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## Strategies and Processes for Mainstreaming Gender in the Education Sector

### The Gender Management System

To assist member governments in mainstreaming gender into their activities, the Commonwealth is promoting the Gender Management System (GMS), an integrated network of structures, mechanisms and processes designed to make government more gender-aware, increase the numbers of women in decision-making roles within and outside government, facilitate the formulation of gender-sensitive policies, plans and programmes, and promote the advancement of gender equality and equity in the broader civil society.

### The enabling environment of a GMS

The establishment and operation of a Gender Management System requires an enabling environment. There are a number of interrelated factors that determine the degree to which the environment in which the GMS is being set up does or does not enable effective gender mainstreaming. These determining factors of the enabling environment include the following:

- ◆ political will and commitment to gender equality at the highest levels;
- ◆ global and regional mandates such as the Commonwealth Plan of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW;
- ◆ a legislative and constitutional framework that is conducive to advancing gender equality;
- ◆ the presence of a critical mass of women in decision-making roles;
- ◆ an autonomous civil society and the role it can play in advancing gender equality;
- ◆ adequate human and financial resources; and
- ◆ donor aid and technical assistance, such as that provided by multilateral and bilateral agencies.

### GMS structures and functions

The structural and functional elements of the GMS can be summarised as follows:

- ◆ a Lead Agency (usually the Ministry of Women's/Gender Affairs or other National Women's Machinery), which initiates and strengthens the GMS institutional arrangements, provides overall co-ordination and monitoring, and carries out advocacy, communications, media relations and reporting;
- ◆ a GMS Management Team (consisting of representatives from the Lead Agency, core government ministries such as Finance, Development Planning, Public Service, and Legal Affairs, and a representative of civil society), which provides leadership for the implementation of the GMS, defines broad operational policies, indicators of effectiveness, and timeframes for implementation;
- ◆ Gender Focal Points (senior staff in core and sectoral ministries), which co-ordinate gender activities (e.g. training), promote gender mainstreaming in all activities in their respective sectors, and sit on the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee (see below);

- ◆ an Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee (whose members are representatives of the Lead Agency and the Gender Focal Points all ministries), which ensures that gender mainstreaming in government policy, planning and programmes in all sectors is co-ordinated and that strong linkages are established between ministries;
- ◆ a Parliamentary Gender Caucus (consisting of women and gender-aware male parliamentarians), which carries out awareness raising, lobbying, and promoting the participation of women in politics; and
- ◆ representatives of civil society (a National Gender Equality Council, academic institutions, NGOs/professional associations, media, the private sector and other stakeholders), who provide inputs to gender analysis, monitoring and evaluation (via academic institutions and NGOs), and to policy and planning (via the National Advisory Council).

## GMS processes

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The processes involved in implementing a Gender Management System include developing and implementing a national Gender Action Plan, which should include provisions for setting up or strengthening the GMS structures and mechanisms, and for engendering core ministries and sectoral policy and planning. Normally spearheaded by the Ministry of Women's/Gender Affairs or other national women's machinery, the Gender Action Plan should include specific guidelines for setting up Gender Focal Points and mainstreaming gender into the regular policy, planning and implementation cycles of the Ministry of Education. These cycles have five main phases, and a gender perspective needs to be integrated in each phase:

- 1 Gender analysis: this involves analysing the status of women vis-à-vis men in the sector and examining the impact on women and men of education policy.
- 2 Policy development and appraisal: establishing gender priorities according to individual national circumstances, developing policy options to address gender imbalances, and appraising options to determine their gender impact.
- 3 Gender-aware action plans: the output of policy development is a plan which should have a clearly defined gender dimension.
- 4 Implementation: the implementation of the engendered work plan takes place as part of the normal functioning of government.
- 5 Monitoring and evaluation: this involves reviewing key indicators on the status of women in the national context in the education sector, and feeding the findings into the next planning cycle.

## Prioritising Goals

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The prioritisation of goals and areas for action in mainstreaming gender depends to a large extent on the source of the expressed need for change and the triggers for this change. In most instances, mainstreaming is initiated through a policy statement. Such policy statements usually emanate from a development plan or strategy that has benefited from gender-sensitive intervention – by non-governmental organisations, development agencies, women's organisations and/or women and men who have convinced the government of the advantages, and indeed the necessity for such change.

In some instances, the change is triggered by the requirements of international agencies that insist on countries meeting certain conditions relating to gender equity, and make these conditions a prerequisite for the granting of financial assistance. In such a 'top-down' scenario, the institutional environment may be required to implement change advocated by policy directives, and institutions may respond differently to these requirements. Responses can range from enthusiasm to a cautious acceptance and a willingness to comply, or even to strong resistance.

Sometimes the call for change comes from within individual institutions (a 'bottom-up approach' to mainstreaming). The process here could involve a group of teachers and/or students identifying the need for change in a variety of areas, and working towards effecting this change. In such a situation, changes at the classroom, staff room and local institutional level, such as in access, participation, resource allocation and achievement of male and female students may precede and trigger mainstreaming in institutional management and the policy environment.

The objectives of such localised action are usually targeted at bringing about change within the institutional environment and possibly also working towards having this recognised as a model for change in other institutions. The often quasi-subversive action involved in bringing about such change is usually highly motivated, and can greatly facilitate a national thrust towards gender equality if the persons initiating the change are co-opted to be members of the institutional arrangements for gender mainstreaming, such as a Gender Management System. The ultimate goal is usually to influence policy as it relates to a large number of institutions, and provision of a local success story can assist in the framing of such a policy and its recommendations

Legislative change, for example in the form of a Code of Regulations establishing a framework around which other changes can be developed, may come first; or changes in attitudes brought about by increased awareness of gender issues may result in calls for, and the implementation of, legislative change.

## Gender Awareness Training

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Gender mainstreaming may necessitate the provision of significant educational input in the form of gender awareness training, geared towards changing established cultural norms of behaviour and obtaining acceptance of new and different goals and objectives. Such training should be developed around hard data – both quantitative and qualitative – from which training needs may be ascertained, and must be conducted at different levels.

This training should be designed to achieve the following goals:

- ◆ assist staff in developing alternative perspectives on gender issues;
- ◆ build capacity in gender analysis;
- ◆ ensure that a gender perspective is included in the policy-setting and decision-making processes; and
- ◆ permit the framing of appropriate policy guidelines and directives to advance gender equality.

Gender awareness training should also reach beyond government institutions to involve all stakeholders – teachers, parents, students (particularly in tertiary level institutions), places of worship and religious organisations (where these are sponsors of schools), and non-governmental organisations and community groups who have a strong influence on the opinions, attitudes and behaviours of persons in small communities.

## Involving Other Stakeholders

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Whether the triggers for mainstreaming are 'top-down' or 'bottom-up', the involvement of all the key stakeholders in the system is crucial. The commitment of those who are part of the process, and/or who are influential in the implementation of the process, is essential if success is to be realised. In the setting of policy, a broad consultative group which includes all stakeholders will ensure their involvement, and hopefully also their agreement and commitment to the demands of the policy

agreement. Stakeholders should be part of the membership of both the National and Institutional Consultative Committees in order to facilitate their involvement in the implementation process. It is only when this is assured that the implementation process can be fully examined and the priority areas for action decided upon. The stakeholders very often also provide some of the resources necessary for the full implementation and so their 'buy-in' to the process becomes vital.

In the bottom-up scenario, the stakeholders' concurrence with the change will also be crucial if it is to be moved from the local to the institutional and policy levels. Initiators of the change in this case, therefore, will have to lobby the stakeholders, individually or collectively, and work towards gaining their support.