



IN BRIEF...

Gender equality enriches the world

The right to decide over one's own life is essential for human dignity. Poor people lack this right just as much as they lack money, food or a roof over their heads. Because of gender discrimination, poverty has an even greater impact on women and girls than on men and boys. Consequently Sida includes initiatives to promote equality between women and men in all of its development projects.

Gender discrimination is one of the main causes for poverty in a world in which men own 99 percent of total wealth and earn 90 percent of all income. Discrimination is obvious in countless areas: 85 percent of boys in the world complete primary education, but only 76 percent of girls. The number of women killed by domestic violence is greater than the number of people killed in armed conflicts. Men hold 85 percent of seats in the world's parliaments.

What is gender equality?

Gender equality means that all people have equal rights, obligations and opportunities, regardless of gender. Gender equality is a human right, which means that women and men, girls and boys, are considered as equal in terms of dignity and rights.

How does Sida promote gender equality?

Although Sida has long concentrated on special initiatives to strengthen the position of poor women and achieved many excellent results in the process, the significance and role of men in

gender equality and development was neglected. Analysis of the balance of power between women and men, and how it affects society, was missing.

Today Sida's work is based on the philosophy that an equal society can only be achieved if women and men work together. Men's roles, responsibilities and behaviours must be changed, just as women need to be empowered to exercise their rights and take control of their lives.

The rapid spread of HIV/AIDS is an area that shows the importance of working with both women and men. Because of men's sexual behaviour, many women and girls risk becoming infected through forced sex. It is usually women and girls who have to quit their jobs or leave school to take care of sick relatives. In this situation, merely focusing on analysis and support for women could even reinforce the problems.

Five points of departure for gender equality

The following points of departure explain what gender equality means for Sida's work and are also identified

as key for ensuring that Sida's actions contribute to gender equality. They are based on the understanding that lack of power, lack of choices and lack of material resources form the essence of poverty.

1. Gender equality further strengthens Sida's work for poverty reduction.
2. Gender equality is crucial in order to achieve sustainable democratic development.
3. Unequal power structures for women and men create obstacles for development in all spheres of society.
4. Gender relations vary in different societies and Sida takes this into account – but always within the framework of universal human rights.
5. Equal economic opportunities for women and men are necessary for a sustainable and democratic development.

Gender equality – part of the struggle against poverty

Sida's strategy to integrate the gender perspective into all development co-operation activities is called gender mainstreaming. All initiatives, programmes and projects are to be analysed from a gender perspective *before* they begin. Whether the initiative involves support for infrastructure, education or tax legislation, it must be analysed to determine its impact on women and men respectively.

One requirement for each development project that receives support from Sida is that it must contain clear

and attainable goals to increase gender equality. Sida pursues a constant dialogue with its partners – governments, organisations and other donor countries – to highlight gender equality issues.

Sida also supports initiatives that directly focus on promoting gender equality.

Some gender equality initiatives supported by Sida

● The governments in South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Namibia, Sri Lanka and Barbados work with gender equality in **government budget planning**. These efforts enable them to report how the different components of the economy affect women and men in practice.

● The organisation Tostan in Senegal works to increase knowledge of women's health and **mobilise opinion against female genital mutilation, FGM, and child marriage** through theatre, songs and stories in the local language. Attitudes to FGM have rapidly changed in hundreds of villages, which have all issued official statements to protect their girls from genital mutilation and their children from forced marriage. Ideally, in one gene-

ration's time the custom of genital mutilation will be as rare as foot binding and widow burning.

● About fifty projects are in progress around the world based on providing support to children and women subjected to **human trafficking and slave trading**. The network Angel Coalition in Russia is one such organisation that receives Swedish support. Angel Coalition has built up rehabilitation centres in several cities for women and children subjected to trafficking. The network also works to influence public opinion.

● **Men As Partners** is the name of a project in South Africa that aims to change men's attitudes towards their wives and families. MAP's activists fight for gender equality and to stop men's destructive behaviour towards women and children. For example, a big problem in South Africa is the idea that "real" men don't use condoms. This limits women's opportunities to negotiate for safe sex in a country where a quarter of the sexually active age group is estimated to be infected with HIV. Every year between 2,000 and 3,000 men attend MAP's weeklong courses.

● New laws in Nicaragua have given women a stronger position in society. Here Sida supports a project with **local intermediaries** whose task is to ensure that the laws are enforced even in remote rural areas. Previously men were not forced to take responsibility for their children, but the new law requires mandatory maintenance. For example, if the father refuses to accept his responsibility, the intermediaries can help the mother to file a paternity case in family court.

FURTHER READING

Sida's policy *Promoting Gender Equality in Development Cooperation*, Sida 2005.
Perspectives on Poverty, Sida 2002.

Web resources

Download full text versions of the CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action at:
www.un.org/womenwatch

Facts and statistics on the UN Millennium Development Goals:
www.developmentgoals.org
www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

A number of international agreements serve as the basis of Sida's work and ideology related to gender equality. The most important policy document is the **UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, which was adopted in 1948. It states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights".

Another policy document is **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, which was adopted in 1979. It defines discrimination and signing states pledge to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women from their legislation.

In September 1994 UN held a conference on population and development in Cairo. The

conference's action plan, the **Cairo Programme**, broadened the view of population issues and emphasised the right to sexual and reproductive health and equality between men and women.

The **UN Fourth World Conference on Women**, held in Beijing in 1995, affirmed what was adopted in Cairo. The Beijing conference resulted in a Platform for Action for gender equality, with twelve critical areas for the world's states to address.

In 2000 the UN member states reached a consensus to work together to eradicate extreme poverty. They formulated eight **Millennium Development Goals**, which also focus on the promotion of gender equality.

Halving poverty in the world by 2015 is feasible. It calls for cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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