BRIEFING NOTE

POLITICALLY INFORMED, GENDER AWARE PROGRAMMING

FIVE LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

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ABOUT THE
GENDER AND POLITICS IN PRACTICE
RESEARCH PROJECT

How can a gendered understanding of power and politics make development work more effective? Many development programs tend to look at gender issues and politics separately. Through a series of case studies, this research asks what we can learn from more integrated approaches. It includes:

- a literature review on thinking and working politically and gender equality
- a context paper, and three in-depth studies that examine how gender and politics came together in social change processes
  - women political leaders in the Pacific
  - labour reform in Vietnam's garment industry
  - transgender empowerment and social inclusion in Indonesia
- 14 short case studies of development programs that aim to be both politically informed and gender aware, and a synthesis of their key insights

GAPP is led by the Developmental Leadership Program, which involves the University of Birmingham and La Trobe University, in collaboration with the Australian Government. Partner organisations include The Asia Foundation, Palladium, RMIT, Kings College London, UCL and the University of Southampton.

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Many development challenges – such as improving public services, building peace, tackling corruption and empowering women and girls – are complex. Pathways to successful reform are neither linear nor predictable, and what works in one place may well not work in another.

What makes these development challenges complex are the power relations and politics involved. These shape usual practice and the possibilities for, and pathways to, change. They are central to formal political processes but also to people's everyday interactions.

In all contexts and at all levels, these power relationships are gendered.

Making headway on complex development challenges therefore requires development programs to engage with power and politics and with gender issues.

This brief argues that development practice is greatly strengthened by integrating politically informed and gender aware ways of working. It draws on the 17 case studies that contributed to the Gender and Politics in Practice research project to highlight practical lessons on bringing insights from these two approaches together.

CARE's work on disaster reduction in Vanuatu involved establishing community committees. Rather than working through existing male-dominated power structures, CARE ensured that women made up 50% of the community committees, and trained them in disaster awareness: *"Fantastically, it had flow-on effects. Women who had been in the program could see that [family members] were recognising they could contribute to the community ... When disaster aid arrived in Vanuatu ... all of the agencies that came in said that in the areas where women [were involved] community organisation was much better and it was simpler to work."*

SOURCE: *CARE AUSTRALIA: TACKLING POVERTY AND GENDER INEQUALITY* (GAPP CASE STUDY 1)

COMPLEX CHALLENGES REQUIRE POLITICALLY INFORMED AND GENDER AWARE SOLUTIONS

An approach that is politically informed and gender aware strengthens analysis and practice.

The importance of development programs taking a politically informed approach to complex development challenges has become increasingly accepted in recent years. In this approach, a program analyses where power and influence lies to decide what it can feasibly achieve: what to work on, who with and how.

For a long time, development programs have also been encouraged to be 'gender aware'. But these two approaches have tended to operate on parallel tracks – to the detriment of both. Both approaches aim to understand and reform unequal power dynamics to achieve change.

Bringing gender analysis together with political analysis highlights the extent to which men dominate formal decision-making arenas. It shows how the status quo is reinforced in informal settings, such as the household, and in indirect ways, such as through stereotypes. It reveals more of the barriers to change.
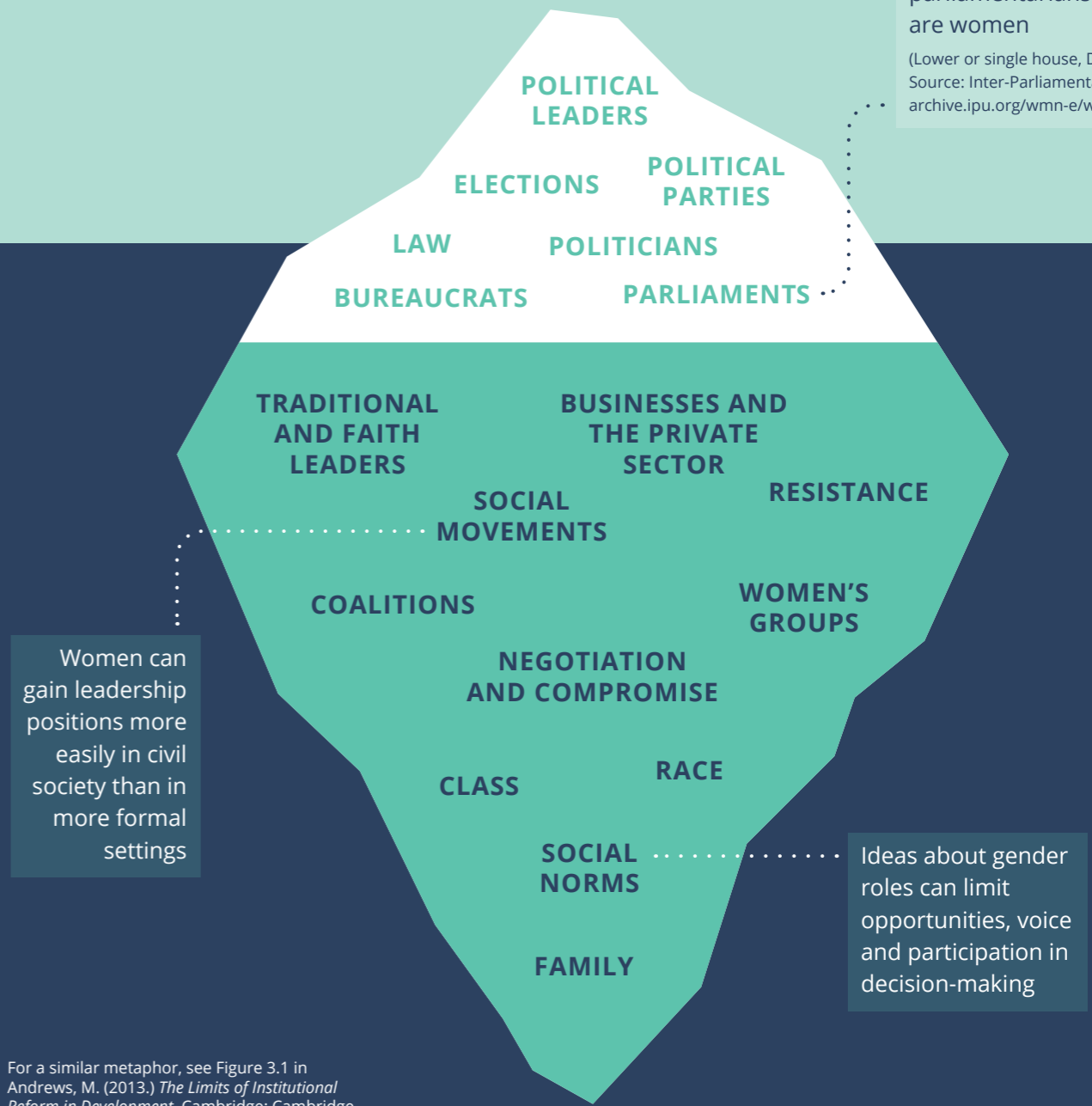
This integration also helps us see that power can be used in collaborative as well as competitive ways, and that change can be championed and negotiated at all levels. It reveals more potential allies and coalition partners.

Further, gender analysis provides an important caution against just focusing on political feasibility. It highlights gender equality goals and whether the feasible change pathways are likely to promote or hinder inclusive development.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT AS AN 'ICEBERG'

Some parts of the political context are easier to see than others. Formal manifestations of politics and power are the tip of a vast iceberg. Below the waterline are less visible, informal power structures and relationships. All of this political iceberg is gendered. Women and men are positioned and affected differently – often unequally.

THE GENDERED POLITICS ICEBERG

Only **23.6%** of all national parliamentarians are women

(Lower or single house, Dec 2017)
Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union
archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm

POLITICAL LEADERS

ELECTIONS

POLITICAL PARTIES

LAW

POLITICIANS

BUREAUCRATS

PARLIAMENTS

TRADITIONAL AND FAITH LEADERS

BUSINESSES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

RESISTANCE

COALITIONS

WOMEN'S GROUPS

NEGOTIATION AND COMPROMISE

CLASS

RACE

SOCIAL NORMS

FAMILY

Women can gain leadership positions more easily in civil society than in more formal settings

Ideas about gender roles can limit opportunities, voice and participation in decision-making

For a similar metaphor, see Figure 3.1 in Andrews, M. (2013.) *The Limits of Institutional Reform in Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE 'POLITICALLY INFORMED'?

Being 'politically informed' is a way of working to achieve reform in complex contexts – where power dynamics are complex and change pathways messy, dynamic and unpredictable. It is not about formal governance reforms – financial management, elections, civil service reforms – but about a way of working that recognises that power and politics shape all sectors and issues.

It involves analysing the dynamics of power and politics to understand what is politically feasible. These dynamics include stakeholder interests and incentives, the formal and informal rules shaping decision-making and agenda setting, and the politics of trade-offs, coalitions and deals. The approach recognises that change produces winners and losers, and that losers may need to be compensated or won over.

Ideally, this analysis is practical and regularly updated. It helps programs and partners identify entry points for reform, potential champions, and the people and systems blocking change, and to strategise accordingly. And it helps them adapt to shifting opportunities as the political context changes.

A number of approaches to politically informed programming share a family resemblance. These include, but are not limited to, political economy analysis (PEA), thinking and working politically (TWP), doing development differently (DDD), adaptive programming, problem driven iterative adaptation (PDIA), and development entrepreneurship (DE).

See: the GSDRC Topic Guide on PEA at gsdrc.org/?p=42965; the TWP Community of Practice at twpcommunity.org/about-us/what-is-twp; the DDD Manifesto Community at doingdevelopmentdifferently.com; ODI's paper on adaptive programming: odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10401.pdf; Harvard University's Building State Capability program for details of PDIA at https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/about; and The Asia Foundation's introduction to DE: asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/OccasionalPaperNo12.pdf

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE 'GENDER AWARE'?

Being 'gender aware' is a way of working to achieve greater gender equality. Gender aware programs are often associated with more robust and sustainable development results.
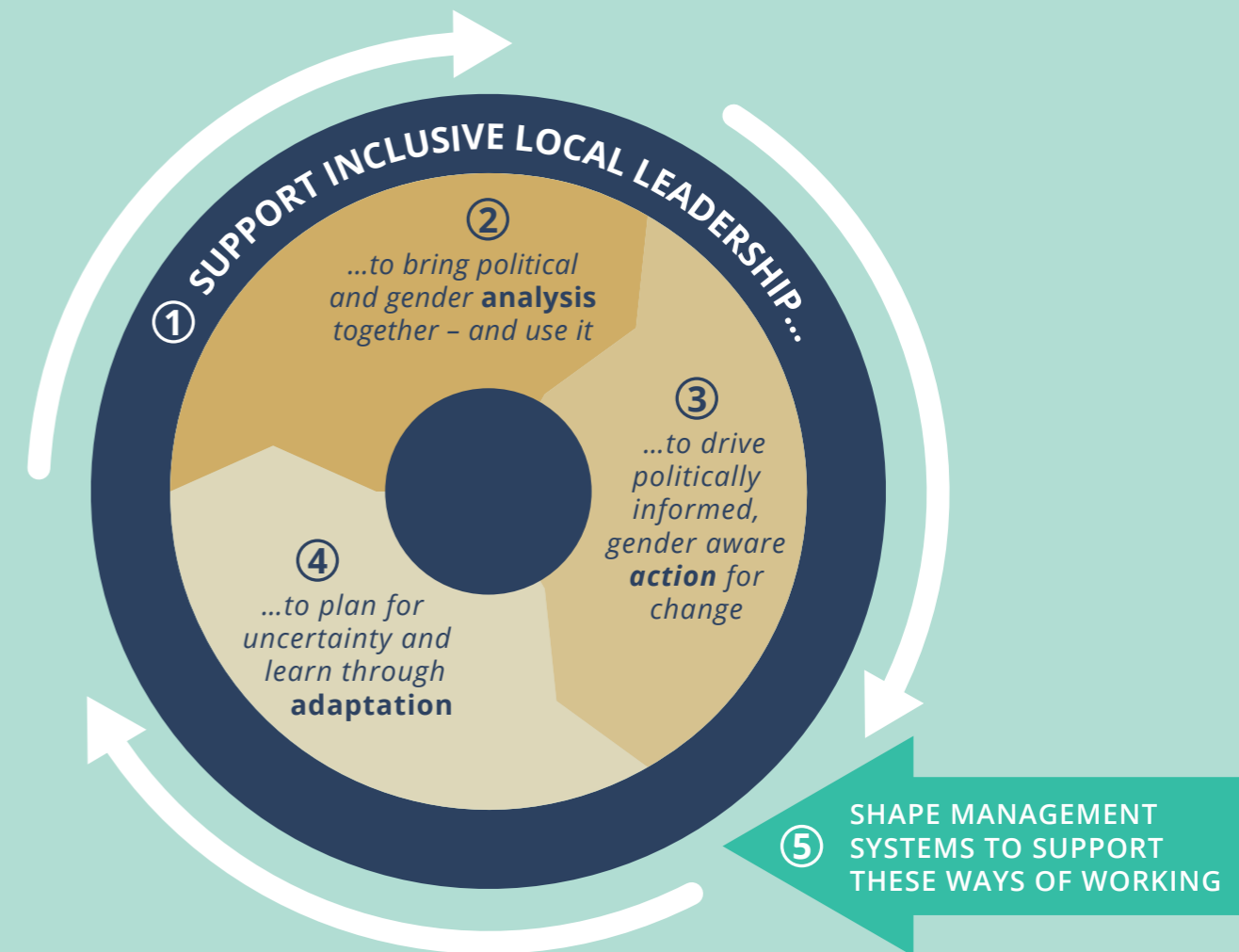
It involves analysing how women and men, girls and boys, experience an issue differently and/or unequally and the power relations that sustain these inequalities. Sex disaggregated data on quantitative gender gaps is complemented by qualitative information on roles, norms, experiences and priorities. This information is used to inform program design and monitoring.

A robust analysis also looks at the ways gender intersects with other forms of diversity such as race, religion, ethnicity, class and disability.

There is increasing recognition of the discrimination faced by people who do not identify as straight women or straight men. Where relevant and appropriate, gender analysis examines the experience of people with non-binary gender identities or diverse sexual preferences.

POLITICALLY INFORMED, GENDER AWARE PROGRAMMING: FIVE LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

Five lessons emerge from the Gender and Politics in Practice studies, and are unpacked in the sections that follow.

SUPPORT INCLUSIVE LOCAL LEADERSHIP...

① ② ...to bring political and gender **analysis** together – and use it

③ ...to drive politically informed, gender aware **action** for change

④ ...to plan for uncertainty and learn through **adaptation**

⑤ SHAPE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT THESE WAYS OF WORKING

1 SUPPORT INCLUSIVE LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Being politically informed and gender aware means supporting a mix of locally legitimate actors to promote change, including greater gender equality.

Solutions to complex development challenges require in-depth local knowledge, time, commitment and courage. Only domestic actors – inside and outside government – have the necessary relationships, legitimacy, ownership and staying power.

But of course everyone is affected by gender and wider social norms – and can reinforce them or help change them.

Working in politically informed and gender aware ways means working with diverse reform-minded individuals and organisations. This provides a range of voices, relevant skills, experiences and connections to draw on.

Development programs have an important role to play in catalysing and supporting reform, brokering collaboration, and providing mentoring and capacity building support.

But care needs to be taken that donor backing does not distort domestic actors' incentives for action, compromise their ability to work together, or undermine their local accountability and credibility.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are you taking time to look beyond the 'usual suspects', to identify partners with local legitimacy, the potential for influence and a commitment to reform?

- Are you engaging with the individuals, organisations or movements that are promoting gender equality and other forms of inclusion?

- Are you brokering new working relationships by bringing diverse actors together to address locally agreed development challenges, including gender inequality?

- Are you nurturing locally driven change processes that do not depend on external support? For example, instead of 'picking winners', are you creating a conducive environment for inclusive local leadership to emerge? This might include supporting women's groups to take time out to reflect, build more effective coalitions and develop politically informed strategy.

BUILDING COLLABORATION IN INDONESIA

The Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (known as MAMPU), aims to improve poor women's livelihoods. It has sought to be politically informed and locally led from the outset. It selected partner organisations with a record as successful change agents, and included them in program design processes. These partner organisations reviewed, revised and endorsed the program's goal, desired outcomes and theory of change, and its governance and management structures.

This involvement helped ensure program relevance, and promoted collaboration: *'We needed to shift the gaze up, out and across organisations.'*

While partner organisations shared similar aims, competition for donor funding had undermined cooperation. MAMPU has worked with influential local leaders to champion win-win relationships among partner organisations. These relationships have gradually produced a broad-based and increasingly powerful movement for women's empowerment.

MAMPU has extended this collaborative approach into work with government, supporting partners to identify and develop relationships with male and female reformers at provincial and district level. This has involved *'bringing the right people together, providing the right level of support for relationships to grow organically and based on mutual respect between politicians and CSOs. That way it has … value for everyone and becomes sustainable.'*

SOURCE: *MAMPU: AUSTRALIA-INDONESIA PARTNERSHIP FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT* (GAPP CASE STUDY 2)

We needed to shift the gaze up, out and across organisations

2 BRING POLITICAL AND GENDER ANALYSIS TOGETHER – AND USE IT

Combined political and gender analysis can give a fuller picture of change pathways. It needs to involve front-line staff and partners and be continuously updated – and, of course, it needs to be used.

Understanding the context is central to being both politically informed and gender aware. Political analysis looks at power and politics – but tends to omit gender issues – and identifies feasible pathways to change. Gender analysis focuses on gender difference and inequality. These tools complement each other.

Both types of analysis are usually required of development programs, but are often contracted to external consultants, and carried out separately and as one-off exercises. Synergies are not exploited, and highly technical reports are approved but summarily shelved. Analysis may have little effect on front-line decision-making.

Work that is politically informed and gender aware brings political and gender analysis processes together: a gender-blind analysis of power misses key barriers to, and opportunities for, change.

Such work uses participatory and accessible approaches to engage front-line staff and partners in analysis, and learns from their perspectives.

It also helps them integrate this analysis into their planning and learning.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Have you brought political analysts and gender specialists together to support staff to develop a holistic analysis of gender, power and political dynamics in your program context?

- Are you using participatory approaches to help front-line staff and partners and other local actors analyse the gender, power and political dynamics of their context and focus area?

- Has this analysis helped develop a gendered understanding of what may be holding back or promoting change?

- Are you supporting front-line staff and partners to draw on this knowledge to continually update their planning and learning, and to identify entry points, potential allies and change pathways? And are you learning from them?

WORLD BANK / MARKUS KOSTNER

UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER DIMENSIONS OF PEACEBUILDING IN MYANMAR

The DFAT-supported Peace Leadership Program in Myanmar uses gender analysis in its whole-systems approach to conflict: *'Using a gender lens as part of program design is just as important as ensuring that there are female beneficiaries.'*

A gender lens provides a broader understanding of the political landscape, contributing to more sustainable settlements. Politically informed approaches can help to strengthen relationships among critical actors promoting gender equality, and to frame issues strategically. For example:

'In one of our first cohorts we had the leader of a large ethnic women's organisation who has since gone on to be one of the chairs of a Myanmar-wide group which has been putting pressure on the peace process to be more inclusive ... We realised that she had been pegged as a women's rights/gender voice ... [so] we helped with ways to communicate strategically: toning down the gender hat and considering other strategies to be relevant politically, with success.'

SOURCE: *PEACE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME: WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN MYANMAR* (GAPP CASE STUDY 4)

a gender lens as part of program design is just as important as ensuring there are female beneficiaries.

3 SUPPORT POLITICALLY INFORMED, GENDER AWARE ACTION FOR CHANGE

Politically informed, gender aware approaches work with the shifting political landscape, balancing pragmatism and ambition. They use locally identified entry points, networks and experience, and frame goals in locally appropriate ways.

Effective, locally led work on gender equality is almost inevitably politically informed. Women's organisations and programs have decades-long experience of campaigning for women's and girls' rights. Their successes demonstrate effective ways of championing change in relation to complex development challenges.

However, politically informed work may not be gender aware. It is important to consider whether what a program does – and how – will reinforce gender inequalities or promote more inclusive development.

Objectives and strategies need to be informed by political and gender analysis, and shaped by local deliberation over priorities. Local actors should carefully frame objectives, including on gender equality, to resonate with aspects of local norms.

Politically informed, gender aware action includes building diverse coalitions to increase leverage, and focusing on achievable results.

It often requires a continuous, finely tuned balancing act between political pragmatism and developmental ambition. Prioritising gender equality may be in tension with political feasibility, for example, and such trade-offs should be explicitly debated.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Are you supporting front-line staff and local partners to:

- focus on issues that have potential local traction, identify entry points, and get their timing right?

- develop strategies that are politically informed and inclusive, and think about how both processes and outcomes can promote or hinder gender equality?

- frame objectives and calls for change, including on gender equality, in ways that take account of sensibilities and promote buy-in?

- find ways of securing the support, or at least minimising the opposition, of powerful players?

- discuss and decide on the appropriate balance between challenging gender and other inequalities and being pragmatic as to what's feasible and who to work with?

MAKING A BUSINESS CASE FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN BANGLADESH

The Sudokkho program supports the economic development of the clothing and construction industries in Bangladesh. It has successfully built local ownership of its explicit women's empowerment agenda by making a strong business case, and concentrating on changes that benefit all parties.

This business case focuses on persuading (all-male) middle management in private companies of the economic advantages of investing in women. It shows that women's empowerment is good for women but also for production, profits and growth.

For example, clothing factories were experiencing high staff turnover among female sewing machine operators, which was lowering profits. Bringing women into the previously all-male supervisory roles lessened abuse of female by male staff and substantially reduced staff turnover.

SOURCE: *SUDOKKHO: SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT IN BANGLADESH* (GAPP CASE STUDY 12)

It shows that women's empowerment is good for production, profits and growth

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

4 PLAN FOR UNCERTAINTY AND LEARN THROUGH ADAPTATION

Politically informed and gender aware ways of working mean engaging with a constantly changing context. This involves learning by doing and through adaptation, collecting appropriate data and working to realistic timeframes.

The political context and gender relations constantly change – for example, there may be a change in government, in the balance of power between local factions or in attitudes towards same-sex marriage, or a sexual harassment scandal may emerge. Working in politically informed, gender aware ways means working with constant change and uncertainty.

Given the kinds of complex reforms many development programs seek, there is no clear or linear link between cause and effect.

This kind of work involves supporting front-line staff and local partners to find out as much as they can about the problem they are addressing, try something they think might work, monitor it closely and adjust as necessary.

Achieving changes in gender and social relations requires understanding how power and politics, as well as attitudes and behaviours, are shifting. It means looking at the gendered political context both above and below the 'waterline' (see p. 5).

It requires realism in objectives and a long term perspective. Attitude and behaviour changes relating to power, politics and gender can take place slowly.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- **Are effective feedback loops in place? Do front-line staff and partners have the time and space to learn from their experience, reflect on their changing context, and adjust their strategies?**

- **Do monitoring systems provide information – including in relation to gender, power and political dynamics – to support reflection and learning, as well as external reporting?**

- **Are the trust and systems in place to help local teams learn from success and failure and to give them the flexibility to adapt accordingly?**

- **Do program objectives and indicators recognise the long term nature of changes in gender norms and power relations?**

WORLD BANK / ARNE HOEL

MONITORING GENDERED ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE IN NIGERIA

The State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI) is a 'demand-side' governance program in Nigeria. Gender is explicit across all levels of its log frame.

At output level, SAVI measures attitude and behaviour change in partner coalitions. For instance, it measures the extent to which partnerships 'include the voice of women and other excluded groups', using a simple qualitative scale against a range of indicators. The scale starts with 'Aware' of these voices, and moves through 'Permit', 'Facilitate' and 'Promote' to 'Institutionalise'. This encourages local partners to reflect on the extent to which women and other excluded groups are involved in various aspects of their work.

At outcome level, SAVI measures the number of demonstrable changes in policy and implementation by state governments, where there is evidence of contribution from SAVI partners, *a significant proportion of which reflect the voice of women and other socially excluded groups*. This means SAVI can report results retrospectively through 'outcome harvesting'. State teams record the headline result and the backstory on the role played by partner organisations.

This helps staff reflect on strategies' effectiveness. It also enables SAVI to adhere to donor targets for the overall number of results to be achieved, without tying down in advance exactly what these will be.

SOURCE: *THE STATE ACCOUNTABILITY AND VOICE INITIATIVE IN NIGERIA* (GAPP CASE STUDY 14)

It enables SAVI to adhere to targets for the number of results without tying down in advance what these will be

5 SHAPE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT THESE WAYS OF WORKING

Donors and program management teams together need to provide an environment that encourages staff and local partners to work in politically informed, gender aware ways.

A politically informed, gender aware approach needs to be central to the roles of all front-line staff and partners – not just of specialists.

But for this to happen, donors and program management teams need to work together to help provide a supportive environment. The ability of front-line staff and local partners to be politically informed and gender aware depends largely on whether the culture and management systems of the program and its donors encourage – or discourage – these ways of working.

Conventional approaches to staff recruitment, training, financial management, planning, monitoring and reporting all tend to reinforce a top-down, technocratic approach.

The challenge is to provide space for front-line staff to learn through adaptation while balancing accountability to the donor and to local constituencies. This requires attention to many aspects of program management.

Above all, both the management team and the donor need to share a strong commitment to politically informed, gender aware work, and to collaborate to champion this.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are all staff supported to be politically informed and gender aware?

- Are you shaping your program management systems to empower front-line staff and local partners?

  – Do recruitment, staff development and appraisal systems value local knowledge, soft skills and values (e.g. gender equality and inclusion) as well as technical expertise?

  – Does the program champion equality and inclusion internally?

  – Is decision-making appropriately decentralised?

- Are you shaping your program management systems to support flexibility and adaptation?

  – Do planning, reporting and financial management systems enable locally led, adaptive work?

  – Are you pushing back, where possible, on requirements that hinder this type of work?

WORKING FLEXIBLY IN TONGA

Autonomy and strong partner relationships have been the two most crucial factors to the Pacific Leadership Program's ability to support the Women in Leadership coalition in Tonga:

'The program has been able to provide nimble support, without necessarily always working to a clearly defined path – mucking in together and seeing where it takes us. That supports thinking and working politically by allowing us to be accommodating and flexible, trusting partners to identify opportunities themselves.'

The program's initial focus on building relationships allows it *'to challenge as well as support partners, and that's just as important'*.

SOURCE: *PACIFIC LEADERSHIP PROGRAM: ADVOCACY FOR CEDAW IN TONGA* (GAPP CASE STUDY 3)

Autonomy and strong partner relationships have been the two most crucial factors

FURTHER RESOURCES FROM GENDER AND POLITICS IN PRACTICE RESEARCH

This brief highlights key lessons from the Gender and Politics in Practice research project. These are discussed further in *From Silos to Synergy*. The full series of publications is outlined below. Explore GAPP findings and resources at **dlprog.org/gapp**.

CONTEXT PAPER & THREE IN-DEPTH STUDIES

SYNTHESIS OF PROGRAM CASE STUDIES

LITERATURE REVIEW

- *Gender and Politics in Practice: The Bigger Picture*

- *Being the First: Women Leaders in the Pacific Islands*

- *Thinking and Working Politically for Social Inclusion: The Waria of Banjarmasin, Indonesia*

- *The Politics of Better Work for Women: Vietnam's Garment Industry*

- *From Silos to Synergy: Learning from Politically Informed, Gender Aware Programs*

- *Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*

- *CARE Australia*

- *Empowerment, Voice and Accountability for Better Health and Nutrition, Pakistan*

- *Enabling State Programme, Nepal*

- *Gender & climate change research, Bangladesh*

- *Mobilising for Development, Nigeria*

- *Pacific Leadership Program: Advocacy for CEDAW, Tonga*

- *Peace Leadership Programme, Myanmar*

- *State Accountability and Voice Initiative, Nigeria*

- *Sudokkho, Bangladesh*

- *Voices for Change, Nigeria*

- *We Can, South Asia*

- *Women in Leadership Support Program, Pacific region*

- *UN Women, Asia Pacific*

CIAT / NEIL PALMER

Cover photo: Asian Development Bank
Family cruising along the Tonle Sap Lake in Kampong Phluk, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia.

p.9: Nugroho Nurdikiawan Sunjoyo / World Bank
Community meeting discussing reconstruction of village hit by volcanic eruption. Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

p.11: Markus Kostner / World Bank
A young woman walks home along the road from Naypyitaw, Myanmar.

p.13: Asian Development Bank
Tractor on the Kusum Sera road in Nepal.

p.15: Arne Hoel / World Bank
Women of Takalafiya-Lapai village, Nigeria.

p.17: Asian Development Bank
Tufui Faletau stands outside the Treasury building in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. She works at the Tongan Policy and Planning Ministry.

p.17: Neil Palmer / CIAT
A farmers' village meeting, Kenya.

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