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BHUTAN



Helvetas-Bhutan Gender Strategy (2010-2013)

TABLE OF CONTENT

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Context Analysis	3
2.1 Statistical data	3
2.2 Policies and Legislation	5
2.3 Context Specific Challenges	5
2.4 Strategy	7
2.5 Important Actors	8
3. Strategy and main activities for Helvetas-Bhutan.....	9
3.1 Goal and Objectives	9
3.2 Components	9
3.3 Programme/Projects	10
3.4 Programme Office.....	11
4. Partners.....	12
5. Annexures	12
Annex 1: Some gender related terminologies.....	13
Annex 2: Gender sensitive monitoring.....	14
Annex 3: Example Gender Sensitive Checklist.....	15
Annex 3: Useful documents/references	16

Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention of the Rights of the Child
FYP	Five Year Plan
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NAPG	National Action Plan for Gender
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NWAB	National Women’s Association of Bhutan
PO	Programme Office
RENEW	Respect, Education, Nurture, and Empower Women
RGoB	Royal Government of Bhutan
VAW	Violence Against Women

1. Introduction

Generally, Bhutan is regarded as having a high level of gender equality in comparison to countries in South Asia. Bhutan comes in second, after Sri Lanka, on the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)¹. Bhutan's first gender study also showed that women in Bhutan do not face overt discrimination² and that institutionalised forms of discrimination against women does not exist.

However, subtle forms of discrimination, specifically in the fields of higher education, employment and public decision making have been emphasised as causes for concern. A National Action Plan for Gender (NAPG) has been developed to provide a national framework covering the period 2007-2013. This action plan has identified 7 critical areas for action: Good governance; economic development; health; education and training; aging, mental health and disabilities; violence against women; and prejudices and stereotypes. Strategies to empower women and promote gender equality as identified in Bhutan's on-going five year development plan (10th five year plan) are linked to the findings and critical areas elaborated in the NAPG.

Within the national framework provided by the NAPG and the 10th FYP, and guided by Helvetas' own global gender strategy, **Helvetas-Bhutan** seeks to mainstream gender as a means to achieve gender equality. It subscribes to the belief that gender mainstreaming "aims to ensure that women as well as men are involved in setting goals and in planning so that development meets priorities and needs of both men and women."³

2. Context Analysis

2.1 Statistical data

Based on several documents⁴ on gender in Bhutan, education and employment statistics, and discussions with relevant agencies and local government personnel, an overall perspective on gender in Bhutan can be summarised as follows:

positive observations	negative observations
Absence of overt forms of gender discrimination Political commitment (ratification of CEDAW; Beijing Platform for Action; Constitution proclaims it a responsibility of the State to take measures to eliminate gender-based discrimination) A competent National Action Plan for Gender Presence of state and non-state actors engaged in promoting gender equality	Socio-cultural perceptions generally hold women as less confident, less capable and having lower status Low representation of women in governance/public decision-making forums Gender disparities in higher education, technical and vocational institutes Gender disparities in employment situation, with more pronounced unemployment rate for women.

¹ The SIGI measures gender inequality in five areas: family code, physical integrity, son preference, civil liberties and ownership rights in 102 non-OECD countries

² Gender Pilot Study, June 2001, Planning Commission, Royal Government of Bhutan

³ Helvetas Gender Policies and Strategy 2006-2011

⁴ Gender Pilot Study, 2001; National Action Plan for Gender 2008-2013; 10th FYP; Gender Stereotypes and Women's Political Participation of 2008

The following information highlights areas where stark gender disparities exist, and also important areas where progress has been made.

Governance:

The Parliament of Bhutan comprises of 72 members of whom 10 are women (4 in the National Assembly and 6 in the National Council). At the local government level, only 4% of the leadership roles are occupied by women.

Women account for 31% of the civil service and 1.5% at the executive level⁵.

In the Judiciary, women's representation at the top level is very low. Only 3% of the judges and 4.2% of the deputy judges in the country are women.

Education and Training:

Gender parity has been achieved in primary and basic education. However, this has not translated into parity at the tertiary level. The ratio of girls to boys in tertiary education is 48:100⁶ and the overall literacy rate is lower for women (65.6% of women are illiterate) as compared to men (49.34% of men are illiterate).⁷

There has been considerable progress made in terms of gender parity in enrolments in vocational training institutes (39% females in 2007).

Health:

Life expectancy rates are similar for both men (66 years) and women (66.2 years) and infant and under-five mortality rates are slightly lower for girls than for boys. Maternal health receives high attention with the result that maternal death rate has been reduced from 770 per 100,000 in 1990 to 255 in 2009.⁸

Issues that need closer examination and reliable data are early marriages and teenage pregnancies; sexual harassment; and violence against women. These issues are gaining focus especially with efforts from NGOs and autonomous agencies.

Economic Development and Employment:

The gap in the rate of labour force participation between men and women is decreasing. However, the discrepancy is high in urban area (41.5% for females compared to 76.8% for men)⁹. In terms of employment status too female unemployment rate is more pronounced in urban areas and twice as high (9.5% unemployment rate for women) when compared to that of men (5.3%).¹⁰ In rural areas, female unemployment is only slightly lower than that of men. This can be associated to factors such as social expectations and inheritance traditions (matrilineal, although in the southern communities it is largely patrilineal), which have contributed towards a majority of women being engaged in the agriculture sector and tied to their homes. However, these engagements are usually low or non-paid farming and household activities¹¹. Additionally, with increasing rural-migration rates, largely men (60% of migrants are men) seek employment in urban areas leaving women behind to farm¹². Among young women migrants with little or no formal education, because of their lack of urban sector skills, many find lowly paid employment (e.g. domestic help) or become economically dependent on men.

⁵ www.rcsc.gov.bt/statistics (2009)

⁶ NAPG

⁷ Labor Force Survey report, 2009

⁸ Annual Health Bulletin 2009

⁹ Bhutan Labour Force Survey, 2007

¹⁰ NAPG, p. 41

¹¹ 10th Plan document, Volume 1

¹² Ministry of Agriculture (2005). Rural-Urban Migration in Bhutan

2.2 Policies and Legislation

The legislative framework in Bhutan is generally non discriminatory. Specific provisions that are conducive for promoting gender equality include:

The **constitution** of Bhutan guarantees equal rights and opportunities to both women and men. Specifically, **Article 9 (17)** stresses the responsibility of the state to take appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination and exploitation against women, including trafficking, prostitution, abuse, violence, harassment and intimidation.

The Local Government Act 2009, similarly, does not differentiate between sexes, as all registered Bhutanese are eligible for office, if they fulfil set criteria. However, one of the criteria include a certain level of education which is disadvantageous for women as they are on average less educated than men (female literacy rate in urban areas 60%, vs. male 80%; in rural areas female 29% and male 57%¹³).

The Labour and Employment Act, 2007, provides for favourable working conditions for pregnant and nursing mothers, and equal pay for work of equal value. Female civil servants are entitled to three months of maternity leave with full pay, or one month with full pay in case of a miscarriage. Moreover, the Act emphasizes that there should not be discrimination based on sex against employees or job applicants in connection with recruitment, dismissal, transfer, training and demotion.¹⁴

The **Penal Code of Bhutan** has dedicated an entire chapter, **Chapter 14**, to criminalize various degrees of sexual harassment, rape, and physical and verbal abuses.

In the **10th Five Year Plan**, which provides the framework for Bhutan's development programs for the period 2008-2013, each sector is required to effectively mainstream gender issues into their policies and programs. Sectors are also required to maintain gender disaggregated data to help identify and monitor potential gender gaps. This five year plan recognizes the need to strengthen and develop appropriate policies and strategies that take into consideration the different needs, roles and capabilities of women on the basis of the principles of gender mainstreaming.¹⁵

2.3 Context Specific Challenges

There are 7 critical areas for action that have been identified during the process of the formulation of the National Action Plan for Gender: Good governance; economic development; health; education and training; aging, mental health and disabilities; violence against women; and prejudices and stereotypes. These challenges are directly related to areas where statistics have shown that gender disparities exist (also refer to 2.1) and also areas where there is growing concern but lack of comprehensive and reliable data (violence against women, mental health and disabilities).

¹³ RGoB, 2008, p.52

¹⁴ <http://labournet.molhr.gov.bt/>.

¹⁵ *Tenth Plan Document Vol. 1*

Governance: women's low representation and participation in decision making in public arenas is a challenge. The causes have been attributed to lower formal educational attainments and literacy rates of women, which also have an influence on lower access to information and fewer opportunities. Therefore, addressing the causes for the low participation of women in governance and increasing women's representation at all levels of governance, especially local governance, are challenges.

Education and training: the low participation of women in tertiary education and professional and vocational training programs needs to be changed. These have had direct impacts on the current situation of lower employability skills among women. Another area that needs attention is raising the literacy rates of girls and women in rural areas.

Health: improving access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities¹⁶, better understanding the extent of teenage pregnancies and unsafe abortion practices and strategising ways of reducing the numbers of both are some of the pertinent challenges.

Economic development and employment: issues of lower unemployment rates for women specifically in urban areas, need for skills related to income generating opportunities in rural areas, and better understating and recognition of women's involvement in the informal sector are challenges that need to be addressed.

Aging, mental health and disabilities: better understanding and monitoring of gender disaggregated prevalence of issues related to aging, mental health and disabilities, and developing appropriate gender sensitive strategies are important issues. There is now increasing recognition and recent efforts have shown gender issues: need for care and support for the widowed population which is female dominated; girls with disabilities are perceived as being more vulnerable and therefore are usually kept at home, possibly explaining the comparatively low enrolment of girls (26%) at the National Institute for the Disabled¹⁷.

Violence against Women: although the issue is gaining focus, there is generally a culture of silence on violence against women and, therefore, there is a lack of reliable data (only data from incidences reported to the police or treated at the hospitals exists). These data would exclude the extent of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence at home, in the workplace, schools and institutions, and the community.

Prejudices and stereotypes: changing socio-cultural perceptions in Bhutan that generally hold women as less capable than men is a challenge. There are traditional beliefs¹⁸ and adages that reinforce these perceptions. It is perceived that these socio-cultural perceptions influence the non-participation of women in public decision making and economic activities outside the household

¹⁶ Although no sex disaggregated data exists on this in Bhutan yet, it has been internationally recognised that generally fetching water is a role assigned to women and girls and therefore better access to safe drinking water frees up time for women and girls; better sanitation also has gender related advantages (e.g. better toilet facilities may encourage school attendance especially for girls)

¹⁷ NAPG, 2007, 119

¹⁸ For example, there is a belief that women are 9 lives behind men

levels¹⁹. In terms of regional differences within the country, it is generally the case that women in the southern communities of Bhutan are less recognized and appreciated in terms of their social standing.

2.4 Strategy

The National Action Plan for Gender provides the basis for gender mainstreaming strategies in Bhutan's overall development plan, including the current five year plan. The current five year plan seeks to combine a two-pronged strategy on gender mainstreaming:

- as a cross-cutting theme through gender sensitization and awareness raising, and systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of gender-disaggregated data; and
- as a focus in specific areas (directly related to context challenges) :
 - a) **Governance:** to further integrate gender perspectives into legislations and policies; to identify causes of low female participation in governance and address those issues; and increase women's representation at all levels, particularly in local government.
 - b) **Education and training:** to study the causes of low enrolment of women in tertiary education and address those causes; encourage increased participation of women in professional and vocational training programs.
 - c) **Health:** reducing maternal mortality rates, teenage pregnancy and associated challenges; improving access to reproductive health issues, and reducing prevalence of anaemia and cervical cancer.
 - d) **Legal framework:** strengthening existing legal framework to combat violence against women and sexual harassment; promoting women and child-friendly police and court services, taking appropriate measures to prevent violence against women (VAW) and care for victims.
 - e) **Economic development and employment:** addressing socio-cultural perceptions and stereotypes, encouraging female participation in training programmes, promoting cottage and small rural-based enterprises with increased access to micro-credit, and support girls transition from school to work.

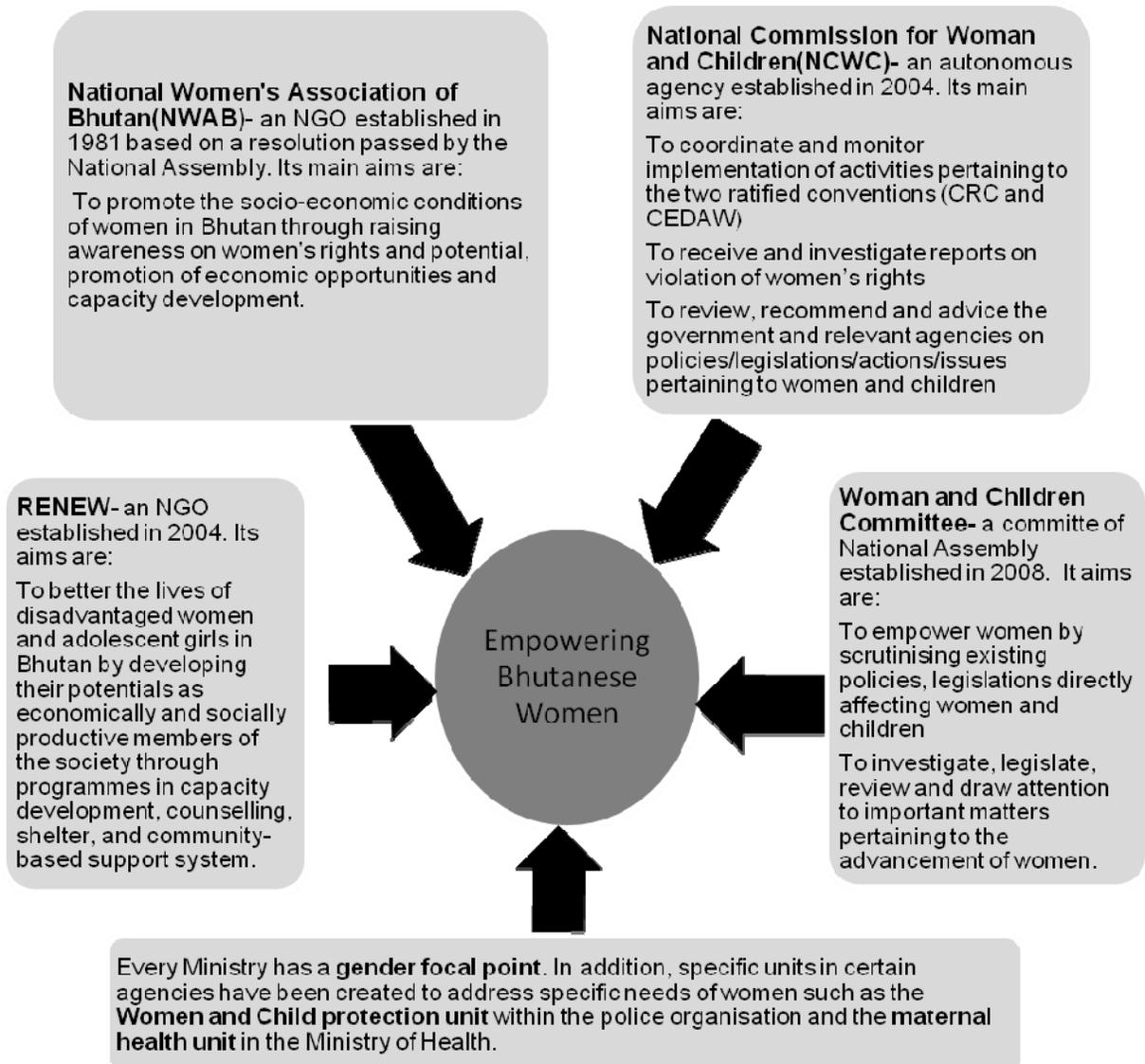
A cross-cutting topic in issues related to gender in Bhutan is the socio-cultural perceptions of both women and men that perceive women as less capable and confident than men.²⁰ While these perceptions have not been a barrier to women's participation in agriculture, household decisions, property inheritance and getting involved at village levels, there is evidence to show that they have influenced participation of women in tertiary education, public life, and vocational training.

¹⁹ Gender Pilot Study 2001; NAPG, 2007

²⁰ Gender Pilot Study, 2001

2.5 Important Actors

There are several important state and non-state actors who share a common goal of contributing towards achieving the MDG 3 - Promote gender equality and empower women.



3. Strategy and main activities for Helvetas-Bhutan

3.1 Goal and Objectives

Our goal:

To contribute towards recognizing, appreciating and reducing gender inequalities through promoting gender equality in the Helvetas-Bhutan programme.

Objectives:

- Equitable participation of men and women in decision making and leadership forums
- Enhanced access to and control over productive resources for women, including capacity development and employment opportunities
- Increased awareness on gender issues

3.2 Components

Gender has been a transversal theme in the Helvetas-Bhutan programme. However, its implementation has largely been limited to ad-hoc collection of gender disaggregated data. In order to more systematically mainstream gender, a rapid gender assessment²¹ was conducted in the entire programme, including the programme office. In line with the global Helvetas strategy, we will focus on three components:

- Engendering all steps and processes of the programme/project cycle
- Engendering the organisation
- Gender specific activities

Based on the context specific challenges (under 2.2) and the national strategies (under 2.3), the programme and projects of Helvetas-Bhutan would directly seek to contribute to the following issues and strategies:

- as a **cross-cutting theme** through gender sensitization and awareness raising, and systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of gender-disaggregated data (entire programme). Specific activities on gender sensitization will seek to challenge prevailing prejudices and stereotypes
- to look at ways of increasing women's representation particularly in **local governance** (specifically through: Support for Local Governance project, Participatory Forest Management project, Rural Livelihood project, Support for Tarayana Foundation, Rural Development Training project)

²¹ Helvetas-Bhutan through the gender lens - a rapid gender assessment of selected programmes of Helvetas Bhutan, Phuntshok Choden (2007)

- to enhance the participation of women in **vocational/training programs** (specifically through: Rural Development Training project, Suspension Bridge Programme, Rural Livelihood project, Participatory Forest Management project)
- to support the **economic development and employment** of women and girls (specifically through: Rural Development Training project, Rural Livelihood project, Participatory Forest Management project, Support to Tarayana Foundation)

3.3 Programme/Projects

Strategies:

In its programme/projects, Helvetas Bhutan will focus on gender mainstreaming to promote gender equality through 3 main strategies:

- Gender mainstreaming all steps and processes of the programme/project cycle
- Documentation of best practices and dissemination
- Specific activities aimed at promoting gender equality²²

Expected Outcomes:

Theme	Outcome Indicators	Projects	Partners
Local Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratio of women to men in decision-making positions (Gups, Mangmis, group presidents, secretaries) in local governance bodies • Increased awareness among gewog and Dzongkhag functionaries on gender equality and equity • Increased elected woman GT and DT members in 3 target districts 	PFMP, RLP, SLG, TF	Local governance bodies, gender focal person of GNHC, project partners, National Commission for Women and Children
Vocational/ training programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female and male ratio of participants in training and vocational education programs 	PFMP, RLP, RDT, SBP	Trainees, CSOs, project partners, gender focal person of MoAF

²² Gender specific activities should be considered as short-term measures to address critical disparities and should not substitute transversal interventions

Theme	Outcome Indicators	Projects	Partners
Economic development and employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender gap in wages Percentage of women engaged in income generating activities and/or wage employment in non-agricultural, agricultural and other sources supported by projects Control over economic resources 	RLP, PFMP, TF, RDT	Community-based income generating groups, Women and Children committee (for legislation on wages) Project partners, gender focal person of MoAF
Cross-Cutting themes/Special programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation and sharing of best practices within projects Gender sensitization on prevailing stereotypes Remedial programs to address lack of/less female participation (e.g. mobile training methods) in local governance, training and employment opportunities 	All projects and PO	Community groups, RENEW, NCWC, government partner agencies

Main Activities:

- Concepts clarification and discussions with project partners
- Engendering all steps and processes of the project management cycle
- Incorporating gender guiding questions and checklists in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation based on project specificities (e.g. linkages between livelihood projects, economic empowerment of women, and confidence raising)
- Documenting and disseminating best practices
- Identifying and supporting gender specific activities (e.g. special trainings in leadership skills based on the context of lack of women leaders in public decision making forums)

3.4 Programme Office

Strategies:

The rapid gender assessment pointed out that while the Programme Office (PO) has a good level of gender awareness and gender sensitivity at the individual level, as an organization there is room for improvement. Based on this assessment, the following are the main strategies:

- Sensitization on gender concepts within the PO.
- Engendering the PO with the main aim of building a gender sensitive culture within the organisation.
- Further develop in-house capacity for mainstreaming gender.

Expected Outcomes:

Areas	Outcome Indicators	Responsible	Support
General awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">All PO staff are aware of basic gender concepts	PD and GFP	PO staff
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">All PO staff have read the gender strategy paper	PD and GFP	PO staff
Administration and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use of gender neutral language in the administration manual and other PO documents	PD, GFP, and Head of Administration	PO staff
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Recognition and time allotment (e.g. in the activity registration form) for gender mainstreaming activitiesDiscussions, collaboration and networking with GFPs from government, CSOs and other agencies	PD, GFP	
Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Presence of a gender focal person	PD	PO staff
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"># of capacity development initiatives, including documentation, on gender	PD, GFP	

Main Activities:

- Concepts clarification and discussions within PO
- In-house gender sensitization sessions as and when required
- Gender and gender mainstreaming package for new staff as part of orientation
- Build in-house capacities for gender mainstreaming
- Document and share best practices in gender mainstreaming
- Network with gender focal persons from other agencies

4. Partners

Helvetas-Bhutan will partner with a wide range of stakeholders: community groups, civil society organisations, government agencies, and international organisations in the country. Refer 2.3 and 3.3 for details on partners.

5. Annexures

Annex 1: Some gender related terminologies

Annex 2: Gender sensitive monitoring

Annex 3: Example gender sensitive checklist

Annex 1: Some gender related terminologies²³

a) Gender

It refers to the socially and culturally based distinction between men and women. It is not the same as sex, and it is not the same as women. It comprises of those roles and attributes that are dictated by norms and traditions. Gender is not biologically determined and therefore can be changed.

b) Gender equality

This does not necessarily mean equal number of men and women (or boys and girls). Gender equality exists when both men and women are attributed equal social value, equal rights and equal responsibilities, and have equal access to the means (resources, opportunities) to exercise them.

c) Gender equity

It is the process of being fair to men and women. To fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women (and men) from operating on a level playing field. Equity is one of the means to achieving equality.

d) Gender mainstreaming

It refers to the processes of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action so that their different concerns and experiences become an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes.

e) Gender disparities

These are differences between men and women in terms of their status, situation, rights, responsibilities, and other attributes.

f) Gender neutral

Gender neutral policies are not specifically aimed at either men or women and are assumed to affect both sexes equally. However, they may actually be gender blind (ignoring the socially determined roles, responsibilities and capabilities of men and women).

g) Gender roles

Roles assigned to men and women according to cultural norms and traditions. Most often, these roles are not based on biological or physical imperatives but on stereotypes and presumptions on what men and women can and should do. Gender roles become problematic when a society assigns greater value to the roles of one gender.

h) Gender relations

It refers to the social relationships and power distribution between men and women in both private and public spheres.

²³ Gender mainstreaming toolkit UNDP (2007); Gender Equality in Australia's Aid Program – Why and How AusAID (March 2007)

Annex 2: Gender sensitive monitoring

Gender sensitive monitoring requires gender sensitive targets, and realistic, measurable and time-bound indicators. The table below²⁴ can help in selecting indicators for different monitoring questions at different phases in the project management cycle.

Type	Description	Examples
Gender checklist	Asking whether something is or is not in place. Simple data collection. Good for monitoring processes. However, lacks qualitative aspect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there a gender strategy in place for Helvetas-Bhutan? - Does sex disaggregated data of the project target groups exist?
Statistics-based indicators	Indicators that measure changes using available data. Provides a quantitative perspective. Needs to be complemented with qualitative data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Male: female participation in training programs - Male: Female ratio in decision-making positions in farmers' associations
Indicators requiring specific forms of data collection	Require specific forms of data collection (interviews, focus group discussions, case studies etc). Goes beyond the numbers. Needs replicable methodology so that data gathered can be compared over time to assess changes in, for example, attitudes. Often resource intensive (time, human and financial resources)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % of population in target community who feel that women are less capable than men - % of women representation in the highest levels of the DTs and GTs

²⁴ Adapted from the gender mainstreaming toolkit of UNDP (2007), available at <http://europeandcis.undp.org/gender>

Annex 3: Example Gender Sensitive Checklist

The example provides guiding questions²⁵ for gender mainstreaming in all the three stages of planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. These questions are only meant to be a guide, and are not an exhaustive list. Every project needs to develop their own or adapt questions based on the nature of a specific project.

Areas	Guiding Questions
Country Programme	
Objectives	Does the CP contain objectives that seek to address gender and development?
Strategies	Does the CP have a strategy for incorporating gender issues into its programme? Are adequate gender sensitive monitoring mechanisms in place in the logical framework? Are the data in the CP disaggregated by sex?
Projects	
Objectives	Do the project objectives explicitly refer to women and men?
Planning Process	Does the project document describe project consultation processes? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have target men and women been involved in the decision-making process of the project? • Have constraints to men's and women's participation in the project been identified? (E.g. would participation in the project increase women's workload?) • Have strategies been identified to overcome these constraints? Has consideration been given to how social, cultural, religious, economic, and political factors men's and women's participation in the project? Does the project partner have the capacity to implement gender sensitive projects? How will the project affect women's status? (e.g. their decision making role) Are arrangements in place to monitor gender impacts?

²⁵ Adapted from Helvetas-Nepal 'Strategic framework for gender' and AUSAID 'Guide to gender and development'

<p>Implementation & Monitoring</p>	<p>Are both men and women participating in the project activities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have sex disaggregated data been collected on men's and women's participation in the project? • Are project activities equally accessible to both men and women? • Have sex disaggregated data been collected on the distribution of benefits? • If men and women are not equally benefiting, have reasons for this been assessed? <p>Is the project adversely affecting men and women?</p> <p>How are the participation of women affecting their men's and women's roles and relationships? (e.g. women's increasing financial independence may not be appreciated by men and therefore affect their relationship)</p> <p>Are assumptions and information on needs, interests of men and women still valid?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there on-going consultation with men and women? • Is there on-going collection of data about the needs and interests of men and women? • If original assumptions and information are not valid any more, are there provisions/mechanisms for redesigning certain elements of the project?
<p>Evaluation</p>	<p>Has the project succeeded in promoting equal opportunities between men and women?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have both men and women been involved and consulted in collecting data on the gender impact of the project? • Do data collecting systems specifically differentiate between the project's impact on men and women? • Have both men and women benefitted from the project? <p>Has women's status improved as a result of the project? (e.g. in education levels, health status, employment opportunities, political status etc)</p> <p>Does the project partner have the capacity to implement gender sensitive projects? (e.g. has their capacity been strengthened during the project?)</p>

Annex 3: Useful documents/references

- Helvetas Gender Policies and Strategy 2006-2011, Helvetas
- Strategic Framework for Gender (2005), Helvetas-Nepal
- Empowering Women, Learning and Sharing Series (2), Helvetas-Nepal
- Gender Mainstreaming in Practice, A Toolkit (2007), UNDP. Available at <http://europeandcis.undp.org/gender> (step-by-step guide on mainstreaming)
- Gender Equality: A Key for Poverty Alleviation and Sustainability, SDC. Available at <http://www.sdc.admin.ch/en/Home/Themes/Gender> (on definitions, understanding concepts)
- <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/guidetogenderanddevelopment.pdf> (key guiding questions based on sectors – agriculture, enterprise, training etc)

