

Achievements and Challenges:
Progress Report on DISCAP's Gender Strategy

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1 Introduction

The increased awareness of gender issues in northern Ghana continues to be supported and promoted through a wide range of sectors, particularly in the education, health and economic fields. Despite greater attention to gender issues and numerous organizations providing gender training and advocating for change, this increased interest still must be translated into strategic action plans to help drive forward the process of attaining gender equality.

Commitment and integration of gender equality is particularly critical within local governance and civil society organizations, in programming, planning, analysis and policies. The District Gender Desk Office is intended to play a central role in the development of strategic gender action plans and coordinate efforts to promote equitable local governance. The Gender Desk Office will reflect the Government of Ghana's priority on the integration of gender into its local government structures.

1.1 Vision/Goal

Gender mainstreaming has become a key element within development discourse. The DISCAP Gender Strategy's vision is to build an understanding along with local government institutions and civil society on gender disparities and enable these actors to take leadership roles and initiate action on gender issues.

The goal of DISCAP's Gender Strategy is *to increase the participation of women and the integration and coordination of gender equality issues in the policies, programming and structures of local government institutions, with a particular focus on the water and sanitation sector.* In this way, the project seeks to increase institutional capacities to integrate gender in policy analysis and development planning.

The DISCAP Gender Strategy's objectives are to bring about change/best practices in organisational procedures, structures, staffing and programming in such a way that gender objectives become a norm of the partner institutions; and monitor gender equality results in a systematic way which will be documented and shared with others.

2 Methodology and Process

In Year 1, a gender assessment was conducted at national, regional and district levels. The issues investigated during the gender analysis have been incorporated into the overall set of issues addressed with stakeholders during the Project Implementation Phase. Instead of conducting a separate gender analysis, this integrated approach allowed DISCAP and its partners the opportunity to reflect on gender equality issues within a broader context of their institution's policies, programs and practices. Data were collected through the use of questionnaires, semi-structured focus group discussions and validated by stakeholders during the consultative workshop held in May 2002 in Wa, UWR.

The initial assessment completed during the PIP Phase was followed by a more detailed data collection for the purpose of establishing baseline data. The secondary capacity assessment of the gender equality status of institutions and other stakeholders was completed in March 2002. This provided additional information for further revision of the gender analysis in June 2002. The baseline information and an analysis tool developed by DISCAP guided stakeholders (regional and district) to validate their gender profile and based on that, develop a generic District Gender Strategy outlining action areas and expected results (August 2002).

2.1 Data Collected

The key data collected for the purpose of the analysis were as follows:

Policy Level

Information on national and international-level commitments related to gender equality were collected, including international conventions, gender-sensitive legislation and key institutions in charge of promoting gender equality in the country.

Institutional-Level Data

The main focus of the gender analysis has been at the institutional level and key data were collected on organizational, staffing and programming issues.

1. Organizational Issues

- Existence of gender-sensitive policies, practices and procedures;
- Level of knowledge and expertise of key planners, decision-makers and professional staff;
- Capacities to plan, implement and monitor gender-sensitive programs and projects;
- Centre of responsibility for incorporating gender equality issues into the institution's policies and practices.

2. Staffing Issues

- For each participating institution, the number of men and women and the type of positions occupied. This included information about appointed or elected positions, when applicable;
- Women's access to skills development and other opportunities;
- Measures facilitating women's access to decision-making, technical and professional positions and employment-related opportunities such as training.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation of Programs/Project Issues

- Organizational capacities to collect, analyse and use sex-disaggregated data and qualitative information on the different impacts of those activities on men and women;
- Existence and use of tools to carry out gender analysis;
- Capacity to monitor gender-differentiated impacts;
- The types of gender equality results achieved: focused on practical needs and strategic interests.

Community-Level Data

- Identification of socio-cultural traditions and practices which define women's low social status and hinder effective participation in decision-making and governance. Particular attention was paid to women's professional and personal development;
- Primary and secondary data on the nature of women's participation in water management committees and changes since the 1997 impact evaluation: role, influence and scope of their participation;
- Extent to which women are involved in water management committees and are interacting with institutions at regional and district levels.

2.2 Gender Desk Assessment

2.2.1 Identification of District Gender Desk Officers

In preparation for the establishment of the District Gender Desk, DISCAP facilitated the identification of Gender Desk Officers in the districts. Draft operational guidelines for the District Gender Desk Office were developed and circulated among a few stakeholders for comments and validation. These

informed the DAs and guided the selection of the GDOs. The selection process itself varied. Certain districts organized meetings of Gender Desk Officers while others used an interviewing procedure with the assistance of the NCWD to also facilitate the process of selection.

It came to light that some DAs, following a government circular, have already appointed a gender focal person to act on issues generally relating to women. Such Focal Persons are commonly the DPO, DDCD or female staff from sector departments and are compelled to combine their designated schedule with that of the Gender Desk Office. These positions therefore have a high-level workload, which gives little attention to gender mainstreaming. Under-staffing further constrains adequate time invested in gender activities. Generally, priority is given to women to serve as gender Focal Persons within the Assembly. Using Assembly Women as gender Focal Persons is limited by their mandate, and therefore not a sustainable option. It could, however, be sustained if she is a civil servant and can return to work in her mother department.

Concerning district recruitment procedures, the DA has limited options due to the Civil Service ban on employment, which has been in effect for several years now. This ban disallows the selection of new Officers to the Assembly. Assemblies therefore find it more practical to rely on existing staff to perform the function of the District GDO.

DISCAP accepted all 16 nominations of the district GDOs selected. Their identification and selection by their DAs also were confirmed through written notification. Application for negotiation terms of secondment to the DA has been sent to the officers' respective Departments. For those who are not working under the DA, most are with the Ghana Education Service. The existing policy and service conditions on secondment clearly indicate that persons should return to their service after a given time. As a result, the GES is currently facing human resource displacement due to an increasing number of staff leaving their posts on secondment to other organizations permanently. GES is now reluctant to accept applicants for secondment unless in exceptional cases and negotiated at higher level of authority.

It has been established that, due to DA budget constraints, only existing staff with salaries paid by the Civil Service can be permanently engaged. In this respect, GDOs on secondment lack the security of a permanent salary and lack the security of acceptance for secondment from their mother departments. In this respect, there is the need for District Chief Executives to investigate secondment policies to identify ways of lobbying to engage permanently GDOs either through secondment or through the Civil Service. A common front coming from all districts facing this issue is necessary in the final placement of GDOs as permanent staff of the DAs.

Due to human resources constraints in the West Gonja District in the NR, and Bongo District in the UER, the respective DAs and DISCAP accepted the nomination of males (the DDCD for Damongo and the Deputy Planning Officer for Bongo), based on their demonstrated commitment to gender and development. We anticipate the added support from their respective DAs due to their existing heavy work schedules.

The nominations for GDOs in all the three regions have largely been women as an affirmative action to increase the participation of women in the District Planning and Coordinating Units. Although the recruitment of women was limited, officers selected met the required qualifications necessary to serve as gender officers. In order to better understand the background and needs of women working within local government bodies, all 16 GDOs selected participated in the DISCAP study (refer to 2.2.2 below).

2.2.2 Gender Desk Officer Study

The DISCAP study was undertaken to better understand the background and needs of women working within local government bodies. The study focused on collecting data on personal and professional background on respondents' engagement as GDOs. The study allowed for significant understanding of women's public participation within civil society and local government.

Generally, it was observed that women who are involved in development work, and particularly institutional positions of influence, tend to be in a certain age group of 40 to 50 years of age, when

most of their household and reproductive duties are diminished. This includes child rearing and household cleaning. In addition, because of the professional status of these women, their salaries permit them to have easier access to their basic needs. Those who are married often receive professional support from their counterparts and family members with food preparation and other household chores. In certain cases, families with higher than average salaries, or of two breadwinners, may have the added responsibility of caring for the children of relatives and parents.

Most officers belong to sector departments—GES, SW, MOFA, and EHU—that compliment well their role as GDOs and give them adequate background experience in meeting people's needs. Meeting practical needs in areas of healthcare, education, and social welfare are key areas of intervention based on equality between women and men for people-centred district planning. In addition, gender disparities in these sector departments are high and remain a priority in development programming. The diverse sector backgrounds of GDOs serve as a strong resource in the formation of gender desk support networks and will also allow in strengthening inter-departmental linkages.

Less than half of the female GDOs have had civil service experiences as Assembly Women or working within DAs. However, their practical work backgrounds reflect significant contributions to district and community support through membership and volunteerism. GDOs generally possess the key skills of teaching, animation, facilitation, sensitization, lobbying, mobilization and management, which will be crucial in the implementation of district gender strategies. One of the challenges confronting GDOs will be in meeting women's *strategic* interests. Capacity building is critical in mainstreaming gender at strategic levels.

GDO responses indicate that there is a common understanding among officers that inequality between men and women affects participation in governance and decision-making and, therefore, limits the achievement of sustainable development and poverty reduction. The GDO position is also viewed as a juncture in development planning to address restrictions previously found in sector departments. GDOs understand the political and institutional challenges of promoting gender equity and as such are committed to the goals and objectives of the District Gender Strategy.

2.2.3 Gender Desk Officer Training Needs

Assessment of the GDO personal/professional profile has identified key areas for GDO training in development planning, coordination and monitoring. The study also revealed that most Officers do not have means of transport. The availability of vehicles for planners is exclusively for specific donor projects. A project motorbike is being provided, for transportation for each GDO. An issue raised during the assessment was the provision of fuel for motorbikes. In the past, certain DAs, including the DWST, experienced restricted mobility in carrying out their functions due to lack of funding for maintenance and project motorbike fuel.

3 Challenges

The GDO faces the commonly-experienced difficulty in similar structures elsewhere which are tasked to deal with women's issues, that is, that women-specific initiatives make mainstreaming gender difficult. DISCAP is both using women's specific and gender integrated approach because they are mutually reinforcing. The use and success of both approaches may depend largely on the ongoing support from the DA and National government structures. Due to the Gender Desk's size, lack of resources and power, addressing both gender mainstreaming and women-specific issues can be challenging. The GDO must focus on establishing its credibility and gaining the confidence of the DA to keep its office support streamlined.

Attempts to transform organizational culture and practices at all levels can be met with hostility and resistance. Hence, efforts to mainstream gender can be perceived as an 'externally imposed political agenda' with few benefits. The nature of gender issues is complex and requires slow and often invisible processes to move them forward.

Many of the professional challenges and constraints are due to the lack of logistical tools, incentives and availability of transport.

Donor-funded activities favouring gender-sensitive programming may trigger negative effects on the distribution of government funds. Gender-related activities may not be funded by governments due to the expectation that donors will fund them.

Effective and sustainable development programming relies heavily on women's needs and interests being taken into account and the opportunity for equal participation in decision-making. If local governments are to effectively meet the needs of both men and women, it must build on best-practice experiences, which cover a wide-range of interventions in local governance.

Although the DISCAP gender strategy is at different stages of maturity in different districts, the substantive response in the establishment of the district Gender Desk Offices will allow the leadership generated by GDO, play a critical role in the development of equitable governance.

Gender-based institutional development is a relatively new approach. Civil society may be ambivalent and critical of changes this may entail. The implementation of the District Gender Desk Office is to support mainstream gender efforts in the institutional programs and projects. Thus, the overall responsibility is actually a collective one and not solely that of the Gender Officer, a perspective that must be communicated to all stakeholders.

4 DISCAP Gender Desk Expected Results

In order to formally adopt the DISCAP Gender strategy, districts are supported in establishing a Gender Desk Office based on a demonstrated institutional commitment to gender equality as a crosscutting goal in policies, programs and projects.

The implementation of the GDS with a focus on enhancing the participation of civil society, notably women, in decision-making, management practices and organizational change, takes a results-oriented approach.

Expected results include the establishment of the Gender Desk Office, supported with basic furniture and equipment; this has been implemented. Motorbikes to strengthen outreach activities will be delivered soon.

The Gender Desk Support Network has been formed in all 16 pre-expansion Districts. The Network is intended to provide a forum for consultations with gender Focal Persons and experts in other sectors as well as female leaders on the advancement of gender equality issues in the District and also serve as a resource in the implementation of the District Gender Strategy. The Gender Support Network is a way of creating a forum for stakeholders to share ideas, priorities and strategic interests, increase personal leadership skills and decision-making influence. In addition, the Network strengthens local organizational linkages particularly, female resource groups, as a strategy to increase social, economic and political empowerment of women through motivational mechanisms and incentives.

The integration of GDOs in the DPCU and DA activities, including the DWST, is an approach to influence government planning processes and equitable public policies. While equitable planning and programming is a long-term impact, improved skills and capacities of GDOs and key stakeholders (already identified) to mainstream gender are necessary as a means of achieving these efforts. Increasing the local pool of gender equity experts and female representation in the DA and institutional decision-making are also expected results of the Gender Strategy.

5 Achievements So Far

The following achievements in implementing DISCAP's Gender Strategy are worth highlighting:

- The DISCAP Gender Analysis and Strategy (June 2002), which revised and completed the gender analysis and the development of the Gender Strategy in the PIP.
- The District Gender Desk Manual developed with input from stakeholders, which facilitated a better understanding of the Gender Desk Office and Gender Desk Officer's position. The principles of CIDA's Gender Policy, the Ghana Gender Strategy for Development and the Beijing Platform for Action guided the development of this manual.
- To facilitate implementation of DISCAP's gender vision and strategy, the District Gender Desk Office (DGDO) has been established as part of the decentralised structure, to effectively implement the priorities and efforts of the District Gender Action Plan and Strategies. The DGDO serves as a vehicle for improving gender institutional capacities; and facilitates gender awareness and equitable development planning. The Gender Desk Office is located in the District Assembly and forms part of the District Planning and Coordinating Unit (DPCU). Its strategic location is a deliberate move to reflect the Unit's integration of gender into the Assembly structure and allow the Gender Desk Officer the overall responsibility to support gender -mainstreaming efforts.
- All the 16 pre-expansion DISCAP districts have established the Gender Support Network. Members have undergone a Gender Adoption Training at District level. The output is a better understanding of gender issues and concepts, institutional gender issues and strategic interventions required for the implementation of the DGS. The training also accorded them a forum to establish legitimacy over the DGS and a shared committed to the task of integrating gender in their sector and district programming as well as representing the districts in disseminating gender approaches.
- Stakeholders validated and committed themselves to the DGS by critically examining institutional resources and power structures in relation to the equity measures. This enabled them to determine opportunities and limitations in the implementation process and has begun a process of identifying ways (including policy issues and capacity building) of over coming any obstacles. The leadership of the DAs will be crucial in achieving this objective.
- Rethinking policy issues and implications, has deepened stakeholders' awareness and knowledge of existing policy concepts and implications and collated input for the GE/OD to formulate related draft policies, which will be further examined and adapted by the DA with appropriate resource support. Prepared draft policies are based on priority areas for action and the operational environment. However, the objective of coming out with proposals (strengthened or transformed) by districts was not fully achieved due to lack of skills in policy formulation. There is a need to identify and support a working group, which will be tasked with the responsibility of developing a gender vision and associated policies that will include the mobilization of resources by the DA to support gender equity programming.
- The DISCAP Gender Planning Training Module 1 has been developed, tested and assessed by the training team to have achieved its objectives. It is intended to guide the incorporation of gender in the development of district development programming. The tool allowed participants to learn through practice, empathise with real situations and reconcile divergent views—which they felt was exhausting but useful—resulting in collective decision-making. The tool is still opened up for strengthening in the ongoing training in the remaining districts.
- In line with DISCAP's objective of developing a local capacity building resource group, the training offered opportunity for the three YP associates serving with the RPCUs to be trained as Trainers in Module 1. It is hoped that skills acquired will be consolidated in the ongoing training and that they would provide the needed support to the GE/OD and the CBRG.
- The short-term training is the beginning of strengthening members of the Gender Support Network to begin the integration and coordination of gender issues in development planning and implementation. To complement this effort, DISCAP is in the process of designing ongoing institutional and governance capacity building courses that includes gender analysis, monitoring and evaluation, policy formation and leadership, in collaboration with ILGS, Tamale and other

experts. The overall aim is to further develop the expertise of key participants and equip them with appropriate skills for informing policy as well as translate existing policies into practice.

- Feedback on District level short-term results include:
 - A greater awareness of incorporating gender issues in the preparation of the on-going MTDP. Increased efforts are being made to ensure that plans capture the special development needs of the vulnerable and excluded especially women and that outcomes will be guided and measured by those outlined by the DGS.
 - Some districts are in the process of compiling an inventory of women's groups; promoting group action by women to make them more marketable for funding and also for outreach purposes; linking groups with sources of funding, including Poverty Alleviation Funds and also making input to ensure that the disbursement of the funds properly targets women as the most vulnerable.
 - Improved collaboration by NCWD, NGOs and MDAs in gender programming in the District e.g. education on negative socio-cultural practices; rights awareness campaigns, HIV/AIDS and promotion of female participation in the 2002 DA elections. One GDO (male) has been instrumental in getting seven (7) females appointed to the Assembly through lobbying with district and regional stakeholders and Party Executives.
 - Recognition of the Gender Desk Office by NCWD in the three (3) regions is high. NCWD now uses GDOs for specific outreach programs.
- Processes documented as references in the implementation of the DISCAP Gender Strategy include the following:
 - District Gender Strategy Regional Workshop Report, May, 2002: Reviewed the District Gender Strategy on the basis of the gender baseline assessment and helped the Districts to develop their vision for pursuing gender equality;
 - Revised Gender Analysis and Strategy, June 2002: Presents a more detailed gender baseline information and the strategy developed in response to the gender equality gaps identified in the gender analysis;
 - Gender and Development Literature Kit, July, 2002: Selected reading materials on new experiences, best practices and lessons on gender and good governance circulated to GDOs;
 - Gender Desk Orientation Report, August, 2002: Gives an in-depth understanding of the roles and responsibilities of GDOs and Gender Support Network Members in local governance and especially in the implementation of the of the priorities of the District Gender Strategy and Action Plan;
 - District Gender Desk Manual, August, 2002: This Guide and the Orientation Session and Report facilitate a better understanding of the Gender Desk Office, roles and responsibilities;
 - DISCAP Training Guide on Gender Aware Policy in Planning, Module 1, October, 2002: Used to stimulate the adoption of the District Gender Strategies and policies as part of the overall framework for District development planning;
 - District Gender Strategy Adoption Training Report, September, 2002 – February, 2003: Reports on the process used to consolidate existing gender knowledge and experiences of Gender Desk Support Network Members and key district stakeholders, develop Gender Action Plans, and reflect on sector constraints in institutionalizing gender.

6 Constraints in Implementation

The greatest constraint gathered from the feedback is that some districts (number to be determined after an ongoing assessment) are resisting the integration of the GDO as a core staff of the DA and the DPCU. Such GDOs would need to employ a mix of interpersonal and lobbying skills, and demonstrate action-oriented initiatives, in order to gain recognition by the DA and stakeholders. It is hoped that the ongoing awareness creation through consultations and training will help remove this and other obstacles.

7 Conclusion

Very solid, and sometimes impressive, progress on gender equality was made by DISCAP over the past year. The appointment development of 16 District Gender Desk Officers in the programming area, and preparation of district gender strategies, are innovations by international standards. However, as always, actual implementation brings new (though not unforeseen) challenges. The project is assessing effective ways and means of addressing these challenges as it moves its gender equality work forward in the year ahead.