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Gender in Multi-Stakeholder-Partnerships (MSP)

Challenges and Potential Solutions

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Integrating gender is a promising activity but not always easy. The following describes common challenges and potential solutions for addressing them.

Lack of formal requirements regarding equality

Whenever there are no formal requirements to create equal opportunities in structures and organisations, there is a risk of indirectly preventing equal participation of women or addressing gender issues. A lack of rules can make it difficult to address gender aspects and lead to reproducing gender injustices.

♀ Potential solution

Make consideration of gender aspects an integral part of grant rules and contracts. Taking gender into account can be introduced as a desirable feature of project proposals and tenders.

Lack of interest

Most stakeholders working in MSPs are not primarily concerned with gender; few have a genuine interest in the gender aspects of the partnership. Often, people simply know very little about gender issues. However, gender mainstreaming offers a wealth of tools and approaches for development cooperation and sustainable development – hence, there is a lot of potential for MSPs as well.

♀ Potential solution

Demonstrating the potentials of gender can generate interest. For example, studies can show the economic potential that the participation of women can have for the private sector (micro level) or in government (macro level) in the context of a given multi-stakeholder partnership.

Differences in understanding and language

Gender is a complex issue, and there is a variety of concepts and definitions. Even among colleagues in MSPs that are specifically targeting gender issues it can be difficult to develop shared language and common understanding.

♀ Potential solution

An introductory event on gender and its importance in the context of the respective MSP as well as trainings with gender experts can help developing a shared understanding, particularly in the beginning of the MSP. Lengthy discussions about wording can be avoided using effective facilitation and a pragmatic approach.

Gender as an add-on

To date, MSPs usually address gender in additional activities or small projects. However, gender is a cross-cutting issue and should ideally be integrated systematically across the board. Agenda 2030 is demonstrating this as a necessary step towards sustainable development through SDG 5 and the overarching motto of „leaving no one behind“.

♀ Potential solution

Recent publications and training modules show the importance gender equality for realizing the SDGs and point out interlinkages and approaches that work (e.g. UN Women „Turning promises into action“ 2018). Such sources are highly recommended for further reading.

Complexity of gender & diversity

In order to ensure impact and legitimacy of an MSP, integrating other aspects of diversity may be as important as gender – and it may be easier to demonstrate their importance (e.g. age, ethnicity, nationality, disability, religion, class, etc.). People may feel overwhelmed when they are asked to implement a gender strategy in addition to a diversity strategy.

♀ **Potential solution**

Considering and integrating gender and diversity aspects is highly desirable but a long-term and sometimes challenging process. It is important to allocate enough time and space to do it. It is recommended to begin with those diversity aspects that stakeholders in the MSP regard as most relevant – yet keep in mind that all categories of diversity are inter-connected and can lead to overlapping forms of discrimination. A jointly developed Memorandum of Understanding on gender and diversity can provide a good basis for future activities.



Lack of capacity and diminishing motivation

During the beginning phase of an MSP, stakeholders are usually highly motivated and engaged. Over time, motivation and engagement can decrease, particularly among volunteer stakeholders, which is understandable given that MSPs take a lot of time, work and other resources, and there will be setbacks along the way. Dealing with a complex issue like gender can quite easily suffer when the initial “honeymoon” in the MSP is over.

♀ Potential solution

It is key to consider and respect capacity limits, e.g. due to care obligations stakeholders (often women) may have in their personal and family lives. Institutionalising gender activities through creating a specific desk or role (e.g. gender focal point) can relieve stakeholders in the partnership from time-consuming parts of the work, and help keep up their motivation to implement gender activities in the long run.





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