



Gender Encounter

Gender Equality and Strategies in the Horn of Africa

Proceedings by:
Fetenu BEKELE

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1 Introduction to the encounter

HORN OF AFRICA CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME

The Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme (HOACBP) is a regional development initiative, financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and co-managed by Oxfam Québec and Oxfam Canada. The programme's mandate is to promote the principles of equity and participatory development in the Horn of Africa. It supports groups and organizations – civil society organizations and public governing structures – that are grounded at the local level, engaged in non-formal education, information/communications, gender and justice.

HOACBP puts emphasis on organizations that provide opportunities for engaging in a learning process in participation and democracy, thereby developing a sense of responsibility for one's own development among partners. It works with those organizations that have demonstrated a capacity and/or willingness to engage their own people in development initiatives. Such engagement should manifest itself in terms of moral, human, material and financial support from local resources.

This Gender Encounter – organized by HOACBP for its partners and development allies at the Plaza Hotel in Khartoum, Sudan, from 5 – 9 December 2003 – is the eighth regional initiative that the Programme has undertaken in and for the Horn of Africa region since 1997. Apart from the Nairobi Encounter, HOACBP's first regional initiative, all previous 'encounters' have taken place in Ethiopia. The Khartoum Gender Encounter, therefore, is significant for HOACBP and its partners in terms of the increased potential for regional activities and outreach in other Horn countries.

THE THEME

The choice of gender as the theme for this Encounter served many purposes:

- The Horn's isolation is, among other things, severely marked by the gap in information, space for reflection, diagnostic analysis and deeper work on gender and women's empow-

erment. Awareness by some Oxfam partners – especially women's organizations in the five Horn countries Oxfam works with – has resulted in national and regional initiatives for joint learning through networking. The Gender Encounter, therefore, has built on this awareness and interest.

- There is a movement of women in the region demanding space in the negotiations and management of peace. These initiatives and the emerging challenges are thought to merit more attention and support. The Encounter provided an appropriate forum for discussion of issues relevant to this initiative.
- Although the HOACBP programme framework has never failed to draw attention to, and identify gaps in, gender work and activities with women in the Horn, Oxfam Canada and Oxfam Québec have increasingly felt the need for a special focus on the gender equality agenda. The same sentiment has been echoed by the partners, who welcomed the opportunity to give a more structured approach to programming initiatives by helping to develop an effective and practical strategy for gender equality.

OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the Encounter were:

- ➔ To bring to light the situation of gender inequality in the Horn of Africa.
- ➔ To take stock of recent international thinking and practice on moving toward gender equality.
- ➔ To develop a conceptual framework that can facilitate planning, implementation and monitoring of the gender components within HOACBP.
- ➔ To enhance the capacities/skills of participants to do more effective gender equality work.
- ➔ To build common understanding on gender equality among the Oxfams working in the

region (i.e., Canada, Quebec and Great Britain), and their partners in the Horn.

- ➔ To inform the capacity building strategies of organizers, governments and other development stakeholders working in the region.

PARTICIPANTS

The Gender Encounter drew 50 participants – 41 women and 9 men – from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Puntland, Somaliland and Sudan, all of whom were resource persons in their own right, enriching the teaching and learning that took place in Khartoum. A list of workshop participants can be found at the end of this report.

APPROACH

The methodologies utilized by the facilitators were participatory, engaging members in discussions of key factors regarding gender equality in the region, identifying common factors, challenges and opportunities from shared experiences, and engaging in joint analysis and development of strategies for change.

Although the official language of the Encounter was English, informal translations were provided by the facilitators and the participants themselves, which greatly enhanced joint learning.

ORGANIZATION AND RESOURCE PERSONS

The Gender Encounter was organized in collaboration with Al Ahfad University for Women – the oldest and first of its kind in the Sudan and the Horn Region.

The main facilitators of the Encounter were:

- ➔ *David Kelleher*, Co-Director of Gender at Work (Canada); and,
- ➔ *Balgis Badri*, Professor at the Institute for Women, Gender and Development Studies, Al Ahfad University for Women (Sudan).

Other resource people included *Rieky Stuart* and *Joan Summers* from Oxfam Canada, and *Nora Matovu Winki* from Associates for Change, a Ugandan NGO.

Danielle Valiquette, HOACBP Deputy Programme Manager from Oxfam Québec, was mainly responsible for developing workshop content and for the logistical arrangements, in collaboration with Al Ahfad University, and assisted by *Amel Aldehaib*, contact person for HOACBP in Sudan.



2 Conceptualization: the Why and What of Gender Work

Facilitator David Kelleher began his introduction of the current thinking, trends, challenges and opportunities concerning the theme of the Encounter by duly acknowledging the rich knowledge and practical experience the participants bring to the discussion. He felt each participant was already engaged in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through their organizations' chosen approaches and strategies. Further, that each would bring their own personal queries and concerns to share and reflect upon, to help improve their efforts, work and impact on gender.

- What is the current thinking, theories, practices and lessons from gender work?
- Are women and men interested in working for and attaining gender equality?
- What is in gender equality and women's empowerment for men?
- Do women have a cause?

Kelleher's presentation, based on a concept paper prepared for the Encounter, tried to address the above questions and let the participants reflect on them, by drawing on their personal experiences and the work of their own or other organizations. He also shared his personal views, and drew on his own and other analytical work on gender, for easier conceptualization of the theoretical framework for the Encounter process.

WHY DOES GENDER EQUALITY MATTER?

The reality of deepening poverty challenges the practice of continuing 'business as usual' – i.e., maintaining gender inequalities – and calls for a search for alternative strategies and approaches to poverty reduction. There is now increased awareness that gender inequalities are both causes and effects of poverty, and that gender equality is both a human rights issue and a development objective in its own right. As well, there is growing evidence of the existence of gender inequalities in highly economically-developed countries. Poverty is also being redefined to include non-material acquisitions.

Kelleher referred to existing literature, including a World Bank publication¹, agreeing with the position that addressing poverty does not mean just improving service delivery for material benefits. It also includes building the assets and capabilities of the poor. The poor lack power, and generally poor women are subordinated to poor men. There is no region in the world where women and men have equal legal, social, economic and political rights. These studies show how development is slowed when girls and women do not enjoy equal rights in access to resources, voice and freedom from violence.

Engendering Development also linked gender inequality to a variety of 'well-being' variables, such as higher rates of HIV infection, poor child nutrition and child mortality. The document illustrates, through examples, how gender inequality affects productivity and growth. Limiting women's access to land, information or capital constrains their ability to make a living. Moreover, because women's income is tied to cognitive development, education and health of children, inequality affects options for livelihood, family support and long-term national economic growth.

Amartya Sen demonstrates in his book² how development is dependent on 'positive freedoms'. He links political freedoms, economic and social opportunities for education and health care, transparency and guaranteed protection/security. Not only are these freedoms to be enjoyed by individual men and women, but society must create institutions and organizations to nurture and maintain these freedoms. There is an increasing consensus that individual change alone is not enough to make significant impact on development and gender inequity. Institutions must also change. By 'institutions' we mean the (stated and implicit) rules that maintain the positions of girls/women and boys/men in different societies throughout their lives.

The terms 'institution' and 'organization' are often used interchangeably. Kelleher pointed out that it is important to distinguish between the two. According to Naila Kabeer³, 'institutions' should be understood to represent the rules for achieving

1 World Bank, *Engendering Development*, 2001.

2 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Anchor, New York, 1999.

3 Naila Kabeer, "Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals", Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003.

social or economic ends – specifying how resources are allocated, and work and responsibilities are assigned and valued. That is, these rules determine who gets and does not get what, who does what, and who makes decisions. These rules, Kabeer writes, would include the values that maintain the gender division of labour, restrictions on women’s ownership of land and property, and the valuing of production (i.e., reproduction), care and maintaining of human capital (the labour force). This undervaluing and exclusion of unpaid family maintenance in the national accounts are among the feminist critiques of the mainstream economy.

Regarding ‘organizations’, Kelleher says these are also implicated, and referred to Ferguson’s critique of bureaucracy. This critique also validated the experience of countless women (and some men) who have tried to make their organizations improve their work and be more active in challenging gender inequality. Among the factors identified as hindrances to effecting organizational change, there are:

- a lack of capacity;
- resistance of male managers; and,
- the dynamics at the very core of organizations.

WHAT IS IT THAT WE WANT TO CHANGE IN INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS?

While reiterating the importance of making the distinction between institutions and organizations, Kelleher noted there is now a clearer understanding that institutions can change, to a large extent, as a result of the actions of organizations. Organizations are change agents, their strategies and approaches determining the success or otherwise of their ability to change formal and informal institutions.

The example is given of organizations raising ‘legal literacy’ in women in the communities where they work. This involves advising women of their rights, which can lead the women to challenge local authorities in their villages, pushing for enforcement of equal rights laws where these exist.

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It is critical to note that whenever an organization intervenes in the life of a community it has the choice of whether to:

1. Support existing community gender-related norms; or,
2. Challenge institutional norms that maintain gender inequalities.

Formal and Informal Institutions and Organizations

The ‘organization’ works within the context of ‘formal and informal institutions’. Formal institutions consist of state constitutions, public laws, policies, enforcement systems/mechanisms, etc. The informal, as mentioned earlier, involves norms – unwritten laws on every aspect of an individual’s daily life and relations (such as work, property, marriage and divorce), which tend to favour men over women, and maintain and perpetuate gender inequalities.

Kelleher shows five interrelated clusters of changes that need to be made to: (1) the conditions of women and men, and (2) consciousness of women and men (at individual levels); (3) informal and (4) formal laws/norms/rules (at institutional levels); and, (5) organizations operating within the (1) to (4) spheres. The changes sought here are:

- improvements in the condition of women and men (represented by measurable changes in individuals in terms of resources, voice, freedom from violence, access to health, etc.); and,
- improvements in women’s and men’s individual consciousness (i.e., attitude, knowledge, skills, political awareness and commitment to equality).

The individual levels of condition and consciousness are influenced by the formal and informal institutions in the life cycle of men and women, with the latter also informing the former.

For a long time, work with women and work on gender issues have been understood differently, with accompanying prescriptions for interventions. These have mostly involved:

- focusing on women (i.e., targeting them to improve their situation and meet their specific needs, because there is still evidence that they are disadvantaged relative to men);
- integrating women's interests into mainstream development – i.e., gender mainstreaming – because they should have an equal share of the national pie; or,
- having more women in decision-making positions.

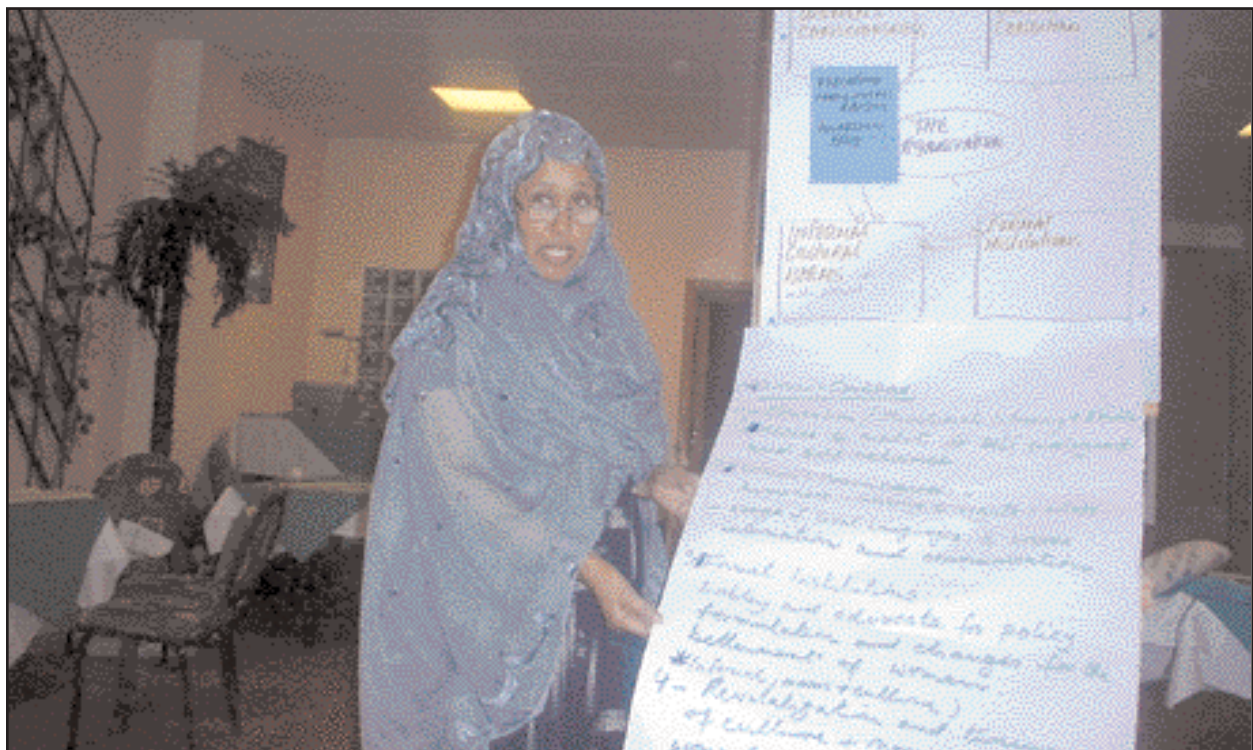
All the above are still valid and need to be continued. Different types of organizations continue to engage in these types of interventions in commu-

nities, according to their choices and capabilities. However, progress in practical implementation of broader commitments – particularly the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, in which all development stakeholders pledged to promote gender equality and women's empowerment – has been very slow⁴.

According to Kabeer, gender relations operate within existing power relations, and power is used to maintain the status quo – i.e., with privileges for some and deprivations for others. Power manifests itself in different ways and, whatever form it takes, is about politics. In so far as gender relations are about power and power is politics, then strategies for gender equality need to have a political component⁵.

The absence of a clear focus on changing gender power relations in social change efforts has ended up either reinforcing existing power relations or creating new male elites.

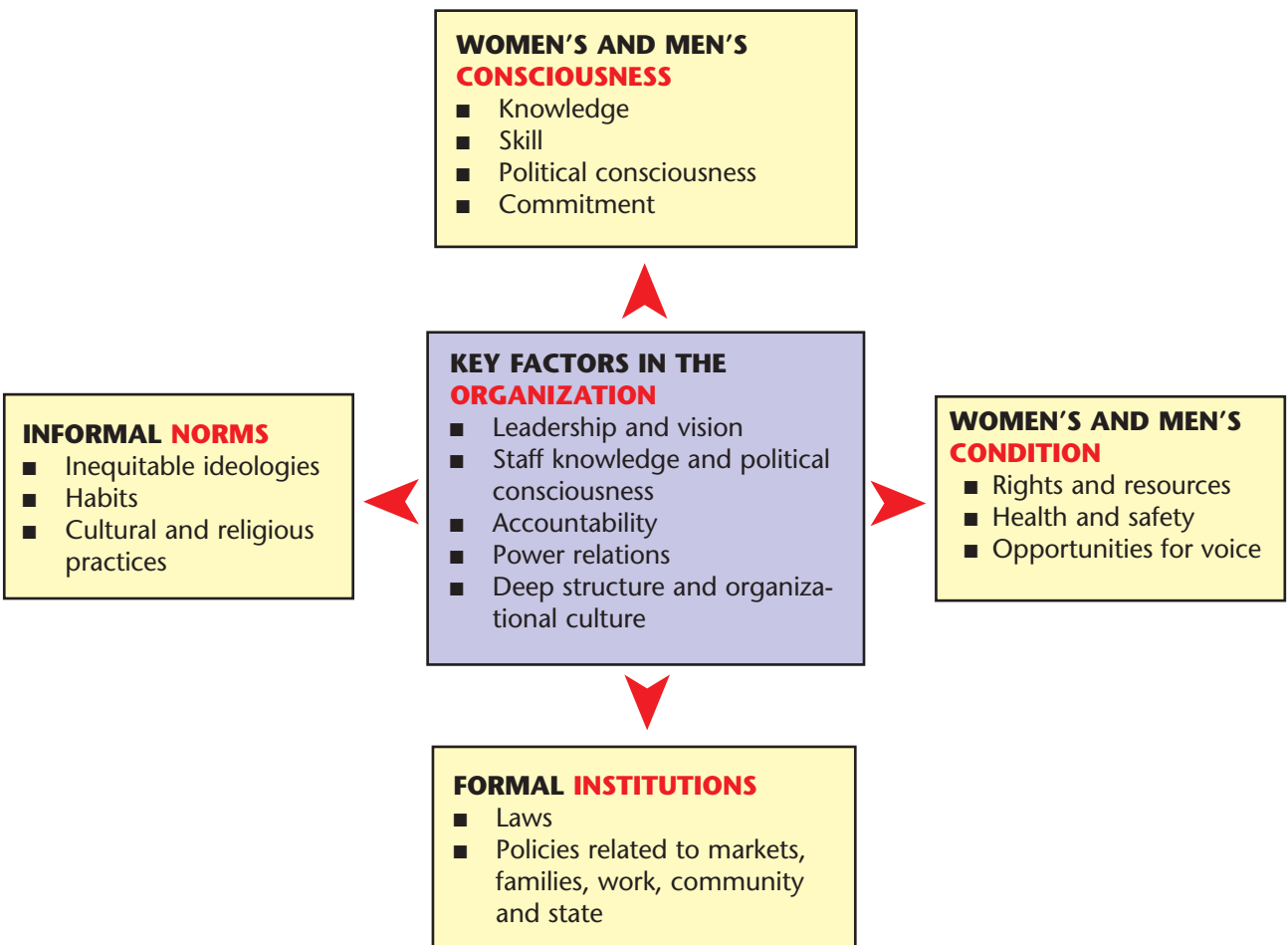
David Kelleher



4 Beijing + 5 Review of PFA Implementation Progress, New York, 2000.

5 Taken from the Concept Paper prepared for the Gender Encounter by David Kelleher, 2003.

A FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGES IN GENDER EQUALITY⁶



⁶ Reproduced from David Kelleher's Concept Paper.

The above framework, developed by David Kelleher, graphically shows the inter linkages between the four clusters that an organization has to work in, in order to be a change agent for gender equality (i.e., condition, consciousness, formal laws and informal norms). For effective work in these clusters, the leadership in an organization must be accountable to women clients, and have a capacity for dialogue and conflict resolution.

In order to bring about changes in gender inequalities, therefore, we need to think about the forces that maintain them. Organizations themselves are gendered. They need to change both inside (within themselves), and outside (in their strategies, approaches, rules, programmes and activities). Analysis of factors in organizations that need strengthening and improving must be undertaken for any strategy for gender change to work.

The Gender Encounter offered an opportunity for the participants to work on the above-mentioned clusters, and jointly identify linkages, strategies and approaches, as well as the types of capacity building needed to improve their organizations' work in gender equality and women's empowerment.

Organizations themselves are gendered.



3 Analysis of Key Factors affecting Gender Equality in the Horn

As noted earlier, progress towards meeting the targets set for gender equality in the Beijing Platform for Action commitments, has been painfully slow⁷. Challenges still remain to deconstructing existing inequalities and the forces that maintain them, including national and global social, religious, political and economic factors.

The Gender Encounter participants embarked on an analysis of some of the national, regional and international factors that have affected gender equality in the past ten years in the Horn. This country and regional analysis was done through group exercises to help contextualize existing situations and emerging trends, thereby generating much needed information. Common events and factors were identified and examined for their positive and/or negative impacts on gender relations in the region. Such factors included:

CONFLICTS

Gender inequality predates conflict in the region, but conflict and post conflict situations bring distinct disadvantages that worsen gender relations. In general, conflict in the Horn has brought about changes in traditional gender relations. War and conflict are decisions and actions of men, resulting in insecurity for women, men and their children. Women have come to bear a disproportionate burden for keeping the family together in such situations. With disruption of the traditional family structure and relations, women are assuming more responsibilities for maintenance of households/ clans, engaging in economic activities to meet financial needs. Although this has given women space to make decisions and earn income from non-traditional activities, their newly acquired role (and income) has also resulted in demands to finance and sustain bad and expensive habits of spouses, children, male relatives and clan affiliations.

In some cases, changes in gender relations and women's 'economic' activities have resulted in male violence against women, and informal community pressure for women to maintain their subordinate positions (i.e., to uphold male control

over women's behaviour, activities and income earned). In other words, the apparent gains by women in control over decisions, mobility and income-earning options – arising out of instability and conflict – threaten the public (masculine supremacy) image of male status. Men are considered to lose control when 'their women' are making decisions and engaged in public interactions. Male inability to 'discipline' women to maintain the traditional relations of domination and subordination lessens their role and place in society.

Furthermore, the loosening of the influences of traditional norms/rules on women in conflict, displacement and refugee situations has unleashed additional disadvantages. Women and their children in such situations have been vulnerable in negotiations, which tend to be unfavourable to themselves and their families. Access to basic survival necessities (i.e., access to food, basic services, personal safety and security) are of extreme concern. Violation of human rights in general, and gender-based violence in particular, is inherent in the conflict situations that are rampant in the Horn region.

FUNDAMENTALISM

Religious fundamentalism in the Horn of Africa has tended to target girls' and women's rights, restricting their mobility relative to boys and men. Male control increases in all spheres of family/clan life in the name of religion. That is, girls and women face restrictions and more deprivations in their access to education, employment, marital decisions, fertility, divorce, inheritance and public representation/participation. Prevalence of polygamy, early and arranged marriages, female subordination, female genital mutilation (FGM), wife inheritance, etc., have increased in some countries and communities in the Horn.

The power of the proponents of religious fundamentalism (whatever the religion) and increased influences on curtailment of girls and women require re-examining the demarcation between religion and culture. Since 'spirituality' and religious leadership are vested on males, it is these

⁷ Beijing +5 Progress Review of 2000 also found retrenchment on government commitments in certain cases.

men who can be targeted to address this concern in the Horn. It was noted that this has proved helpful in a few instances where this has occurred.

POVERTY

Instability, inadequate basic infrastructure and livelihood opportunities have an impact on: the gender division of labour (increased burden on women to secure basic needs, like food and water); access of women to health services; vulnerability to HIV/AIDS; and, opportunities for income creation, especially in rural and displaced communities. The culture of 'boy preference' and investment in educational opportunities for boys perpetuate girls' deprivation. This is more prevalent where family resources are depleted and the cost of education is increasing.

The preoccupation with access to basic services, rather than knowledge of and demands for these as rights, are controversial issues that overshadow gender equality issues in poverty situations. Opportunities for earning livelihoods and decreasing female dependency on males are severely limited. Though improving in some countries, it appears that individual women and organizational change agents are forced to concentrate on improving access to goods and services, rather than working on the legal rights of women.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Male violence against women, in reaction to women's empowerment, is increasing and taking different forms (including abduction and rape). A lack of knowledge of legal rights in cases of violence, acceptance of female subordination and male promiscuity are all contributing to this situation. Within a culture of violence against women, both in times of conflict and peace, State protection is required in the form of enactment of laws and their strict enforcement to ensure gender rights are respected.

THE HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC

The gains from past investments are being eroded as countries, most of which are in denial phase, lose their educated and trained labour force due

to HIV/AIDS. Poverty, gender relations – including inadequate information and services – are playing havoc on family relations. The health, time and lives of women are endangered as they have no control over their sexuality, resulting in lack of autonomy over body and livelihood options, and vulnerability to infections.

HIV/AIDS is seen only as a health issue in many Horn countries. Nor is the gender dimension of this epidemic fully understood. The danger of changes in population dynamics from this epidemic is not yet fully communicated to citizens, including religious leaders and community elders. Isolation and exclusion of countries in the Horn has aggravated the situation, preventing needed communications. Countries are now coming out of the denial phase.

INFORMAL SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Women's increasing entry into the informal sector to generate income is a positive trend in the Horn. However the sector remains unprotected and unsupported even in non-conflict situations. Girls and women are therefore subjected to harassment, violence and deprivation of rights when they seek to earn their living from this sector. Moreover, earning income creates additional economic and social burdens, as women are both expected and forced to maintain a growing number of dependents. Nor is there any evidence of lessening the burden of domestic chores for girls. Nevertheless, female income is becoming critical to family survival, despite the insecurities.

GENDER EQUALITY AGENDA AND INTERNATIONAL LINKS

Constitutional rights, affirmative action, international gender equality conventions, national women's and gender policies, gender focal points and activities in gender mainstreaming are now familiar issues in Horn countries. Academicians, researchers and human rights activists both within and outside the Horn are introducing these concepts and instruments. Exposure to regional and international conferences and events are improving. Partnership with international NGOs and donors (though very few in conflict areas), and the

influence of the Diaspora, have been instrumental in increasing awareness of the gender discourse. The limited sharing of experiences and documentation has inspired NGOs and governing bodies in the region to start reacting to gender equality issues.

Djibouti and Ethiopia have policies for women, and the former has gender infrastructure in government and NGO offices. Others have their own national machinery to initiate, coordinate and monitor progress in implementation of international agreements for protecting women's rights. Funding of gender awareness/training for women and men is improving. Opportunities for exposure for women, though not sufficient and sustained, are being secured from donor and partner NGOs working in the Horn. For the most part, though, conditionality and donor pressure have been instrumental in creating the gender infrastructure that exists. It is women themselves that are seeking to be exposed to, informed about and supported to engage in and improve gender equality work.

EMERGENCE OF WOMEN'S NGOs AND NETWORKING

A positive and growing trend is Horn women forming networks at national, regional and international levels to improve their gender equality advocacy work. In almost all the Horn countries, this is increasing with women's organizations (CSOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) and mixed organizations seeking capacity building support. In countries like Ethiopia, women's CSOs are engaging government on women's and human rights issues, influencing legal reforms, and engaging the public and government in policy dialogue – including demanding for legal reforms and law enforcement related to violence against women and affirmative action policy.

Alliances of women NGOs for peace and gender equality are increasing, building solidarity with neighbouring sister organizations on thematic issues. Somaliland and Ethiopia, for example, have voter education programme and activities to support female candidates. CSOs, in collaboration

with external partners in some of the countries, are increasing their involvement in forming and training parliamentary women's caucuses.

On the other hand, informal pressures are put by men in communities on women's groups, protesting women's involvement in dialogue on cultural issues and political activities (i.e., Puntland and Somaliland). More work is being done on credit, HIV/AIDS, violence against women, legal rights and training in gender mainstreaming, funding for which comes more from donors than governments.

Mixed NGOs have WID components and/or gender policies or focal persons. These are coming into their own as they get involved in policy areas such as 'Poverty Reduction Strategy' (PRSP) and monitoring mainstreaming. Women's organizations however need more technical and financial resources and security to be really effective. There are incidents where women's organizations/associations have been subject to State intolerance of their activities, being neither autonomous nor secure⁸.

GLOBALIZATION

Women's handicraft products fetch little in the markets where there is dumping of cheap imported textiles and second-hand clothes from countries outside the region. More women than men are into cross-border trade and migratory labour, the latter to Middle Eastern countries. Human rights issues are concerns in these migratory labour situations. Privatization, liberalization and deregulation negatively impact employment and social security benefits of female formal sector employees (e.g., Ethiopian women have sustained employment and social benefits endangered when textile factories are privatized).

Rural women are also forced to fend for their families, when male farmers move to the cities to look for jobs, abandoning their families because of withdrawal of agricultural subsidies and the drop in commodity value in most Horn countries (e.g., coffee, livestock). These negatively impact

⁸ Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) was banned from operating at one time. A Sudanese women's organization also had its office sealed.

women's use of time, and their ability to support their children and themselves, and to take advantage of opportunities that may come with the globalization process.

DROUGHT AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

In the environmentally vulnerable Horn, access to water, fuel wood and materials for shelter increase the burden for women who bear responsibility for obtaining these (especially in pastoral families). Inclusive programmes for the management of environmental resources are not yet in place. Women's role in and contributions to environmental management have yet to be fully understood and incorporated into policies and programmes in Horn countries.

A positive trend is NGOs increasing public awareness, as in the case of Sudan's Environmental Society, which utilizes various means to reach the public and engage the State on environmental issues. There is also more focus now on the needs and plight of pastoralist communities in Ethiopia.

PEACE MEDIATION AND MANAGEMENT

Women are demanding a role in peace talks and peace management, and are organizing themselves to participate (e.g., in Somaliland and Puntland). Male reactions and community pressures on women activists have a negative impact on their sustained mobilization and advocacy work. The prospect of forming women peace networks, and of their involvement in peace talks to influence future strategies for peace, have not yet been fully appreciated and factored into the peace process. Somali women, both in and outside the Horn, are showing growing concern and interest in activities related to peace negotiation efforts.

Women in conflict-ridden countries in the Horn are all too aware of missed opportunities, both in the region and in other countries. This is motivating them to make a difference, although there are few supporters for these concerns and efforts of women. However, traditional norms and laws are being evoked to make peace advocacy more effective.

Support to women's efforts to participate in conflict resolution and peace mediation is very much needed. Women lack resources, including encouragement from families and friends, to reach the peace talks, which often take place outside the region. Peace activists have no resources to travel to the sites, prepare inputs (which are not in the vernacular) and engage in advocacy. Few external donors and partners are aware of this situation, which is a challenge for partnership development in peace building.

PEACE PROSPECT IN SUDAN

Women activists are demanding a role in the Peace Talks in the Sudan. There is adequate awareness of and expectations from the promise of peace in this country across the Horn. Some restrictive measures on women seem to be loosening in the run up to the Peace Talks (e.g., openings for building external partnerships). This is an opportunity women are keen to seize by widening their networks both within the country and the region.

Position papers and strategies were prepared from a gender perspective to support the talks and incorporate gender issues in the peace building process. Female and male academics and researchers in the country have worked collaboratively, preparing the ground for joint work with male allies for change. This is attributed, to a certain extent, to the recently passed government directive to facilitate CSO networking in the country.

Though more women are visible in public interaction and peace issues from the southern and western regions, there seems to be expanded space for civic engagement in the country as a whole. Women-only NGOs are already engaged in 'peace education' within the framework of family education to homemakers/mothers and families. Reaching all ages through public education is a positive move toward peace management and maintenance.

Furthermore, because of the positive implications of peace in the Sudan, the concerns and prayers of Horn women were quite apparent at the

Encounter. Peace is perceived as the obvious uniting factor for women to solve a number of related problems emanating from war and conflict. However, opportunities for sharing lessons on working for peace with women in neighbouring countries were said to be rather few.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

The 'digital divide' in the Horn affects women more than men, but where women are able to access ICT, it is used effectively for networking and mutual support purposes. Poverty and isolation hamper accessing and taking advantage of this technological resource in the region. Nevertheless, ICT is developing in Somaliland and Puntland much faster and cheaper than in neighbouring countries, which still have various restrictions. Community tele-centres or communication centres, where they exist, are accessed more by men than by women, because of factors of poverty and illiteracy.

The Diaspora has utilized ICT to pass on much needed educational information to Horn NGOs. This link has also helped women through sustained remittances from relatives in the Diaspora, bringing some wealth and independence to mothers and sisters in the Horn. Such financial support has enabled women to engage in foreign currency exchange businesses (e.g., done in open markets in Somaliland and Puntland), with little or no male protection. This would not have been possible in the pre-conflict era.

Plenary Discussion of Presentations

The plenary discussion on the above analysis was lively, validating and bonding. The reactions to the presentations and issues brought forward by the participants from Canada, who shared their analysis of their context, were of particular interest. For example, it was related that even in an economically developed country like Canada, gender inequalities still exist. Women do not get equal pay for work of equal value, and generally receive up to one third less of what men get for the same work. The prevalence and influence of the informal culture on the formal was thus clearly shown.

The fight for equality in both the North and South continues, and there was a strong suggestion that networking, alliance building and sustained struggle are common strategies that Canadian and African women and men share, and should intensify by building solidarity. Participants learned that Canadian organizations have also been subjected to the impacts of globalization and the challenge to improve their work/interventions. For example, Canadian NGOs such as Oxfam continue to work to bring the voices and concerns of the women and peoples of Africa to global decision-making talks. This they can do, it was emphasized, through exchange of information, lessons and partnership building among civil society organizations.

Violence against women and women's struggle for equality are concerns shared by all. A particular difference, noted by one of the Horn participants, was that whereas participants from the Horn are concerned about basic necessities that have yet to be met through State allocations, the developed world is into advocacy related to such issues as tax cuts. Despite these differences, the similarities represented a good basis for strengthening women's solidarity globally.

Adding her comments on the above, the Co-Facilitator Dr. Balgis Badri validated the analysis, and also drew attention to additional international, regional and sub-regional events and processes that have a gender dimension. She cited the African Human Rights Charter, HIV/AIDS, sustainable environment conferences in South Africa, structural adjustment programmes (SAP), PRSP, the African Union (AU) and NEPAD as openings for further elaborating a gender dimension. Activities related to these at the country level, she noted, and their impact on gender relations, are issues for further examination and analysis. Among the problems in the Horn, Dr. Badri underlined the gap in information and inadequate documentation, which are closely linked to limited opportunities for sharing and networking.

Group exercises and panel discussions followed guiding questions provided by the Facilitators. These looked into the four boxes contained in the framework for bringing about changes in gender equality, given in Section II above – (1) conditions

4 Analysis of current conditions of gender equality in the Horn

of women in comparison to men, (2) women's and men's consciousness levels, (3) formal and (4) informal institutions – as factors affecting gender relations in the Horn. This section of the report concentrates on Areas 1 and 2.

CONDITIONS OF WOMEN AND MEN

Guiding Questions:

Thinking of the women you work with ... what is the situation they face in comparison to men in terms of access to and control of resources, influence/decision-making in the family and the community, access to health and education, and freedom from violence?

Indicate the positive and negative aspects of these on flip charts.

Resource Access and Control

Preference for boys deprives girls of educational opportunities. The same male preference and position assumes control of family/clan property (i.e., land, livestock, employment and income), making girls and women dependent on men. Marriage and divorce determines women as 'resources' and 'exchange commodities', thus contributing to gender inequality. Rural women have no ownership of family land, which is reinforced by both formal and informal laws, thereby depriving girls and women of means of production/productive resources. Pressure on boys to carry on the family name and traditional values were also said to disadvantage them, in that boys are expected to assume maturity and family responsibilities at an early age, thus depriving them of schooling and other opportunities for improvement.

Inadequate services, particularly reproductive health care, affect women's access to health services. Since women's health problems are not priorities – and are even stigmatization – they continue to care for the sick and elderly even when they themselves are sick. Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, the burden of care of infected families/clans are addi-

tional health and economic problems women face in Horn countries.

As mentioned earlier, women are subjected to domestic violence, physical and informal community pressures, when and if they get a chance to become economically and politically active (empowered).

Decision-Making / Influence

Men generally own and control livestock in pastoral communities. Women are restricted to small ruminants, with some leverage to sell livestock products and use for family care. Large animals are the property of men, often acquired with wives at marriage. However, divorced women cannot take these back with them. Women with influential father or brothers are better protected in the family, with some say in family decisions. The pastoral lifestyle leaves some decisions to the women who remain behind for the months the men are away herding livestock. However, a young boy remaining at home may feel he has power over his mother because of his socialization within a patriarchal society.

Women acquire control and decision-making status as they grow older and become 'elders'. Women elders have decision-making power related to conflict resolution and peacemaking, along with elderly men. At the same time, there is an increasing trend of elderly women caring for orphaned grandchildren.

Vulnerability to Violence

Harmful practices in the form of physical abuse are directed at the girl child and women in the name of culture. Male control of women's mobility, economic activities and fertility, and cultural norms around food taboos and FGM, are among the things women are subjected to in the household. Mothers-in-law have control over the labour, time, fertility, mobility and identity of daughters-in-law, and can perpetuate the practice of FGM on granddaughters.

With families disintegrating (attributed to a certain degree to conflict), there is a lack of social security

and protection for elderly women. On the job front, although unemployment is a shared problem in the Horn, elderly men can more easily secure paid jobs outside their homes. Elderly men can get jobs as guards and/or gardeners, which are not options for elderly women.

Women and their children are among the majority of the displaced and refugees – situations which increase vulnerability to violence.

Facilitators' Input

The plenary was able to identify commonalities from the presentations and fill gaps through the discussions. The Encounter facilitators added to these from their experiences and observations on women's and men's (material) conditions in the Horn region, with Dr. Badri adding the cautionary note for participants regarding the need to make the distinction between access to and control over resources in women's conditions.

Dr. Badri underscored that access and control are two sides of a coin, but that where women may have access to certain goods and services (e.g., land, health services), they lack control over them. Women can use family land to farm in rural areas, but they cannot own or dispose of it. Similarly, while women may have access to health services, they have no control over the types of services offered, or on the way services are delivered and managed.

WOMEN'S AND MEN'S CONSCIOUSNESS

Guiding Questions:

Think of the women and men you are working with and analyze the stages of consciousness ... their knowledge of their rights, political consciousness, their self-confidence, independence and agency (for change).

All groups came up with the conviction that there was very low level of consciousness of women and men about gender inequalities in the Horn. Men were not targeted for gender awareness. There

was heated discussion on assertions that women accept their subordination and the reasons for this.

The groups understood 'consciousness' as being:

- awareness of inequalities in the position one finds oneself (women/men);
- knowledge and capability to mobilize and take action, either individually or with others to change their situation;
- knowing that one has options/choices; or,
- giving up the power over situations to others because, for instance, of internalization of subordination by the women themselves.

Group presentations on the above were rather interesting, not least because of the difficulty they encountered in identifying the level of consciousness/awareness of other people. Rieky Stuart of Oxfam admitted that her group was confused and found the task rather difficult. She reported that since 'consciousness' is hidden/invisible, it is difficult to see, let alone measure. Women may or may not be aware of their unequal situation, and perhaps accept it as a strategy for survival. If adopted as a strategy, this would however suggest a degree of consciousness.

The same woman one describes as being 'not aware' may actually be aware, but she alone knows if she has power to negotiate and what it is that she may use in a particular situation. Discussion of this important issue also included women's own acceptance of their subordination and dependency in the countries of the Horn.

For men socialized in patriarchal societies, they assume the right to resources, decisions and portray more self-confidence, even when they have no sure knowledge (i.e., in an oral society) of written legal rights. They do know they are not subordinate to women, and are in charge of the fertility, behaviour (disciplining) and livelihood options of 'their' women (referring to both marital and family relationships).

... 'consciousness' as being awareness of inequalities in the position one finds oneself (women/men) ... knowledge and capability to mobilize and take action ... knowing that one has options/choices ... or giving up the power over situations to others ...

Since the majority of women are preoccupied with daily needs (goods and services), legal rights and human rights issues may not be their priority. They may be 'aware' of where the services are to be accessed, but may not consider themselves as having 'rights' as citizens to service delivery. Instances where women (e.g., market women in the informal sector) became aware of the existence of credit facilities and then sought these services from NGOs, underlines the critical role of information in raising the awareness and consciousness of women and men.

For men socialized in patriarchal societies, they assume the right to resources, decisions and portray more self-confidence, even when they have no sure knowledge of written legal rights. They do know they are not subordinate to women, and are in charge of the fertility, behaviour and livelihood options of 'their' women.

The picture the presentations portrayed strongly suggests that in general there is a low level of awareness among both women and men on gender equality issues. However, the discussions did point out that there are different stages of consciousness, as determined by gender (women/men), geographical demarcations (rural/urban), culture, religion, education, age and relative wealth. Access to information and exposures, personal experience, options and personal strategies, are among the factors at play in assessing levels of consciousness regarding equalities and inequalities.

As mentioned earlier, it is possible that women may be aware of their situation and rights, but not demonstrate this awareness as a strategy for survival, thereby accepting their subordination and inequity for a purpose/cause. Examples are many where women live in abusive relationships, either

because of lack of options, because they think they are 'supposed to', or because of a long-term strategy for survival (typically in this case they would be thinking of their personal and their children's livelihood and safety/security).

The majority of women, however, were perceived to be accepting their situation as 'their lot', hiding behind 'fatalism' or tending to see inequalities as 'divine-construct'. Observations by participants on this 'intimate' issue were quite provocative. Where one participant (a woman activist) argued that 'there is always a choice', another was quick to point out to her that 'that was her consciousness speaking'! According to Rieky Stewart of Oxfam Canada: "It is a special kind of women who says 'I have no choice!'"

On political consciousness, presenters and the plenary noted that there are organizations that give voter education, mobilize and give support to female candidates (like in Somaliland and Ethiopia). Efforts are being made to help women into decision-making positions, evoking government's commitment to affirmative action policy, to reserve at least a third of the seats in parliament and local councils. However, women's political participation was seen to be typically confined to 'guide' voting, often without knowledge of a candidate's party programmes. Their votes are given either willingly, through coercion or in allegiance to kin relationships. Women give away their votes freely, which is a reflection of their lack of political awareness of their rights and capacity to negotiate for changes in their favour.

Co-Facilitator Dr. Balgis Badri, in commenting and summing up the plenary discussion, underscored that the assessment of one's consciousness, independence and agency all involve issues of judgment and measurement. The exercise, she noted, requires serious work on strategies on raising women's consciousness and, most of all, developing indicators for monitoring and measuring. Dr. Badri cautioned 'who judges', 'what measurement / indicators are used' and 'in what context'. She also emphasized that awareness does not necessarily automatically lead to action and change by women, and that there is a need for careful thinking and more work on understanding the

process and impacts of women's empowerment. Empowerment has trade-offs for which appropriate, sustained support backup would be required.

Questions were posed that helped explain the complexities and implications for developing a holistic approach:

- What would we do for or give to a woman who wants to change and seek alternative livelihood to dependency on a man?
- Are we ready with skills training, productive resources, shelter and sustained livelihood assurance?
- Would these come from external funding or from public resources?

And more specifically ...

- What does an organization that gives para-legal services and raises the consciousness of women 'offer' to one who wishes to leave an abusive relationship (e.g., wife battering), without shelter, skills acquisition for employment and employment opportunities?"

Such activities would need to be carried out on a sustained basis, which would include not just the organizations as a change agent, but also the State. It was also noted that even in countries outside the Horn where such options are more or less provided for women who take action, these are through programmes often financed exclusively by NGOs. It was emphasized that one has, therefore, to think strategically. One also needs to be aware that the formal institutions themselves need to be strong enough to change the informal institutions – for example, to have laws on violence against women and to be able to stop the violence.

On assessing women's and men's self-confidence, the discussion touched upon cultural variations. The example was given of 'eye contact', seen as a sign of confidence in Western societies, but considered as 'arrogant' or 'impolite' in some African countries. Such distinctions, understanding and considerations were said to be critical for organizations involved in providing assertiveness training.

Dr. Balgis mentioned that often it is easier to measure project success in quantitative rather than qualitative terms, especially where there are no appropriate measurements for the latter. Nevertheless, she said that it is important to document both successes and failures where these are identified, for sharing, learning and strategy formulation for change.

This led to the experience of women in Somaliland, where over 200 women rallied against FGM and were, in turn, subjected to pressures and harassment by community elders. This experience made the women abandon their mobilization and movement. Their initial action reflected successful awareness raising, but other factors eventually came into play. There is always a mix of variables to consider in gender equality work.

A rather uncomfortable part of the session arose around the issue of religion, 'can women address religion?' There seem to be cases where wives consider their husbands as 'god' and serving them as a divine duty. Typically, men are religious/spiritual leaders and are powerful allies to work with in the interpretation of religious ideology and formulating strategies for changes in marriage, property, divorce, fertility, polygamy and FGM – all rites that maintain women's subordination and dependence. An example was given of religious leaders in a mosque in Somaliland in 1995 educating the public on the 'non-religious' basis of a type of circumcision.

Reacting to the above, Dr. Balgis' noted that this is an area that is a priority for the majority of women in the Horn. She stressed that the issue merits careful research and advocacy strategies. Women, who are well versed in the Holy Book and have wide interpretation experience, need to be approached for assistance. Women who have experience in religious interpretation of Islam number perhaps two or three! Much more should be done on this and building alliances with learned men is very critical.

The Sudanese case is special in so far as the State and religion are one. There has been a backlash, with the freedoms enjoyed by earlier generations lost to the current one. Participants were cog-

nizant of the fact that all issues need to be contextualized, and that women's empowerment under all systems of government carefully reviewed for their interpretation and likely impact.

On the subject of women's empowerment, Dr. Balgis noted that this is also an area that needs careful thinking and more work. We have to understand the process and impact of women's empowerment for, as mentioned earlier, empowerment comes with trade-offs and requires supportive backup. The participants were provoked into very interesting discussions on shared personal experiences.

It was then duly noted and agreed that the formal is very much informed by the informal, because it is those who are socialized in the latter who are in charge of the former (laws, policies, etc.), and whose orientations are reflected in the State machinery, and their own beliefs and actions. More study and work on consciousnesses of men

and women would have to be undertaken in the Horn to formulate effective strategies. Although NGOs are doing work on awareness raising, through provision of legal literacy programmes, these tend to focus almost exclusively on women, and do not target the public at large or men.

The formal is very much informed by the informal, because it is those who are socialized in the latter who are in charge of the former (policy and law makers).



5 Institutional Factors affecting gender equality in the Horn

The facilitators' guide for discussion and analysis of Areas 3 and 4 of the gender equality framework presented earlier in the Encounter, enabled participants to identify the key elements in formal and informal institutions that affect gender equality across the Horn of Africa.

Guiding Questions:

Identify most important formal laws – labour, land, marriage, etc. – positively or negatively affecting gender equality in Horn countries.

FORMAL INSTITUTIONS

Formal institutions are written laws related to the national constitution, and specific laws related to land, labour, social and personal security/safety, political, economic, social and macroeconomic policies and directives, law enforcement systems, parliament, councils and municipalities, and family law (marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc.).

Public institutions as State machinery have their own rules and regulations and enforcement mechanisms (the rules of the game of the State). International legal instruments, conventions and protocols fall within the formal sphere. Schools, health-giving institutions, banks, research institutes, State media, etc., are organizations that have their own rules and regulations and differential treatment of females and males, based on their definitions of gender relations.

The manners in which laws, policies and rules are formulated and implemented (e.g., the electoral system) often lack inclusive participation and thus have no gender perspective. The lack of accounting and valuation of women's social and economic contributions to the national economy in national statistics contributes, however inadvertently, to their 'invisibility' in decisions that affect their lives. The methodology for data collection continues to lack gender disaggregation, contributing to and perpetuating gender inequality in decision-making in almost all countries.

Loss or gain of maternity benefits is governed by formal institutions. In the case of women being 'given entitlement' to maternity leave of almost a year, is this a manifestation of support and 'value' for their reproductive functions, or a way of taking them out of the labour market?

Restriction on what women can and cannot do is also governed by formal laws in many countries. Therefore, in spite of their claims of 'neutrality', formal institutions are not gender-neutral. Examples abound.

- Land policy does not provide equal access and control of rural land to men and women.
- 'Farmers' are perceived to be men and therefore targeted for related services.
- Marriage law, except in cases where there are legal reforms, consider the man as 'head of the family' and the wife as 'dependent'. A childless wife gets little share of the family property upon divorce.
- Furthermore, there are laws in some countries that curtail women's mobility without male permission or company. Negotiating the necessary travel permits have been known to contribute to lost opportunities for exchanges, joint learning, and conferences within and outside the Horn.

In labour law, pay rates and working standards are among the factors within the formal institutions that have yet to be made gender sensitive. Others factors, like gender policy, gender desks, affirmative action policy, curriculum and teaching materials, may well be in place, but are not yet fully operational and able to effectively overcome gender biases and resistance to change.

Policy and law makers are often not interested in gender issues, and shy away from attending related debates, dialogues and training, because of a perception that gender is for 'women'. There is clear resistance to the expected transformation through gender mainstreaming, and little public budget allocation for this from the State. Only donor conditionality in funding has opened formal

institution's doors for gender-related programmes and projects. In situations of unstable or officially 'unrecognized' governments, NGOs have even more leverage to incorporate gender equality imperatives in their dealings with 'formal institutions', and can thus have positive impacts.

INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS

The same guidelines serve in identification and analysis of the cultural norms, customs, beliefs, practices, attitudes and behaviours (i.e., unwritten rules) that affect gender equality in the Horn, through informal institutions exerting influence in all spheres of life. Restrictions on women's access to resources (for sustained livelihoods), education of girls, deprivation through early marriage, abduction, fertility as the worth of a woman in marital relationships, polygamy, FGM, personal autonomy and mobility are all governed by informal institutional laws that underpin inequalities between men and women. Girls and boys socialized into the identities, entitlements or deprivations that perpetuate inequalities, pass this perception on to the next generation as 'cultural heritage'.

Preference for boys is at the root of inequality. In almost all countries of the Horn, the reception at the birth of a female child and the value given to her determine the self-worth and confidence of the girl child/woman throughout her life. Food taboos for girls and women impact their health, and the care they give to their daughters and themselves.

Subordination, dependency, powerlessness and fatalistic views about their lot are all results of the way each is treated by the informal cultural norms and practices of society. Sanctions on how women should dress and behave, including curtailment of voicing their opinions, erode their self-confidence and reinforce their inequality. Each sees the freedom accorded to some and deprived to others, and accepts this as the 'norm', thus internalizing gender inequalities.

Male control over women, fertility, mobility and polygamous relationships are informal institutional norms that define gender relations where women remain voiceless and helpless. Marital rites, where

wealth (e.g., livestock) changes hands, amounts to 'buying a wife'. Since what one pays for, one 'owns', that person is 'entitled' to keep or dispose of the goods. The customary laws governing divorce and inheritance are disadvantageous to women, increasing vulnerability to dependency and poverty. Men derive their status by the number of children (as well as livestock) they have, which puts pressure on their wives to produce lots of children. Women are not allowed to use family planning services – nor do the majority have knowledge of or access to such services.

Expectations and pressures on female fertility, with repeated pregnancy and a preference to produce sons, are obviously hazardous to women's health. This impact on women's health, and the importance or stigma attached to their illnesses, cause additional burdens and anxieties for the women themselves, who fear replacement. Participants also noted the implications of these informal laws/norms on the formal laws, such as population and poverty policies.

Harassment of and violence against women is tolerated in the name of culture. At the same time, male promiscuity is considered 'normal' and excused, thereby subjecting wives to STD and HIV/AIDS infections.

The low value given to women's domestic work follows them into formal employment situations, when and if they get a chance to break away. Division of labour in the household and responsibilities for maintenance of the family are disproportionately assigned to women, depriving them of energy and leisure time. In some countries, the formal and informal merge with State theology defining the place of women in the labour market and the community at large.

Religion is one 'informal' institution that has profound influence on inequalities, with rules sanctioning women's subordination to men. Divine reverence and/or fear and obedience to husbands and religious teachers are situations that call for more clarity and elaboration on the linkages between the informal and formal institutional laws. The distinction between religious and cultural laws is still unclear, but both are factors that

influence the subordination of women, socially, economically, politically and even spiritually.

These 'informal institutions' are so deeply rooted, it is not easy to break the pattern, even in more open societies. For example, in Canada so-called 'soft' government ministries (like community development, sports and recreation) tend to be assigned to capable women, when they finally manage to break into decision-making structures. This is a direct reflection of male bias in the system.

PLENARY DISCUSSIONS

Following the group presentations, the facilitators discussed the institutional factors that can positively influence gender equality in the Horn experience. She mentioned the culturally-accepted practice of women congregating together, as a way of addressing some of these issues. In all Horn countries, women's groups are sharing experiences, try-

ing to understand the linkages and implications, and to think of developing strategies for realistic change. This is a positive thing for informal institutions to exploit – women interacting with women.

Other positive aspects were identified in cultural systems that protect women from violence. However, there was some argument on the 'interpretation' given by a male participant on 'family protection' for women as being a positive thing. The factors discussed, like 'arranged marriage' and lack of schooling opportunities, were perceived and reported differently by the presenter. This incident clearly suggested the difference in consciousness and perceptions between men and women.

Concerning religion and culture, it was reiterated that there should be work done on 'interpreting religion in terms of women's empowerment', and unravelling the difference between culture and religion with male allies.



6 Organizations and change strategies

The original presentation on the four clusters influencing organization change touched on the need for better understanding of how organizations operate, their current and former strategies, and what more they need to do. Kelleher said that analysis of these are required for the identification of the kind of capacity building requirements and strategies that lead to organizational changes, both within themselves (internal) and with their constituents (external). This session of the Encounter began by defining organizations and strategy.

ORGANIZATIONS

Facilitator David Kelleher introduced organizations and organizational development (OD), clearly explaining the components of organizational change.

Organizations are change agents that work to help communities improve their lives through their interventions. Theoretical and empirical work exists on the gender-based nature of organizations and how these constrain them. Organizations represent a collection of values, history, culture and practices that are considered to be a 'reasonable' way to work. Women's interests and perspectives are excluded through a male power base. Few organizations have the mechanisms to balance and restrain this base. Though most claim to be participatory, ideas and decision-making are mostly the domain of men – i.e., business as usual.

Kelleher discussed the gendered nature of organizations in some detail. Organizations are gendered at very deep levels, and women are prevented from challenging institutions. Four interrelated factors are used for this:

Political access: There are no systems or powerful actors who can bring women's perspectives and interests into the decision-making process.

Accountability systems: Resources are allocated to activities that have quantitative targets and not to activities that are related to bringing organizational change for gender equality.

Cultural systems: Because of their caring responsi-

bilities at home and in the community (i.e., a double work burden), women are prevented from full participation in the organizations.

Cognitive structures: Understanding and definition of 'work' is gender biased.

GENDER AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE APPROACHES

Generally, approaches to working on gender equality include:

Gender Infrastructure Approach

This involves putting in place the following:

- gender policy;
- gender unit of technically-skilled change agents to work on organizational programmes (mainstreaming);
- gender training and tools;
- family-friendly administrative policies (flex-time and child care);
- increase in the number of women staff and managers; and,
- increase in resources devoted to women's programming.

Organizational Change Approach

This approach enables organizations to challenge gender-based institutional rules, including:

- democratizing relations;
- making women's voices more powerful in the organization;
- finding ways to make the organization more accountable to women clients and more amenable to women's participation; and,
- building relations with other organizations to further a gender equality agenda.

Unlike traditional organizational development, gender equality organizational change holds that a new political alignment – new issues on the agenda – is as important as rational analysis to the change process. Much work being done on organizational change for gender equality has put emphasis on learning and on participation.

According to Kelleher, the challenge is to develop methods that combine politics and participation with an understanding of organizations in terms of their equality mission.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Why this shift in approach from the above? It is refocusing attention to changing social institutions and gender power relations. It helps in challenging gender-based norms and values throughout society and within organizations, and works to upgrade women's position and voice, not only their material conditions. This is needed because:

- Traditional gender mainstreaming infrastructure efforts have not delivered as expected.

- To make positive impacts on women's lives, there has to be connections to the larger contextual forces that are changing women's opportunities and threats.
- Having a large number of women entering into decision-making positions has not brought the expected changes in terms of decision-making power, transparency, accountability or accessibility
- Nor have policies emanating, or voices and representations, being translated into influence⁹.



9 Reproduced from Aruna Rao and David Kelleher, *Institutions, Organizations and Gender Equality Gender at Work.*, *Gender at Work*. Paper given as handout at Oxfam Gender Encounter.

7 Analysis of successful and promising strategies for change

Presentations of strategies used in Horn countries, given by representatives from NGOs and government, provided examples of what is working and illustrations of framework 'clusters' in action, and shared lessons on successes and challenges. The elements highlighted below are intended to give direction on what is promising and what needs to be improved, with the view to formulating strategies for capacity building support for partners by Oxfam, governments and other development partners working in the Horn of Africa.

SUCCESSFUL AND PROMISING STRATEGIES FROM THE HORN

The Experience of NEGAAD, Somaliland

■ **Interpretation of religion in terms of women's empowerment:** Since traditional beliefs, norms and practices, which are unfavourable to girls and women, were continuing as part of religious rites/laws, NEGAAD as the umbrella organization for a network of NGOs in Somaliland, initiated work with sheiks to help in interpreting Koranic laws in terms of women's empowerment. Unlike the old sheiks who tended to manipulate Islamic teachings to follow closed, traditional ways, the network sought the help of younger learned sheiks. The approach to build alliances with the sheiks (religious leaders) in helping to create a platform for dialogue and debate with broad representation from the community was found to be successful.

Those invited to the dialogue on religious interpretation included elderly women, youth (girls and boys), religious leaders and elders, and traditional birth attendants (TBAs who perform the cultural practices that needed understanding and changing). The platform was successful in making a distinction between the myth and realities of traditional practices that were performed under the pretext of religious rites. The sheiks became valued allies, working with NGOs to raise awareness on the basis of a reinterpretation of the Koran, and became change agents themselves.

- **Research, processing and dissemination of information** are helping for advocacy and enabling NGOs to overcome some of the difficulties they face in bringing about changes.
- **Awareness raising activities at the community level**, on such issues as early marriage, FGM, participation in religious rites and working in alliance with traditional elders and volunteer 'diplomats', are having a positive impact.
- **Capacity building of organizations that address violence against women** is increasing, and involves human resources development / training and building of trauma (treatment) centres.
- **Revitalization of traditional protection systems for women** is also in process and proving a promising strategy.

Government and NGOs Strategies¹⁰

The presenting group was composed of representatives from government and NGOs from Sudan and Ethiopia, which examined the strategies from both sectors, identifying what strategies are working and need to continue. Some of the presenters mentioned the problems of information gaps, lack of impact assessments and indicators.

Formal Institutional – Government Strategies

- **Gender awareness for decision and policy makers** at all levels (Ethiopia and Sudan).
- **Research and information dissemination:** different themes, including harmful traditional practices (HTP); filling information gaps; involving men and women from NGOs and government sectors in activities, thereby building alliances and transparency; research findings feeding advocacy/lobbying work.
- **Gender desks in each of the sector/line ministries** established, with dedicated people on board, but lacking capacity support for gender

10 Strategies that are in place and working

mainstreaming work (Ethiopia). This structure is now replicated down to the district level, with focal persons helping in gender mainstreaming and serving as ‘watch dogs’ for gender issues in the localities, and working with women’s associations at each level.

- **Government support to emerging women’s associations:** Government at all levels encourages and provides technical and financial support for women’s associations. These associations are for the most part organized along ethnic lines and have yet to assert their independence.
- **Women’s Affairs Office at the Prime Minister’s Office, Ethiopia** facilitates registration of women NGOs, who are assisted to access office space in government-owned buildings (if they so wish). The structure’s proximity to the highest level of leadership is intended to give the Office more leverage and access to political support for its coordination role in gender work.
- Ethiopian government has put in place **mechanisms for acceptance and implementation of international equal rights instruments/commitments**, like the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing PFA, etc.
- **Mobilization of women to participate in political process**, like elections, voter education, etc. (Sudan and Ethiopia)
- **Support to community information resource centres** with local municipal financing, initiated by Oxfam (e.g., Illubabor Library Network and Information Centre in Ethiopia). Gender materials are provided to the centre for community reading and awareness raising.

NGO Strategies

- **Research, information generation and dissemination** (same as above).
- **Advocacy and lobbying** that target politicians (such as the work of EWLA in Ethiopia); cam-

paign for food security or women’s activities or girls’ education promotion (Sudan and Ethiopia).

- **Building awareness and capacity for gender equality** continuing through training, conferences, and at all levels.
- **Capacity building** for NGOs advocating for gender equality and also for government institutions in the form of technical, financial, institutional and cultural support.
- **Networking** between government and NGOs, and among NGOs – e.g., thematic networks – inside and outside the country (Ethiopia and Sudan).
- Building the **gender capacity of political parties**.
- **Production and dissemination of information materials in the vernacular** for use by schools and communities to raise public awareness on gender issues in isolated regions (Ethiopia and Sudan).
- **ICT training:** Training to youth for employment skills and computer use by partner NGOs/network members are new interventions that are resulting in more demands (Somaliland, Ethiopia).

PLENARY DISCUSSIONS

Questions, issues, challenges and insights, arising out of the presentations, are given below.

- **Research:** Why and what topics? Can one be specific on this? Research should feed advocacy work, so the topics would need to be specific and action-oriented. Action-oriented research, such as on causes and effects of violence against women, would provide workable tool/ammunition for advocacy and lobbying (e.g., Sudan study on women and poverty resulting in poverty fund/safety net). It would be better to undertake research on thematic issues to fill existing information gaps.

- **Policy analysis** should be an ongoing process and involve various stakeholders to build alliances.
- **Advocacy and lobbying:** Who to target and at what level? Not just necessarily policy makers and law makers – it could be school principals, for example, on the treatment of students. Could this be broadened, or foresee other targets and base activities on emerging issues? How to identify issues for advocacy and how to do advocacy? There is a need for advocacy skills training in the Horn.
- **Gender Desks:** Why desks in government bodies? To help in coordinating the gender mainstreaming strategy in the sectors, build gender analysis capacity of government planners – with decentralization to the lowest/district level. (Note: Job descriptions of these are available and in use for reference.). Although the gender focal point system has shown promising results, there is inadequate capacity support to make the system more effective.
- **Mobilization of women to participate in political processes:** What does this involve? Introduction to the electoral system, nomination and financing female candidates, getting women's votes for candidates of the ruling party? This is in line with the Affirmative Action Policy to give priority to women in parliament/council seats (i.e., one third), girls' education and university entrance.
- **Government establishing women's associations:** What about the issue of autonomy of these associations? Although seed money and institutional support has helped strengthen emerging groups, co-option or GONGO identity and dependency may be a danger.
- **Nominating female candidates** and financing their campaigning could be more effective with the use of the media and ICT to create public awareness and mobilize public support.
- **Analysis of policies/legislation** and events and factors related to gender equality, for the consumption and action of policy planners and law makers for decisions.
- **Building alliances** in and outside organizations, including with government bodies.

8 Advocacy – Envisioning change

Nora Matovu Winki of Associates for Change from Uganda conducted the advocacy workshop. Based on handouts she gave to participants,¹² she introduced advocacy as a process and a strategy for change. After defining the concept of advocacy with participants through a brainstorming exercise, she highlighted key points and led the discussion. The text below is taken mostly from the handout, the full text of which can be obtained from the website¹³.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN ADVOCACY?

It is about lobbying, awareness raising, mobilization and media use to reach the target, who will then take action to bring about the changes the message demands/requests (not necessarily a confrontational approach). Advocacy is about:

- asking why (until you get to the root of the problem – use problem tree);
- ensuring power is used well (enabling those without power to see what power they already have);
- education (of those who are oppressed or treated unfairly);
- seeking justice (for those who are oppressed or treated unfairly);
- bringing about change (for individuals, through changing their personal situation, and through changing systems, structures and policies); and,
- being a voice (for the voiceless and enabling the voiceless to find their own voice).

IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES OF ADVOCACY

Advocacy is about working on individual cases, such as campaigning to release those who have been wrongly imprisoned, and about campaigning on issues, such as access to services and better service delivery.

Activities include:

- Capacity building – so that the poor will become agents of change themselves

- Networking – in order to pool resources
- Good research – so that the problem and potential solutions can be clearly identified

Advocacy objectives are based on good research. They should be presented as a clear message directed at those who have the power to bring about change (the targets), or those who can influence them. Activities are done by those working to bring about change (the advocate, allies and those affected by a situation), and will be communicated through a variety of methods. Together, they can strategize and formulate the message and how to deliver it.

APPROACHES TO ADVOCACY

- Advocacy for those affected by a situation
- Advocacy with those affected by a situation
- Advocacy by those affected by the situation.

A mix of approaches may be appropriate at different levels throughout the process. Developing organizations that support the principles of participation and empowerment should aim to see the poor undertake advocacy themselves, and become agents of change in their local areas. However, due to risk factors or lack of skills and knowledge, advocacy for others may be the only option at the start.

PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN ADVOCACY WORK

Any of the above three approaches may be appropriate in a given situation. However, to achieve long-term sustainability, it is vital that whenever possible advocacy is done by those who are affected by a situation. Even if advocacy is being done for others at the start, it is vital that those being 'represented' be included in all stages of the advocacy process, such as defining the problem, proposing the solution and developing the strategy.

There are advantages and disadvantages to participation and representation. Awareness of the factors involved is key:

¹² Taken from TEARFUND on 'Understanding Advocacy', Advocacy Toolkit.
¹³ Ibid TEARFUND ROOTS RESOURCES

Accountability: Accountability considers how decisions are made, and to who people are answerable for the decisions and actions they take. This occurs whenever there is a relationship, such as:

- in the local community;
- between staff and co-workers;
- between organizations; and
- between founders and beneficiaries.

The benefits of accountability include:

- ownership and participation of all involved in an advocacy initiative;
- use of the skills of different people, which increases the likelihood of success;
- increased sustainability of advocacy work;
- increased legitimacy with policy-makers; and,
- prevention of people being marginalized in decision-making.

There are several key applications of accountability for an organization, including:

- clear job descriptions and roles, and a clear process for deciding policy;
- identifying someone to whom everyone in the organization is accountable;
- ways for all stakeholders to comment on the organization's operations and performance-monitoring, reporting and evaluation of activities; and,
- documentation of mission, vision, values and strategy.

Legitimacy: Legitimacy by stakeholders and from where legitimacy is sought depends on who the advocates work for/with, and those affected by the situation.

The Role of an Advocate:

- Represent (speak for people)
- Accompany/associate with (speak with people)
- Empower (enable people to speak for themselves)
- Mediate (facilitate communications between people)
- Model (demonstrate the practice to people or

policy-makers)

- Negotiate (bargain for something)
- Network (build coalitions)

Advocacy is a continuous process by committed people who may be doing it on a voluntary basis, but should take it seriously enough to fit into the activities they have committed themselves to. There are benefits and drawbacks of an advocacy approach to development.

Discussing the above, the Resource Person cautioned participants that while there are many advantages to advocacy work, it is not the only strategy and that it may have its own limitations.

Advantages of advocacy work, mentioned by the Resource Person, include:

- Helps people to see themselves as agents of change.
- Tackles root causes of poverty and injustice.
- Encourages people to look at all dimensions of problem(s).
- Focuses on long-term solutions.
- Uses money efficiently.
- Mobilizes groups and builds collective strength.
- Enables groups to address wider organizational issues.
- Can build democratic processes.
- Legitimacy, accountability and representation are embedded.
- Discourages dependency on external funding.
- Can mobilize greater resources for change.
- Addresses individual cases of poverty and injustice.
- Supports good development.
- Can serve as a model of good development work for others.

9 Closing remarks and observations¹⁴

At the conclusion of the Gender Encounter, participants collectively and individually expressed that they had benefited in many ways. Acknowledging that the programme had met its objectives as set out at the beginning by the Facilitators, participants pointed out that there were many eye openers for them during the Encounter.

The presence of male participants, whose attendance, interest and inputs were exemplary, was noted. The readiness of male participants to plan strategies to influence change in terms of informal and formal institutional factors was encouraging.

Having been made aware of and inspired to examine their own organizations in relation to the force fields – formal and informal – participants said they were exposed to strategies for change and tools to take with them from the Encounter. The sharing that took place, collaborative efforts to build a picture of the state of gender equality in the Horn, commonalities of problems and exposures to working strategies to bring about changes, were all highly appreciated. The Encounter organizers and resource persons, from both the Northern and Southern hemispheres, enhanced joint learning by sharing their personal experiences.

That gender inequality is a global issue was observed and appreciated as well. Furthermore, participants said they were happy that they were given the opportunity to learn, to contribute, to fill gaps, construct pictures, make friends and strengthen networks. Maintaining networks seemed to be a priority, illustrated by the exchanging of addresses and sharing of documents by participants.

The people whose presence and time are much sought after, but still made the effort to come to the Encounter, said that it was worthwhile. Women peace activists were inspirations for both participants and resource persons, as they related their personal and professional experiences, and

the challenges and successes in their lives and work.

Oxfam staff who came to the Encounter – and assured participants of continued support through information sharing and networking, advocacy and lobbying work, particularly for women to participate in peace talks – were acknowledged and appreciated.

Organizers' selection of representatives from governments (public structures), Oxfam GB and CSOs to participate in the Gender Encounter demonstrates the synergy Oxfam Québec and Oxfam Canada seek to develop and utilize, providing a model for development work for all present.

The presence, first-hand inputs and experienced guidance of David Kelleher and Rieky Stuart, two of the authors of *Gender at Work*, added value to the Encounter, which was duly acknowledged and appreciated by participants who were grateful for receiving copies.

The Encounter has certainly been instrumental in filling some of the information gaps in the Horn, strengthening networking and identifying (for all) the way forward in organizational change. Reading materials, brought by the organizers as handouts, were valuable resources that quickly disappeared from the display and distribution table.

Resources within the Horn (organizational networks and individuals experts), and outside the region, were identified. This is essential for building the alliances and solidarity so necessary for gender equality work.

Along with the usual appreciation and thanks to individuals and organizational support from Oxfam Québec and Oxfam Canada, participants gave a vote of thanks to the resource persons and the Executive Director of Oxfam Canada, whose inputs were highly appreciated by the participants. The workshop on advocacy, which provided much

¹⁴ These are from participants' formal communications / presentations, and personal interactions and observations by the Rapporteur.

needed skills that were new to many, was also appreciated for its use of humour.

Since the Encounter took place at a time of heightened expectations for peace, the closing remarks by a representative of the participants, Aisha Ghelle of Somaliland, included a prayer for successful Peace Talks and overall peace, to make what had been discussed, planned and hoped for a reality for the Sudanese people and the Horn of Africa.



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