

**COLLABORATIVE PARTICIPATORY  
RESEARCH IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING  
IN SOCIAL CHANGE ORGANIZATIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Unequal gender relations in societies, specially developing countries, have been focus of development programmes for decades. Much of this focus has been on changing gender relations in communities. However, organisations – governmental and private – also reflect similar patterns of gender relations. Advocacy for gender mainstreaming in organisations has had limited success due to prescriptive approach. PRIA has adopted a learning process approach to gender mainstreaming in development NGOs in India. Collaborative Research methodology has been utilized towards this end. This paper describes one such case and draws implications for future research and practice.

## **GENDER CONTEXT**

Women's marginalisation, exclusion and deprivation are pervasive in many societies around the world. Women's participation in social spheres is constrained and restricted through a wide variety of cultural and religious practices and taboos; women's economic participation generally keeps them in low-paid, low skilled occupations and jobs; women's political participation is generally invisible and inconsequential. Women continue to perform several roles simultaneously—home-maker, reproductive, care-provider etc; much of this work is invisible, unaccounted for, unpaid and undervalued. In addition, women work in the fields, mines, at home, factories and offices as earning members of the family (Farrell, 2004).

Those involved in the women's movement worldwide began to question and protest against the unequal status of women, and resist the discrimination they face in all spheres of life—at home, in community and at work places. As a consequence, legislations, programmes and schemes began to be formulated by governments in many countries to address such issues of inequality and discrimination (Kabeer, 1994).

Over the past two decades, many development agencies and programmes have also been attempting to provide resources for transforming the conditions and status of women around the world, especially in the developing countries of the south. In the early days, these programmes had Women-in-Development (WID) focus (Kardam, 1991); later it became Women-and-Development (WAD) focused; now, it is focused on gender—Gender-and Development (GAD) (Moser, 1993). WID perspective attempted to develop programmes aimed at improving services for women (like education and health

care); WAD approach took a holistic view of women's development (including livelihood, water and sanitation, etc); GAD perspective attempts to change unequal relations of power – gender relations – between women and men in a given social context.

Perceptions of gender characteristics and capabilities are the result of social construction of roles and responsibilities (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Gender discrimination, therefore, is open to change and the focus of many current interventions in development programmes. Rooted in the ideology of patriarchy, gender discrimination is still widespread in many societies—in the north & and south. According to Farrell (2004, page 57): “The word ‘patriarch’ means the rule of the father. ‘Patriarchy’ therefore refers to a social system where the father controls all members of the family, all property, all economic and other major decisions. The traditional form of patriarchy is based on the assumption that ‘men’ are superior to ‘women’, that women should be controlled by men and are part of a man's property. So we can define patriarchy as ‘the system that subordinates and oppresses women in both private and public spheres”.

Over the past two decades, analyses of programmes established to overcome gender discrimination have largely been carried out by those involved in the women's movement, civil society and development NGOs (non-governmental organisations). Documentation and analysis of such programmes clearly established that women's low status in the family and society is closely related to many other development deficits—malnutrition among children, lack of education of girls, poor immunization & health care, inadequate water conservation, absence of sustainable livelihoods, etc. (Moser 1993). Thus, many international agencies and governments have formulated and implemented several programmes which attempt to enhance the status and improve the condition of women in different societies.

Many civil society and non-governmental organizations have been implementing a number of development projects aimed at addressing such gender discrimination in rural and urban areas. These projects cover a wide spectrum of issues—education, health, savings & credit, microfinance, livelihood, and so forth. Various frameworks and methodologies have been formulated for undertaking systematic gender analysis in particular locations; likewise, many methods and tools have been designed to formulate projects which address the conditions and interests of women from a gendered lens (Kabeer & Subramanyam, 1996). Thus, mainstreaming gender in development planning, programming and monitoring has now become commonplace, specially among NGOs.

However, very little attention has been paid to the issue of mainstreaming gender in the very same organizations which address gender discrimination in society through their own interventions.

This paper describes a Collaborative Research and Change effort in a network of NGOs where gender mainstreaming institutionally was attempted over a period of two years (2002 – 04). A collaborative approach to this research was chosen because it seemed appropriate to the learning process orientation needed to bring about organizational change.

## **GENDER AND ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE**

Organisational change efforts in a planned and systematic manner began nearly forty years ago; organizational development (or OD as it became to be known) is a field of

theory and practice which evolved from change efforts in for-profit, private sector, corporations in the United States and elsewhere (Beckhard, 1992). Over the years, participatory diagnosis and change methodologies, utilizing collaborative research and inquiry, also gained considerable currency (see first chapter in this volume). The values and processes in OD attempted to change organizations in ways that would enhance employee motivation and empowerment, as well as organizational productivity, efficiency and results. OD methods, therefore, seem well-suited to address gender issues that are rooted in the design and process of organizations, including NGOs.

The impact that institutional design and functioning has in mainstreaming gender in development programmes has begun to get reported only recently (Goetz, 1997). The mainstay of many of these arguments is the separation of life from work, and non-recognition of women's reproductive responsibilities in society. It has been clarified that institutions not only affect the manner in which programmes are delivered in the field, but also the functioning of their internal processes as well. Thus, many theorists have argued for an engendered view of organizations in general, and development organizations in particular. Such analysis helps to clarify the institutionalization of patriarchy in organizations. Acker (1992, p.255) sums it up succinctly: "The gendered substructure lies in the spatial and temporal arrangements of work, in the rules prescribing workplace behaviour and in the relations linking workplace to living place. These practices and relations, encoded in arrangements and rules, are supported by assumptions that work is separate from the rest of life and that it has first claim on the worker. Many people, particularly women, have difficulty making their daily lives fit these expectations and assumptions".

In recent years, some interesting and positive experiences of organizational change efforts with gender lens have been reported in the literature. These indicate how challenging and uncommon such efforts are in development organizations themselves (Macdonald et.al., 1997). Rao et. al (1999: page 2) describe a number of case studies where organizational change was introduced by uncovering roots of gender inequality in organizations: "Our explorations focus on the institutional arrangements of organizations, on what Joan Acker calls the "gendered substructure" of organisations. This she characterizes as being built on a fundamental separation, and consequent devaluation, of "life" from "work"".

In promoting awareness of and sensitivity to gender discrimination, many activists and protagonists have successfully utilized aggressive advocacy and sustained pressure from below. Most international agencies and governments were made to listen to these voices due to such campaigns. The "women's rights are human rights" campaign had to take on religious institutions as well in achieving results during the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) after the UN Conference in Cairo (1994). In local situations, women's groups had to mobilize themselves in the face of extreme adversity from both their families and society to impress upon men and authorities that their experiences of gender discrimination were real, and their analysis of such experiences had convinced them that such discrimination was systemic and institutionalized.

When issues related to gender mainstreaming in organizations were raised, these feminist activists attempted a similar assertive advocacy approach. In raising the question of gender mainstreaming in development organizations themselves, such an aggressive approach has typically resulted in denial, rejection and justifications from the

leaderships (and many a times from the rank-and-file men) of such practices in their organizations. In the context of NGOs from the south, many donors have recommended the use of 'gender experts' to prepare gender policies for mainstreaming gender in their organizations. In our experience, such externally 'imposed' gender agenda has caused harm to the cause of gender mainstreaming in development organisations in the long-run, as resistance to internal change and transformation has been built in the leadership of such NGOs.

However, newly 'engendering' organizations have generally adopted a different strategy. Rao et. Al. (1999: page 3) describe their perspective on organizational change succinctly: "Our approach is different in two important ways. First, our understanding of organizational change marries insights from feminist and organizational change theory. Although power and accountability are important, we believe that change requires more than getting power and then telling people what to do or training them to do it. It requires both power and participation. We describe a change process to do this, elements of which underlie the five cases. Second, our goal is not simply to improve existing structures. We don't want to play by the rules; we want to change them fundamentally and contribute to the evolution of a new way of thinking about organisations."

In a similar vein, Howard (2002: page 67) critiques the expert-driven methodology of gender mainstreaming: "However, there is much that is unproductive in the characterization of (most) planners as resisters, which implies that people (both men and women) and organisations are resistant, static, tradition- and interest-bound, and inherently and unconsciously (structurally) biased. These characterizations, no matter how well founded, tend to lead to prescriptions that are top down, based upon ('correct') expert input, and managerial and administrative coercion. On the other hand, the

characterization of planners as passive recipients leads to somewhat different strategies, where at least it is recognized that, in an enabling environment, they have the capacity to learn, understand the need for change, and implement procedures that will improve the outcomes for women.”

Thus, our own commitment to gender mainstreaming institutionally was translated in practice through a collaborative learning and inquiry process.

## **NGOS & COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH**

PRIA is a non-profit, non-governmental support organization, which has been supporting learning and strengthening of civil society organizations for the past 25 years ([www.pria.org](http://www.pria.org)). Its focus in organizational renewal has been a holistic one. Its approach to capacity building in individuals and organizations is based on the theories of participatory research, adult education and experiential learning. It has evolved its unique approach to organizational renewal of mission-oriented social change organizations, specially suited to the realities of NGOs in the south (Tandon, 1998.). An organizational learning approach (Argyris & Schon, 1978) to mainstreaming gender, in our view, offers more durable possibilities for creating organizational capabilities for ongoing renewal and transformations in such situations.

PRIA’s founding philosophy is based on the principles of Participatory Research. In its core meaning, describes research as a systematic process of understanding a given reality. Knowledge in this perspective is not merely that which is recorded in books and documents; knowledge is the understanding of realities in order to act upon them. Thus

has evolved methods, tools and techniques which enable actors to articulate their existing knowledge about a reality (or a set of issues within that reality). Popular knowledge, indigenous knowledge, knowledge in use, or tacit knowledge is valued and recognized as valid in this perspective. Thus propagates a belief that all human beings are knowledgeable, and capable of knowing more. Knowledge production and utilization do not reside in experts alone, and ordinary folks are knowledge producers and users as well (Tandon 2002).

In this approach, PRIA has worked with local communities and their organizations to facilitate articulation of knowledge by systematizing their own experiences. It has also supported them to access expert knowledge in a manner that builds on what they already know. In doing so, PRIA has learnt that knowledge production is not merely a cognitive exercise; feelings and emotions are just as legitimate modes of knowing, just as action (as espoused by Action Research theories) is a legitimate mode of knowing. Thus, PRIA's methodology of knowledge production utilizes cognition, emotion and action as equally relevant modes of knowing about a given reality.

In its programme of work with NGOs, PRIA has found ready resonance of this methodology. As social change mission-oriented organizations, NGOs identify and act on societal problems based on their own values, inspirations and commitments. Such actions generate huge insights, which remain largely hidden within the experiences of their staff and volunteers. Systematisation of this knowledge requires some facilitation, which PRIA has undertaken during these 25 years in numerous settings and on various issues. NGO staff thus find participatory research methodology, practiced in a collaborative manner, very helpful in articulating and synthesizing their experiences in 'usable' knowledge. PRIA facilitators establish a relationship of mutuality with NGO staff

in undertaking such an exercise; they emphasise the collaborative nature of this effort at building knowledge; NGO staff are encouraged to take ownership of the processes of collective reflection and analysis, while PRIA facilitators act as stimulators, questioners, and supportive synthesizers. PRIA facilitators also bring to the notice of NGO staff other relevant knowledge that may already exist, which may have a bearing on the synthesis being attempted. Thus the process of systematization can benefit from knowledge produced by others too.

This process of working together with NGOs resonates with their own style of functioning, which is more cooperative and collective, more informal than formal, and more subjective and intuitive. Thus participatory research perspective and principles, when applied through a collaborative mode, make it exciting for NGOs to make the effort towards knowledge-building. Their commitment to knowledge production increases as they see a clear link with use of knowledge thus produced in this collaborative approach. Their historical antipathy to the ivory-tower ways of intellectual, academic and research enterprises melts away in the face of such a methodology. It enhances their willingness to undertake systematic and rigorous reflections of their practices.

Thus, collaborative research, carried out within the above perspective of participatory research, is found valuable and meaningful in PRIA's work with NGOs.

We now describe such a collaborative inquiry and learning approach to bring about gender mainstreaming institutionally in a group of Indian NGOs.

## **COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY PROCESS**

As a support organization for other civil society groups and NGOs, PRIA regularly facilitates their empowerment efforts. PRIA's mission clearly recognizes the agenda of gender equity in society; its programmes and interventions have been focusing on addressing such gender inequity and discrimination over the past 25 years. In recent times, PRIA began to address gender mainstreaming in its own organizational context.

PRIA's vision articulates a world where equity and justice characterize relations which include "gender justice as a cornerstone of such relations in the family, community and society." Its mission, among many others, recognizes that "gender discrimination necessitates focusing upon changing women's roles and status as agents and leaders of change." Core values, on the other hand, include "mainstreaming gender justice and equity through analysis of social reality, organizational policies, systems and structures, program priorities and plans... integral to our vision."

### CASH – Committee against sexual harassment

On August 13, 1998 the Supreme Court of India passed a judgment, making it binding, for all institutions, whether private or government to institute certain rules of conduct and preventive measures to stop sexual harassment at the workplace. The judgment also made it mandatory for all organisations to constitute a Committee Against Sexual Harassment (CASH). The purpose of this Committee was to protect women and prevent sexual harassment at the workplace and to take action against the perpetrators of this abuse.

In December 1998, the PRIA Governing Board mandated the formation of the Committee Against Sexual Harassment (CASH). Its main concern was to play a role in developing a conducive and positive work environment, which would act as a preventive measure to counteract sexual harassment. However, the Committee did not limit its mandate to the issue of sexual harassment alone, but took a deliberate decision to facilitate gender mainstreaming in all aspects of the institution.

A total of 6 persons representing various levels of the organizational hierarchy, constituted the Committee, which had a two year term and a gender balance was also ensured in the selection of its members (in accordance with the Supreme Court's ruling its Chairperson was a woman). The members were selected on the basis of their having worked in PRIA for two years, having a clear understanding of gender issues, mature and responsible in their behaviour and considered on having an ability to work in an inclusive and collective manner. This core group of six persons was the working committee but there was an option of inviting others members of the organization to form referral groups when it was required.

However, the larger objective went beyond just the institution of CASH within PRIA. It was felt that if PRIA as an organisation were to convince others of setting up CASH, then PRIA itself should set up CASH. Secondly, as an intermediary organisation it was also seen to be important that the experience of institutionalising CASH would help in providing some lessons to support the process in other organisations.

## Challenges facing CASH

The first task that confronted CASH was to create an awareness of the Supreme Court's ruling regarding the formation and scope of such a Committee. This implied that each and every member of the staff irrespective of his/her sex had a clear understanding of the definitions and constitutions of Sexual Harassment.

The second and more difficult task was to help the entire staff come to terms with the fact that even though the environment of PRIA was positive and there were so far no reported or known cases of sexual harassment, it did not undermine the establishment or need for such a committee.

For most of the male staff in PRIA, the Committee was seen as an unnecessary body and not needed in an NGO. Several of them felt vulnerable and threatened by having such a body. Claims were made that there were no instances of sexual harassment in the workplace within an NGO, since most organizations with their liberal and advanced thinking worked on development issues, which included the empowerment of women in society. Women, on the other hand, welcomed such a move and were eager to talk about the roles, functions and mandate of the Committee.

The initial six months were a stormy period for CASH and the organisation. Orientation programmes about CASH, workshops on sexual harassment, discussions on norms of acceptable behaviour – verbal and non-verbal - created a very subdued atmosphere. There was a visible physical distancing between male and female staff at informal events, including lunch breaks. Dirty jokes were shared in small private groups, and

public announcements made to the effect that no one was risking their job or reputation by sharing these openly (in case some women took offence).

However, consistent efforts were made to discuss these issues in an open manner. There was a focus on discomfort levels of men by the dress and certain behaviours of women in office, as well as in the field.

“Who decides limits” was discussed, which helped establish norms of behaviour for both the sexes. Slowly, the environment came back to normal in terms of interaction between the staff. However, there was a difference – very clearly there was an awareness of norms of behaviour, respect for each other as colleagues and an awareness of what kinds of behaviour constituted sexual harassment.

Conscious efforts were also made to include sessions on gender discrimination and sexual harassment in some of the on-going training programmes of PRIA.

## Review

At the end of 2000 the staff of PRIA were invited to review and critique the functioning of CASH since its inception. The feedback was positive and encouraging with constructive suggestions for the future.

Everybody across the organisation, unanimously reiterated that CASH had positively been able to create a broader awareness and sensitivity to issues regarding gender in the organisation.

Provision of space and a forum in the form of examples of space for discussion on various issues was seen as another key contribution of CASH. These events had offered the entire organisation a common platform to come together and hear and share each other's views and perspectives.

The general opinion was that CASH had been very effective in strengthening and maintaining a conducive environment for women in the organisation. However, both men and women said that they felt a degree of comfort in knowing that there was an existing forum to be approached if anything untoward happened to them.

### Challenges

A number of colleagues raised the issue that CASH should play a much greater role in extending beyond the organisation. The CASH members themselves felt that even the internal role entailed a large amount of time commitment, and if CASH were to play a more proactive external role as well then this would have some implications on time planning as well as appointment of additional staff recruited specifically for the purpose of gender mainstreaming within the organisation.

The issue of size and diversity within the organisation was another factor that needed to be considered while planning for and conducting programmes.

It was further suggested that given the turnover within the organisation, issues and themes related to gender should be reiterated as to give newcomers an orientation to

gender within the organisation. There were suggestions to deepen efforts to integrate gender concerns into programmatic planning and interventions. Everyone lauded the role of the existing CASH in fulfilling a statutory commitment as well as in playing a larger role in institutionalising gender within the organisation.

However several persons expressed their reservations regarding the use of the term Committee Against Sexual Harassment as they felt that it had very negative implications and prevented people from openly approaching the Committee not only for redressal of complaints but for a more open discussion. There was also the general impression of those outside PRIA who thought that CASH had been established because sexual harassment was rampant within the organisation and this was the official way of dealing with the problem. It was suggested that the Committee be given a name reflecting a more positive message and a wider scope of functioning.

In 2001, CASH evolved into the Committee For Gender Awareness and Mainstreaming (CGAMP) in PRIA, which continues to operate as such up to the present.

### Gender Audit Study

The next milestone in the evolution of gender history in PRIA was the decision to have a gender audit study conducted both within PRIA as well as its RSO partners. The audit to be conducted jointly with an external facilitator would assess the role, scope and future of the Committee and the process of gender mainstreaming within PRIA and its RSO partners.

The objectives of the study included:

- Document current practices and efforts in mainstreaming gender in PRIA and regional support organizations (RSOs)
- Generate recommendations that further promote the gender mainstreaming process within PRIA and help initiate and further facilitate these processes in the RSOs.
- Identify factors for formulating recommendations on ways and strategies that serve to further promote the gender mainstreaming agenda.

Following through this strong organizational mandate in pursuit of gender justice, this study was commissioned by PRIA in late 2002 in order to :1) document current practices and efforts in mainstreaming gender in PRIA and regional support organizations (RSOs) in order to address the question of how a gender perspective is understood, negotiated and articulated in both formal and informal structures and processes within the organizations; and 2) generate recommendations that further promote the gender mainstreaming process within PRIA and help initiate and further facilitate these processes in the RSOs.

The study also hoped to identify factors that facilitate, as well as constrain, gender mainstreaming and which shall serve as the basis for formulating recommendations on ways and strategies that serve to further promote the gender mainstreaming agenda.

## Process

An external facilitator was identified to join some members of PRIA's CGAMP team in undertaking the study. The rationales for inviting an external facilitator were manifold:

- (a) to enhance professional understanding of gender in organisations;
- (b) to bring additional perspectives in looking at internal realities to which organizational members may be 'blind';
- (c) to increase the force for organizational changes on top management, should such recommendations arise.

The study team designed a process of data-collection and analysis spread over several weeks. It utilized a modified version of the organizational analysis framework developed by PRIA (Tandon 2003). Some of these categories were as below:

- Vision-Mission
- Decision-making structures
- Personnel System
- Internal Mechanisms
- Culture
- Capacity

The data gathering began with documentary review and was followed by semi-structured interviews of key informants, and two sets of focus group discussions (FGDs) with staff located in the different levels of the organizations, one exclusively with women and

another with men. A set of questions served as the starting point and helped guide the assessment.

In some cases, the external facilitator alone conducted interviews with key informants consisting of the President, the Coordinator of CGAMP and person in-charge of Personnel and Administration. Group discussions were also held with other key informants such as the available members of the CGAMP and the Top Management Committee. Individual interviews were also held with two staff at the level of program coordinators, technical specialists and unit heads (one woman, one man) and two members from support staff (one woman and one man), who were selected randomly. Two Focus Group Discussions (FGD), one with female staff and another with male staff, were conducted after they were drawn from the ranks of program secretaries, assistants, helpers, drivers, and field staff through stratified random sampling. The objective of the FGDs was to undertake a rapid organizational appraisal of staff understanding of the term “gender”, draw out their ideas on gender mainstreaming within the organization, as well as to generate suggestions for improvement of this process. Semi-structured interviews were used to ensure that participants’ responses were not fragmented into preconceived categories.

### Analysis & Feedback

After completion of data-gathering, the study team did a preliminary analysis of findings. It then discussed the same with the President of PRIA and the entire CGAMP Team. These discussions further enriched the analysis, and began to formulate recommendations for further mainstreaming gender institutionally in PRIA. Another

round of feedback and sharing of analysis was held with staff, and further suggestions invited.

A revised report, containing analysis and findings, was submitted to the President of PRIA. After deliberating upon the recommendations in the top management team, the President asked the Chair of CGAMP to share the findings of the study, and recommendations, in the next meeting of the Governing Board of PRIA.

### Key Findings & Recommendations

The key findings about institutional aspects of gender mainstreaming in PRIA are shown in table 1 below:

**Table 1:**

<b>Institutional Aspects in Gender mainstreaming in PRIA</b>
<p>1. Organisational Philosophy—Vision-Mission “ to address gender-based inequality..”</p>
<p>2. Decision-making Structures—Governing Board’s composition (40% women); bye-laws of the Governing Board that suggest.. ”gender balance” criteria in composition.</p> <p>Top management team :composition (40% women)</p>
<p>3. Personnel Systems—Recruitment of women, paternity leave, women with young kids enabled to take them to the field, focused attention to HRD of women staff to take up leadership positions.</p>
<p>4. Internal Mechanisms—Committee on Gender Awareness &amp; Mainstreaming in PRIA (CGAMP), headed by senior woman staff with representation from all levels in the organization, is mandated by the Governing Board in PRIA, and presents a bi-annual report to it.</p>
<p>5. Culture—The most significant aspect of gender mainstreaming is cultural change in organisation’s norms, values, symbols and meanings. In PRIA, this has focused upon such aspects of sexual harassment as language, dress, gestures, etc in the field and in offices. An effective mechanism of handling any such incident of harassment is put in place in all offices.</p>
<p>6. Capacity — One of the important ways to sustain such process of enquiry and change is to invest in capacity of individuals and groups. Gender focal points in each partner and field location is mandated with this role, and provided proper orientation on gender, grievance handling, facilitating reflections and change, etc.</p>

Further findings and recommendations from the study were as described here:

- A Gender Disparity in data on PRIA Staff. The ratio of men and women needed to be reviewed in the context of the representation of women in the decision making process of the organization. The statistics revealed a very interesting picture. It is generally assumed that in most organizations women are more dominant at a support level, in PRIA this was the opposite.
- The institutional policies of PRIA are gender sensitive. The credit for the change in policies goes largely to CGAMP, as it was their persistent efforts in taking recommendations from the staff and following up the same with the Management. Needless to say that the Management and Governance structures were also supportive of the process, which finally culminated in these positive changes.
- CGAMP/CASH workshops were successful and these led to the creation of a gender sensitive climate within the institution, where women can work in an atmosphere of comfort and security.
- A working environment where women feel they can generally compare and compete with their male colleagues in terms of work opportunities based on merit and competence.
- Instituting of a thorough and systematic review of personnel, systems and other processes with a view to making these gender-sensitive.

Some recommendations for institutional changes suggested by the study are:

- Flextime/Part-time arrangements for mothers to be and those with young children
- Formalize facilities which are already in practice like compensatory leave and flexible working hours for all staff
- Capacity Building of all levels of staff on Gender; CGAMP members to be given additional inputs
- Review of existing Gender Training Modules and customizing PRIA's own Module
- Inclusion of other Gender Development Concepts in Trainings
- Child care facilities to be developed in the head office
- Retention of Women in the organization, especially married and pregnant women
- Reassurance of job security to young and married women

There were also specific recommendations for the improvement of CGAMP

- The reconstitution of CGAMP
- A full time Gender person to be identified at the head office
- Gender focal points to be identified at the programme level
- Use expertise/learning of PRIA female Board members

## **FOLLOW UP**

As a follow-up, several of these recommendations have since been implemented in PRIA. CGAMP continues to function and monitor ongoing issues in gender mainstreaming institutionally in PRIA.

Based on its own learning, PRIA initiated a process of collaborative inquiry during the past 3 years, with its partner NGOs to assess the reality of gender in their own organizations. This Gender study methodology (as practiced in PRIA first) entails a process of joint inquiry where internal members join with external PRIA facilitators to undertake a process of diagnosis.

PRIA approaches the leadership of NGOs to consider undertaking a process of “Gender Study” in their own organizations.

Once such a commitment is secured, a team of two PRIA facilitators would undertake a collaborative inquiry of the various organizational dimensions from a gender lens. The inquiry process then generates data on existing gender related practices in the organization. Many of these evolve as pressures for change mount from inside and outside. However, many such practices remain informal practices. The inquiry then identifies areas where new practices need to be evolved. The collaborative inquiry process then shifts the onus of renewal and decision-making on the organization itself—its leadership, its internal decision-making structures, and its people.

PRIA facilitators share experiences from PRIA and other similar organizations which have tried gender mainstreaming. Options and ideas are generated together, but decisions to change and improve are made by the organization.

The PRIA team then assists the organization to implement those decisions. It helps to enhance the internal capabilities for implementing those changes. It provides some follow-up support to assist the institutionalization of those changes in the organization. It also attempts to strengthen internal commitment and capabilities to undertake collaborative research with other field-based partners of that organization.

By so doing, it is able to promote the use of collaborative enquiry as a methodology of gender mainstreaming in development organizations.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

One may ask the question that why collaborative enquiry was instrumental in organizational change in the above cases?

Several lessons from the above interventions can be drawn for future inquiry and practice:

1. Gender mainstreaming 'out there'—in government, community etc.—is lot easier to define and promote than 'in here'—in your own life, family and organization. This is particularly so in development organizations which have been actively promoting gender equality in society. They pay little attention to the means—the instruments

of their own organizations—in achieving those normative ends. Hence, development organizations, especially NGOs, typically remain ‘outward-focused’, and rarely make the link between their inner workings and outer impacts (Tandon,1998).

2. By its very nature, gender construction is socially learned over decades in family, society and schools, etc. Such deep rooted socialization affects men and women alike; values, norms and mores are the essence of gender, and changing these is generally very difficult. Changing such core dimensions through dictates or aggressive confrontation ends up in increasing resistance. Harigopal, (2001) describes many aspects of such cultural resistance in the imposed organizational change process. Thus a learning process to cultural change in organisations may facilitate addressing such sensitive issues as gender.
3. Leadership of many development NGOs in the south continues to be male-dominated. In general, these are men of vision, commitment and integrity, including commitment towards gender equality. When using the gender lens uncovers patterns of power hitherto hidden under their leadership, there is a tendency to deny or simplify the data. The analysis of power relations in a development NGO from the gender lens tends to make its findings potentially discomforting to the male leadership. Plowman, (2000: page 193) explains “Identifying where women and men are situated in the broader political, social and economic spheres immediately raises consciousness about the institutionalized and structured nature of unequal gender relations. It also makes very clear what it is that we are up against. The analysis can then shift from the bigger picture to the level of the organisation which is, of course, shaped in so many ways by the external environment, unequal gender relations included”. Describing a similar change effort in another Indian NGO, Sarah Ahmed (2002: page 303) focuses her attention on

gender sensitive leadership. “Translating the organizational commitment to gender equity into practice requires gender-sensitive leadership, which is not necessarily vested in one individual, but more broadly includes the head of the organisation as well as those involved in senior management positions who are able to influence the direction, style, and values of an organisation.”

4. Building collaborative and learning process oriented inquiry processes on the theme of gender mainstreaming makes it possible for the organizational teams to discover their own reality of structures and practices which are gender fair or unfair. Interpretation of data by the teams themselves makes it possible for the analysis to be owned by the organization, thereby enhancing possibilities for fundamental changes to happen. When confronted with the need for male responsibility in child rearing, male staff in an RSO went into a denial mode initially. But examination of data generated through focus-group discussions made them realize the importance of institutional support (in the form of paternity leave) to shared responsibility in child-rearing. Such difference in perceptions and meanings are not uncommon in organisations. However, interpretation of an act by a man towards a woman as ‘sexual harassment’ is charged with emotions and meanings. Thus learning process orientation in an organization can facilitate innovation and change. When such a learning orientation is carried out with gender lens, the internal motivations, attitudes, values and culture of an organisation can be transformed.
5. Finally, collaborative modes of inquiry can help uncover types of dynamic which may well be ‘invisible’ to the outsiders. In the case described above, aspects and nuances of sexual harassment in a field setting (as opposed to an office setting) were ‘uncovered’ through such a collaboration. Women field workers as researchers began to articulate dynamics of harassment which their male, urban

counterpart could not perceive. Thus systematic knowledge about sexual harassment at work place could not be gathered without collaborative research. Farrell (2004: page 79) describe sexual harassment in organizations in a particular manner: "What may appear friendly and social behaviour for some may be perceived as sexual misbehaviour for others. For example, complimenting a person on their figure/looks may appear friendly, but to the receiver it may be inappropriate behaviour in that particular context".

Thus, preventing such harassment at work place is only possible when both women and men are engaged in analyzing the existing realities and developing norms of behaviour and organizational standards which are acceptable and enforceable.

It thus becomes apparent that gender mainstreaming in social change organizations (and southern NGOs in particular) requires an approach to change that begins with collaborative research on the nature of gender dynamics and analysis of gender fair organizational practices. Such collaborative modes of documentation and inquiry then generate organizational specific diagnosis for actions (as opposed to universal prescriptions of gender equality). The leadership (even when embodying male stereotypes) is then able to take some responsibility for bringing about relevant and meaningful changes that address the underlying dynamics of power relations based on gender.

## Implications

This paper has argued for gender mainstreaming in social change organisations, specially those which focus their programmes of interventions towards addressing gender discriminations in societies. The paper describes a theory of collaborative Participatory Research which has been widely utilized in social change efforts, as appropriate methodology for learning about and changing certain aspects of organizational realities. The case study of PRIA presents a detailed account of the practice of this methodology.

Several implications for future research and organization practice can be drawn from the conclusions made in the previous section. One key implication for knowledge production is the acknowledgement of hidden and sensitive dimensions in an organizational life. Sexual harassment is clearly one such issue; discriminatory norms and values, which ignore multidimensional responsibilities of women, is another. Exploring such issues is only possible through a collaborative participatory research methodology which values emotions and feelings as legitimate modes of knowing, which encourages a learning process orientation of all actors in inquiry.

Another implication for practice is the capacity of gender experts and activists in facilitating such a collaborative inquiry process. There is a real shortage of trained professionals who bring in a gender lens to inquiry and change. Those knowledgeable about gender issues lack competencies in collaborative inquiry.

Thus, addressing problems of social change like gender discrimination, entails more concerted efforts at promoting the use of collaborative participatory research in mainstreaming gender in such organizations.

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