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Institutional and Attitudinal Concerns

Promoting Attitudinal Change

Ministries of Finance, even today, hold that ensuring fiscal and monetary discipline is their overriding objective, and that liberalisation and privatisation are important mechanisms to achieve this objective. This apparently exclusive focus on short-run macro stabilisation of economic aggregates through budgetary management seems to insulate the Finance Ministry from a need to weigh the implications of its actions for human resources development over the medium and longer terms.

But, as we have seen, the Finance Ministry in fact does a great deal more than short-run macro stabilisation. It has become the key ministry, setting the strategic directions for long term growth of the economy. Officers in the Finance Ministry are often reluctant to acknowledge that the ministry in fact plays this role, and it is not hard to understand why. Long-term growth concerns more than saving, investment and other macro aggregates; it also depends on how the labour force and its capabilities, skills and expertise keep pace with the requirements of the growth process.

Acknowledging the ministry's strategic role requires therefore that the ministry begin to factor in the effects of its macroeconomic actions on the potential and current labour force, and the feedback effects therefrom to the growth potential of the economy. This has two important implications for the Finance Ministry's objective of fiscal discipline: (i) *how* fiscal discipline is brought about can be as important for the economy's long term growth prospects as *whether* it is achieved; some methods of balancing revenues and expenditures in the budget may be less damaging to human development than others; (ii) there may be trade-offs between short-run fiscal stability versus medium and long-term growth possibilities; an excessive emphasis on fiscal discipline may cause serious (if not irreparable) damage to an economy's growth prospects.

Ministries of Finance cannot, in today's policy environment, concern themselves with fiscal and monetary discipline to the exclusion of the reproduction of human beings/human development that is the *sine qua non* of sustainable growth. And it is here that gender enters in a critical way. The first attitudinal shift needed among Finance Ministry officials therefore is the acknowledgement that what they do affects not only short-term macroeconomic management but the human resources needed for sustainable development.

A second important attitudinal change that is needed is about gender itself. As discussed earlier, Finance Ministry officials who are used to thinking in terms of macro financial variables, are likely to be somewhat at a loss when asked to engender their work. A change in this attitude is most likely to be effected through the process of working together with external experts on an overall framework for engendering the ministry's work.

This is likely to be more effective in sensitising Finance Ministry officials to gender than gender training that does not include a practical component. Past experience in many countries has shown that attempts to sensitise powerful government departments through gender training alone has not always been successful. Participants may tend to treat such training as a spare-time activity of little consequence to their ongoing work. For this reason, gender training within the Finance Ministry should where possible be integrated into the hands-on process of developing a gendered framework, such that officials can directly see the relevance of gender to their work; and can also themselves be involved creatively in defining how a consideration of gender will affect their policies, programmes, and work-plans.

Easing Institutional Constraints

Changing attitudes is only one of the ways in which change can be promoted within an organisational structure. Another important way is to create or support a reformation of lines of authority and incentive systems within the organisation that will make staff realise that the new directions are in their personal interest.

An important lesson that has been learned from previous attempts to mainstream gender is that the effectiveness of newly-created institutions depends heavily on the extent of political will or the support that they have from above, and the skill with which they can parlay this into co-operation from below. If such political commitment is not there, it often does not matter what type of institutional arrangement is made because it is unlikely to be effective. Assuming the presence of serious political support at the top levels of the Finance Ministry for engendering, the following institutional arrangements can be put in place:

- ◆ One or two **Gender Focal Points** (individual staff members) or a special **Gender Unit** (consisting of a group of staff members), located directly in the office of the Minister of Finance or the senior bureaucrat (as appropriate), whose task would be to provide technical support for the engendering process. The role of the Gender Focal Point or Gender Unit would be to: oversee the formulation of the overall engendering framework for the ministry; support the incorporation of the framework into policies, programmes, and workplans; and identify and initiate specific research on the gender aspects of the work of the ministry. If mainstreaming of the Finance Ministry is being done in the context of the implementation of a government-wide Gender Management System (GMS), the Gender Focal Point or Gender Unit will also be represented on the GMS Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee.
- ◆ An **inter-departmental standing committee** on gender to which senior staff from all the departments of the ministry would be seconded; the committee's task would be to develop an overall time-bound plan for engendering different aspects of the ministry's work, and to monitor and review progress. The committee should also preferably include external experts as technical advisors who would support this process.

In addition to these institutional changes, an incentive system needs to be put in place to encourage personnel to take the engendering process seriously. Innovative incentives such as an award programme (with appropriate monetary and prestige benefits) for the department that makes the most progress in engendering each year, with an external jury, could be tried. This might work more effectively than quantitative checklists whose purposes, experience has shown, are all too easy to circumvent. Other incentive systems could also be tried. For example, the GMS recommends the inclusion of gender-sensitive indicators in whatever performance appraisal system is in place in the ministry. This would include provisions for evaluating employees' performance in achieving gender goals and targets.