and ministries of education) must have the capacity to fulfil their mandates. They may be constrained by insufficient numbers of personnel and inadequate financial systems, poor management, ineffective systems and processes for decision making, and inadequate information gathering and analytical capacity.

Institutional transformation

The way in which an institution is organised to take into account the different needs of women and men is often an obstacle to implementing reforms aimed at achieving gender equality in education. This may manifest itself in both practical and physical arrangements. For example, work arrangements often do not take account of domestic roles, such as childcare, which are often the responsibility of women. They may also reflect female or male characteristics in terms of management styles, organisational principles, and the delegation of authority.

Creating the ability to achieve the gender MDG therefore often requires the transformation of deep-seated relations between women and men, and their practices within organisations. Without such changes, there is a danger that reforms aimed at achieving gender equality in education will become insignificant.

Transforming gender relations within an NGO: experience of BRAC

BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) is heralded as an NGO committed to achieving goals of gender equality through its education programmes and other initiatives. Changes within the organisation that take into account the different needs of women and men have also received attention, especially efforts to recruit, retain, and improve the effectiveness of female development workers. This has been done through adapting the organisational culture to better enable the participation of women (for example through introducing flexibility into the working day, and providing support for child care), increasing the participation of women in decision making through recruitment and promotion policies, including special management-skills training, and supporting women's physical needs, for example by providing appropriate accommodation, transport, health care, and maternity leave.

These policies allow views of men's and women's roles in both private and public spheres to be questioned. The recognition of the need to challenge conventional male work patterns within a dominant organisational culture, and the need to be open to change, has helped to improve the participation of women in BRAC. Transformations of this kind can take time and sustained effort and need to be well resourced.³

Quotas for women

Quotas, if implemented with appropriate support as part of a wider process for promoting and sustaining gender equality, can increase women's visibility and challenge male dominance within organisations. A successful quota programme includes measures to develop the women's capacity so that their *presence* translates into *influence*.⁴ Without this dimension, quotas are only symbolic, with women continuing to play a relatively minor role, either because of the types of responsibility they are given, or because of their own lack of confidence, or because of other commitments which prevent them from carrying out their work effectively.

In local-government structures in India and Pakistan, one third of seats are reserved for women. In village education committees in some states in India, the chair or vice chair of the committee is required to be a woman. While some have criticised these measures because, for example, they can result in female relatives of powerful men taking these positions, others have pointed to the ways in which women in local government have successfully raised local issues concerning land, water, health, and education and have spoken their own minds, independently of the political affiliations of male relatives.

In Ethiopia, quotas for ensuring that one third of the intake into teacher-training institutes are female, has helped to ensure an increase in the availability of female teachers, who can be an important influence on the education of girls. However, since women are accepted with lower qualification levels than men, their performance tends to continue to lag behind, which may badly affect

3 **6. Developing Capacity to Achieve Gender Equality in Education,** Education and Gender Equality series, Programme Insights, Oxfam GB. December 2005

their self-esteem. To address this, the Women's Affairs Office in the Ministry of Education has designed training programmes to give additional support to women in these colleges, at the same time as providing them with assertiveness training.⁵

Gender mainstreaming within organisations

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy to promote gender equality within an organisation.⁶ Mainstreaming has received particular attention since the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women.

Mainstreaming is about extending concern for gender equality and education from a few vocal people, often on the periphery of organisations, to the centre of the development agenda. This requires rethinking of institutional rules, priorities, and goals, and substantial redistribution of resources.⁷

Within education, gender mainstreaming is often associated with sector-wide approaches (SWAPs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Many countries' SWAPs and PRSPs contain broad commitments and specific strategies to achieving gender equality. These commitments, however, are often made without considering whether there is capacity to implement them.

Gender-mainstreaming strategies may be either diffuse or specific. On the one hand, gender equality can be made the responsibility of everyone in the organisation, with related concerns incorporated into all organisational structures and activities. There is, however, a danger that this diffuse approach will sideline gender issues, as other concerns are given higher priority. It can also reduce gender analysis to an insignificant function. On the other hand, specialist units may be set up within ministries of education to ensure that gender issues are visible and endorsed by all levels of the organisation.

In countries in both South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, support for girls' education has often been the responsibility of separate 'gender focal points', either within the Ministry of Education or as a separate ministry or unit. Ideally, focal points act as *catalysts* of change, by working with individuals, departments, and ministries to raise gender awareness and ensure that gender parity and equality is incorporated into major policies, programmes, and procedures.

In practice, however, focal points have often been separated from usual planning activities within ministries of education, and they lack the resources and status to influence policy and programme priorities. In many cases, the roles and responsibilities of 'gender focal points' are inadequately defined and insufficiently resourced. The offices often rely on external funding, because resources are not available internally to support them. In addition, appointments to posts within these offices are often made at a low level, with limited opportunity for transfer or promotion.

Gender initiatives in practice in Ethiopia and Guinea

Although Ethiopia is currently lagging behind in achieving universal primary education and gender equality, it has made considerable progress over the past decade as a result of a high-level commitment to establish Women's Affairs Officers at national, regional, and district levels. Through a nationally driven strategy of ensuring that gender is integrated into education planning, there is optimism that gender equality will be achieved. While this approach requires longer-term commitment, it should ensure greater sustainability than more gradual approaches to gender reforms.⁸

By comparison, in Guinea an Equity Committee was established in 1992, with the support of the then Minister of Education. This was successful in gaining the support of traditional and religious leaders and other public figures for the government's policy of encouraging girls' education. However, subsequently the committee has had no operating budget or strategic plan, as well as few personnel (most of the members work only part-time). As a result it has only been able to focus on random, short-term projects, with financing from NGOs and donor agencies.⁹

Whether one uses a targeted approach through 'gender focal units', or relies on merging responsibility for gender issues across organisations, one needs to consider the background and the timing. A more targeted approach is likely to be more effective in cases where organisational capacity is weak, and there is no evidence of a sustained political commitment to gender equality. If it is handled appropriately, and all stakeholders in the design and implementation process are involved, this strategy could support political commitment to a more coherent approach in the longer term. In practice, across ministries of education in developing countries, there is little evidence of successful integrated approaches to gender mainstreaming.

Recommendations

Developing capacity for gender equality involves implementing a range of strategies, comprising not only gender training of both male and female administrators and teachers to raise awareness and to provide necessary skills for gender analysis, but also initiatives to increase women's visibility within organisations, for example through using quotas. Developing capacity means focusing on gender concerns within organisations, and making gender issues an integral part of educational planning processes. The appropriate allocation of financial resources must be built in to these processes for them to succeed.

In many countries, governments are under pressure to implement a proliferation of policies while suffering severe financial constraints. Officials are often required to perform new roles, while carrying out existing ones more effectively. A priority for donors, therefore, should be to finance and strengthen individual and organisational

development and capacity to achieve gender equality at the national level.

SWAPs and PRSPs provide a potentially valuable tool for capacity building. Evidence from the first phase of SWAPs in education in countries such as Uganda and Bangladesh indicates that although gender targets and strategies are included in these documents, budgets are not large enough to support them. The second phase of plans in these countries allocates more resources to capacity building and gender programming. The growing trend towards the preparation of budgets that take into account gender issues can also help to ensure that sufficient resources are committed and used to support gender equality in education.¹⁰

International agencies also need capacity for high-quality gender analysis, programming, and advocacy. Most agencies are making progress on developing the capacities of important individuals, but increasing organisational capacity and improving institutional incentives require more sustained effort.

Governments

- Address the need to build capacity at individual, institutional, and organisational levels.
- Ensure that *all* staff have an understanding of the importance of gender issues in relation to their work, and that gender specialists possess the necessary skills.
- Integrate gender training and analysis through all programmes of teacher education, to help teachers to be effective change agents.
- Develop gender-sensitive budgets to ensure that adequate resources are committed to achieve the MDGs, and to monitor their use.

Donors

- Finance individual and organisational development for gender equality at the national level.
- Ensure SWAPs and PRSPs include realistic budgets to implement gender equality strategies.
- Ensure that donors themselves are improving their capacity to support high-quality gender analysis, programming and advocacy.

NGOs

- Ensure that NGOs themselves are improving their capacity to transform gender relations in their own work, and in the way they work with others.

- Support governments to build capacity for gender equality through working with planners in ministries of education.
- Monitor progress on capacity building for gender equality at the local level, and use this to influence government and donor policy at the national level.
- Support local organisations, schools, and communities to participate in gender-sensitive monitoring of education.

Notes

¹ Capacity is intimately related to political will. The role of political will is discussed in Paper 5 in this series: 'Making it Happen, Political Will for Gender Equality in Education', Education and Gender Equality Series, Programme Insights, (Oxfam GB, 2005).

² UNESCO (2004) 'A Toolkit for Promoting Gender Equality in Education', Gender in Education Network in Asia, UNESCO, Bangkok; F. Leach (2003) *Practising Gender Analysis in Education*, Oxfam Skills and Practice series, Oxford: Oxfam GB; Beyond Access (2004) 'Resource Pack: Pedagogic Strategies for Gender Equality in Basic Education' Beyond Access Workshop, Nairobi, Kenya, www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess.

³ A. Goetz, 'Getting institutions right for women', *Gender and Development* Vol. 5 No 1, 1997.

⁴ A-M. Goetz (2003) *No Shortcuts to Power: African Women in Politics and Policymaking*. London: Zed Press.

⁵ P. Rose (2003) 'Out-of-School Children in Ethiopia', Report for DFID-Ethiopia.

⁶ For a definition of gender mainstreaming see Paper 1 in this series: 'Beyond Access for Girls and Boys: How to Achieve Good-Quality, Gender-equitable Education', Education and Gender Equality Series, Programme Insights, (Oxfam GB, 2005).

⁷ N. Kabeer and R. Subrahmanian (1996) 'Institutions, Relations and Outcomes: Framework and Tools for Gender-Aware Planning'. IDS Discussion Paper 357, Brighton: IDS.

⁸ P. Rose (2003) 'Out-of-School Children in Ethiopia' Report for DFID, London.

⁹ A. Marphathia (2000) 'USAID/WIDTECH Technical Assistance and Training Plan to the Ministry of Pre-University and Civic Education's Equity Committee,' Washington: WIDTECH.

¹⁰ For a discussion of gender budgeting, see Paper 7 in this series: 'Gender Responsive Budgeting in Education', Education and Gender Equality Series, Programme Insights, (Oxfam GB, 2005).

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