



Is gender a criterion for selecting partners?

Gender competence is part of the criteria for the selection of partners, including contractors. SDC increasingly gives preference to partners who are gender competent, or, at least, open to gender equality. It goes against SDC development policy to work with partners who do not support the principle of gender equality.

Therefore, building gender competence should be negotiated and explicitly mentioned in all contractual partnerships between SDC and Swiss/national organisations. Gender competence is increasingly becoming a criterion against which the performance of partners and contractors is assessed.

How to promote gender in partnerships?

Create a dialogue around gender

Gender is a «cultural issue» but it is also very political. Mainstreaming social justice and equality issues in the development agenda is often controversial as it poses a challenge to the status quo around power at different levels. The fact is that it remains difficult to argue in favour of equality between women and men as a right, including staff in development organisations (women as well as men, from Swiss or other origins). This said,

the importance of gender in countries where SDC works means that partners increasingly take the lead to initiate a dialogue, and actions, on gender.

Questions that can be raised include:

- What is the partners' view on «gender». Is gender equality an issue, why/why not?
- What gender inequalities do they see as particularly relevant to their work and why?
- What is their experience (good or bad) of working with/without gender?
- What gender skills/competence do they have?
- How far are they interested in going with gender mainstreaming and why?
- How aware are they of their own country's policies/commitment to gender?



We would like to encourage all partners involved in SDC work in countries to formulate and own a joint charter.

Throughout this dialogue, it is necessary to assess to what extent the views of professional staff are representative of their organisation as a whole and of women and men in target groups. The participation of professional women and men in defining the terms and conditions of partnerships around gender is important in terms of women's/men's equal access to decision/policy making. But it is also important since it can really influence the outcome of negotiations in terms of gender content.

To work together on gender, SDC and its partners must identify common grounds, visions and strategies and decide jointly how they are going to integrate gender in their organisations and programmes. The charter below is an example of what it could mean to integrate gender in partnerships.

A gender charter between SDC and its partners

- SDC and its partners are aware of the roles, needs and priorities/aspirations of different groups of women and men in the context where they work prior to making decisions about what sectors, resources and strategies they will implement. They are aware of particular inequality and discrimination issues negatively affecting women's and girls' development;
- SDC and its partners select the areas/sectors of interventions on the basis of the identified needs of women and men, including discrimination and inequality issues affecting women and girls. They give priority to interventions most likely to have a sustainable impact on mechanisms responsible for gender inequality. They reflect these needs in the formulation of principles, objectives and the allocation of resources in Country Programmes and Annual Programmes.
- SDC and its partners formulate Programmes and Projects that have a clear objective to help both poor women and men to reach a more equal access to and control over resources in the household and society at large, and, as much as possible, to reduce inequalities between women and men;
- SDC and its partners implement Programmes and Projects in a way that ensures that women and men have equitable, if not equal, access to and control over resources provided by the interventions;
- SDC and its partners facilitate evaluations (self and external) of Programmes and Projects that provide clear indication of the impact on women as well as men and on the changes in power relations and inequalities between women and men in different groups of the targeted population;
- SDC has alliances with partners who are gender aware and competent, working transversally in sectors and/or specifically around issues of women's empowerment and/or gender equality;
- SDC and its partners promote equal opportunities for women and men as workers in their respective organisations, and ensure that relevant women and men are able to plan, implement and evaluate their actions with target groups in a gender-aware way.

Capacity building of partners

Too often, gender training is used as the main, or only strategy for mainstreaming. But the integration of gender equality in development is not only a matter of having the right skills and tools. It also requires positive beliefs and attitudes towards gender. Therefore, capacity building cannot be «reduced» to «gender training». Training should be part of a broader gender awareness and capacity building strategy, besides the analytical and planning skills and tools that training can provide, staff within SDC and its partners also need:

- Technical advice/follow up on site
- Participation in gender networks
- Gender data to build arguments and feed into advocacy for gender change
- Regular capitalisation/stock taking
- Dialogue/action to promote ownership of the gender and development approach

In the CEI Division, the whole team has decided to take gender as a team building theme. The first steps was to come to a common understanding of the concept by workshops, followed by training for most of the programme officers, finally placing an emphasis on gender during a key event in each field office (planning of a new programme, monitoring workshop, assessment of an health project etc..)

This said, training is important¹. It can target participants as professionals (focus on their practice) or as individuals, focusing on their personal attitude towards gender (self-awareness), often both are needed because complementary.

In SDC-Asia¹, as part of the Human and Institutional Development approach, workers examine their **own personal** gender biases and experiences as women and men. Equal Opportunities and the advancement of women in SDC and partners is seen as a key strategy for mainstreaming. In Latin America, the capacity building approach is more technical. Staff and partners are targeted as «**professionals**». The objective is to make them more effective, efficient and relevant in their work with beneficiaries through the gender approach.

¹ Every year, SDC organises two 3-day gender training workshops in Switzerland, for its staff and partners. One is in French and one is in English. For more information, contact the training services from SDC or the gender unit.



Some hints to implement effective gender training

- Carry out an organisational analysis and/or a training needs analysis (sheets 9a, 9b)
- Have a methodology for different target groups, including monitoring after training
- For basic training, a «standard» programme can be used for all staff
- For advanced training, aim for tailor-made programmes as much as possible
- As much as possible, use authentic documents (case-studies, policy extracts etc.) and a participatory approach (with group work, practical applications)
- Try to have a gender-balanced team including experienced male gender trainers
- Aim to train in pairs, with gender and sectoral trainers working together
- As much as possible, work with a local consultant in the training team
- When training project staff, ensure that trainers have field experience too
- Train women as well as men, from different professional profiles and levels of responsibility. Mixing profiles/levels should be a strategic choice
- Think of training existing trainers in gender (multiplying effect)
- As well as implementing specific gender training programmes, do not forget to integrate gender in existing training programmes and modules!

For training to have an impact, trainees have to be supported to implement their new skills. In particular, they need political support from their managers to give legitimacy to the organisational changes they may wish to propose for mainstreaming. They also need technical support from gender officers or experts, so that they can do their work well. When people feel they have little confidence in their skills and knowledge, they do not dare to work on gender as they fear that failure to deliver can discredit the approach. Finally, newly-trained people need resources to implement their strategies (time, money, staff).

After initial training, more advanced and/or specialised gender training can be implemented. It can focus on the link between gender and specific sectors or themes (e.g. environment, governance, human rights) or on the PCM (gender in monitoring/evaluation). Gender can also be included in training around participative methodologies such as PRA or advocacy training. Self-awareness training on gender is also useful to help women and men explore their own attitude to femininity/masculinity, at home and/or in the workplace.

In many SDC countries, internal gender networks provide a useful platform to reinforce gender confidence and competence. External networks (with other donors) are also useful. Regional networks can be created (there is a South America network and a similar idea is germinating in West Africa)... Internet is a great tool to maintain contacts between trainees across countries and share both happy and unhappy experiences working with gender!



SDC and its partners need to work out joint strategies for gender mainstreaming. Capacity building of local partners should be a central objective of partnership and be increasingly recognised as a key factor in the selection and the monitoring of partners.