



The Gender Tool Box gathers knowledge material and method support on gender equality in the form of Tools, Briefs and Thematic Overviews.

Gender equality is achieved when women and men, girls and boys, have equal rights, life prospects and opportunities, and the power to shape their own lives and contribute to society.

## [ BRIEF ]

# Hot Issue: Women's Organisations and the Engagement of Men

**Gender equality and women and girls' rights is a priority in Swedish development cooperation. Sida has since long given support to women's rights organisations as key stakeholders for promoting gender equality. Sida is also a global leader in supporting men's engagement for gender equality. However, a combination of a great demand for limited resources and the increasing engagement of organisations working for men's responsibility for gender equality have created a concern on how to balance the support to women's organisations with that of the engagement of men. The purpose of this brief is to discuss some of the most common questions in relation to this dilemma.**

### GENDER ANALYSIS IS ALWAYS THE POINT OF DEPARTURE

Sweden's development cooperation aims to increase gender equality and the fulfilment of women and girls' human rights. This is realized by mainstreaming gender throughout all Sida's support. Sida's model for gender mainstreaming departs from an initial gender analysis. This is the basis for deciding on how to best promote gender equality. What is the gender gap in the development context? Which are the most strategic actors and stakeholders? Which is the most relevant target group? How can the gender gap be narrowed? Based on the gender analysis Sida may support targeted interventions

where gender equality is the main objective, and/or support contributions where a gender perspective is integrated as well as use dialogue as an instrument for promoting gender equality.<sup>1</sup>

The gender analysis should lead to a theory of change where the priorities are defined.

### WHO IS THE MAIN TARGET GROUP FOR SIDA?

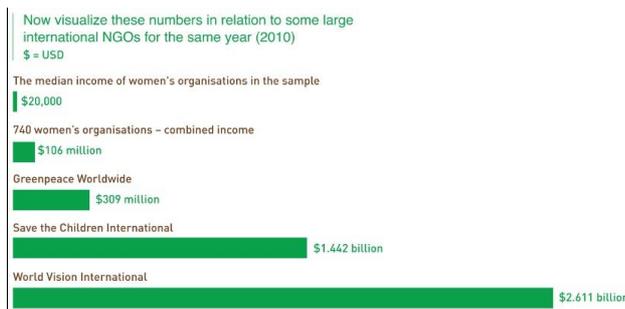
The goal for Sweden's development cooperation is to create preconditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression. The main target group in most of the different strategies guiding Sida's work (country, regional and global) are women and girls because they are the ones who most commonly endure poverty and oppression.

Yet, the direct target group for any kind of interventions can be either women, or men, or girls, or boys or persons with another gender identity or, as it is most commonly, mixed groups. This will be based on the analysis of what fits best in the specific context and the development challenge at stake.

<sup>1</sup> For further reference please see the tool *Gender Mainstreaming* in Sida's Gender Tool Box (<http://www.sida.se/contentassets/3a820dbd152f4fca98bacde8a8101e15/gender-tool-mainstreaming.pdf>)

## WHY IS TARGETED SUPPORT TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS IMPORTANT?

Women's rights organisations exist in practically all countries and regions and their work is the basis for improved gender equality in all contexts. Evidence shows that the existence of a strong women's rights movement is the most critical factor for improving legislation favourable to women's rights, as well as the implementation of the same.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, these organisations are often severely under-financed. Despite the fact that support to gender equality is increasing on a global scale, support to women's rights organisations is decreasing at a global level. According to a study the median income of women's rights organisations was 20 000 USD per year in 2010 – a total of 106 million USD, to compare with other organisations.<sup>3</sup>



From *Watering the leaves – starving roots by the Association for Women in Development AWID*

Apart from the continuous struggle for financing, the shrinking space for civil society during the last years affects women's rights organisations especially. Leaders of and activists within women's rights organisations are increasingly exposed to harassment, threats and violence. Strategic support to women's rights organisations is therefore critical for their survival and a prerequisite for the local, regional and global gender equality work.

## SHOULD THE WORK FOR GENDER EQUALITY MAINLY SUPPORT WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS?

Yes, it is reasonable that a great deal of the work for gender equality specifically targets women and girls as actors, subjects and rights holders. This is a global

<sup>2</sup> *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action turns 20, UN Women 2015*

<sup>3</sup> *WOCAN: Accelerating Investments in Women through Certification – A White Paper of the W+ Standard, 2015.*  
<http://www.awid.org/publications/watering-leaves-starving-roots>

commitment and a Swedish priority. Increasing the power and influence of women and girls in all areas as well as strengthening their rights is a precondition for promoting gender equality. As mentioned previously, Sida's model for mainstreaming gender departs from a gender analysis. If the analysis shows that there is a gender gap where women and girls suffer disproportionate discrimination, addressing this gap must be a priority. This is almost always the case in the contexts of Sida's cooperation.

## CAN AN ORGANISATION WORK ONLY WITH WOMEN AND/OR GIRLS AS TARGET GROUP?

Yes, some women's rights organisations focus entirely or mainly on women while others work together with men/towards men. Women's rights organisations can of course focus on women – just as LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans) organisations can focus on LGBT persons.

Even though no process of change occur in a vacuum but must relate to a context and to diverse stakeholders there is still a need for many women's groups to have access to spaces and environments only for women. Such safe spaces are needed so that women can deal with specific challenges without getting disturbed. Women need to be able to organise within safe spaces as to develop strategies for claiming their rights in all possible areas like entrepreneurship, political participation, freedom from violence, participation in peace processes and other.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO INVOLVE MEN AND BOYS IN GENDER EQUALITY WORK?

In order to achieve gender equality and to change perceptions about women and men, girls and boys and persons with other gender identities it is crucial that men and boys engage and are included in gender equality work. Gender equality is by default about relations and about changing power relations and challenging stereotype ideas about the role of women, girls, men and boys. Many men, especially those who do not live up to hetero-normative ideals of masculinity, also suffer from consequences of the lack of gender equality.

Thus, gender equality is not only a women's issue. Men must be targeted, as agents of change, especially when it comes to changing destructive ideals and forms of masculinities. This includes men who are perpetrators of violence as well as victims/survivors of violence.

An increasing amount of research show that men's active engagement in parenthood and the household has long-

term effects on gender equality in a variety of ways: better learning outcomes for both boys and girls, decreased levels of crime and violence and increased acceptance for gender equality among boys, and stronger self-esteem and less traditional jobs among girls. A close relationship with their children also have a positive impact on men's health.<sup>4</sup>

### **CAN TARGETED SUPPORT TO GENDER EQUALITY BE DIRECTED TOWARDS MEN AND BOYS?**

Yes, targeted support to gender equality can be given to an organisation working with men and/or boys. One example is MenEngage, a network for organisations working with men for gender equality. The aim of MenEngage is to improve gender equality and they collaborate with the women's rights movement.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, when an organisation includes the participation of both women and men, and when such an organisation has a clear gender perspective this also entails working with and targeting men.

### **IS IT ALWAYS RELEVANT TO INVOLVE MEN AND BOYS?**

The gender analysis should define whether it is relevant to involve men and boys. But, there are situations and contexts when it is inappropriate. For instance, shelters receiving survivors of violence against women and children are places where the presence of men may have a harmful effect on the women and children seeking refuge. Other contexts may be health centres where specific clinics for women are required, or in any contexts where women for certain reasons claim they need a safe haven. In each specific context, women's rights organisations, as any other CSO, must determine who they will work with and how. It is an important principle of ownership.

When assessing organisations working with and towards men and boys it also is important to be aware that there are organisations whose work is anti-feminist. This includes for instance organisations arguing that the feminist movement has gone too far and that men's rights needs to be protected, or organisations that explicitly or implicitly promote violence and threats in the name of protecting the family. These organisations should not be supported by Sida.

The gender analysis of the context is key. If Sida supports women's rights organisations that for specific reasons target women only, there might be alternative ways to also promote men's engagement for gender equality in the country or region.

### **SHOULD SIDA DEMAND THAT A PARTNER CHANGES/EXPANDS THEIR TARGET GROUP OR ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP?**

No, Sida should not demand from a partner that they change their target group or their core focus, for example that a women's rights organisation has to work with men and boys. Work on men and boys for gender equality should be supported through organisations with knowledge and experience in that area. However, it is always relevant to have a dialogue with the partner about their analysis and their choice of target group and working methods.

### **SOMETIMES THERE SEEM TO BE CONFLICTS BETWEEN WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS AND ORGANISATIONS WORKING WITH MEN – HOW CAN SIDA HANDLE THAT?**

Women's rights organisations must fight for very scarce economic resources. They also work with issues that challenge power relations and they meet a lot of resistance. It is natural that there is a fear that men get resources at the expense of the limited resources targeting women's rights organisations, even though this is not necessarily the case. Acknowledging this, Sida can engage in dialogue and create spaces for contact between different kinds of organisations working for gender equality in order to create conditions for less tensions and increased collaboration. When Sida considers support to organisations targeting men, women's rights organisations in that context should be consulted in order to create added value and prevent conflicts as to ensure the common goal of gender equality.

Support to women's rights organisations and to organisations of men working for gender equality should not be assessed as if competing over the same resources – there are many reasons for supporting various forms of gender equality work.

<sup>4</sup> MenCare 2015, State of the World's Fathers

<sup>5</sup> Increasing Engagement of Men and Boys for Gender Equality, Development Trends, Paul Dover, Sida September 2014