

DEFINITIONS

GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality means equal treatment of women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities and society at large.

WHO, 2001

GENDER EQUITY

Gender equity means fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. It often requires women-specific programmes and policies to end existing inequalities.

WHO, 2001

GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Gender discrimination refers to any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of socially constructed gender roles and norms which prevents a person from enjoying full human rights.

WHO, 2001

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

These are the freedoms and entitlements of women and girls of all ages. These rights may or may not be institutionalised, ignored or suppressed by law, local custom, and behaviour in a particular society.

Socioeconomic, political, and legal rights for women equal to those of men.

A set of practices and laws that are the continuously evolving product of an international movement to improve the status of women.

MAINSTREAMING

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.

Women Watch

OUTLINING THE ISSUE

Women are more likely to live in poverty, simply because they are women. In every country of the world, women are systematically denied their rights and as a result have less power, money, land, protection from violence and access to education and healthcare. Of the world's poor, 70 % are women, as are 60 % of people infected with HIV in Africa (ActionAid, 2007).

Women's often too limited access to reproductive health information and services leads to intolerable numbers of pregnancy-related deaths in many countries. In the political arena, women are in most cases least represented in decision-making organs of political parties and in turn in governments and parliaments.

Women's rights are a cross-cutting issue, impacting on all aspects of development. Women's empowerment is a pre-requisite for development, and poverty cannot be tackled unless the rights of women are placed centre stage. Similarly, aid cannot be deemed effective unless it tackles this central issue. Women's rights are central to the development effectiveness agenda and should therefore be a main area of focus.

In many countries women's organisations have played a crucial role by representing, supporting and defending vulnerable groups of women; keeping gender equality and women's rights issues on policymakers' agendas; fighting for women's rights at a legislative level; and holding governments and other stakeholders to account for their implementation of gender-related commitments (GAD-Network, 2008).

Women's issues were in the past the prerogative of women's organisations but today, many development CSOs have made women's rights and empowerment core areas of their interventions. They have done this by focusing on basic human rights for women (equality before the law; life; freedom of expression, political participation, religion; freedom from torture and slavery) which are largely mainstreamed gender equality components. Other important women's human rights issues such as violence against women and equality under the law and at home have been pursued successfully through specific (not mainstreamed) women's rights programmes. Nevertheless, there are many challenges in making these interventions effective.

Challenges of religious or cultural fundamentalisms of different kinds and increases in violence, conflict and war have been a great threat to women's rights achievements. At the same time, there is a perceived reduction in the focus on gender equality by donors and governments in recent years. All this has increased the importance and role of CSOs in keeping gender equality and women's rights on the political and development agenda.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What strategies best inform CSOs' approaches that promote women's rights and gender equality? Some suggest that promotion of women's rights issues are best dealt with as standalone projects so as to elevate the plight of the women and to make them reach a level playing field, while others promote mainstreaming of women's rights issues. What are the pros and cons of each approach and what lessons can you draw for guidelines for CSO development effectiveness that can really make a difference to women?

2. What guidelines do you suggest to donors and governments to strengthen women-focused CSO development effectiveness?
3. Share some good practices that can be derived from women's rights and empowerment initiatives of CSOs.

USEFUL RESOURCES

ActionAid International (June 2007), "Making Aid Accountable and Effective: The challenge for the Third High Level Forum on aid effectiveness". Available at:

<http://www.actionaid.org/docs/making%20aid%20accountable%20and%20effective.pdf>

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), www.awid.org

Women Watch: Information and Resources on Gender Equity and Empowerment of Women. Available at: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/gender_mainstreaming_10314.htm

Whither EC Aid? Available at: <http://weca-ecaaid.eu/>

Lupunga, Paul (2007), "Gender and the Paris Declaration in Zambia". Available at: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/financing_gender_equality/ExpertPapers/EP.7%20Lupunga.pdf, 2007-10-16

Terman, Rochelle, "International Achievements of Women's Rights: What they are and why they matter". Available at: http://cis.uchicago.edu/outreach/archive/speakersbureau/rochelle_terman-womensrights.ppt

UK Gender and Development Network (January 2008), "Gender Equality, the New Aid Environment and Civil Society Organisations". Available at: <http://www.gadnetwork.org.uk/pdfs/Jan08/GAD-Network-Report.pdf>