Considering gender norms, roles and relations in institutional processes

Reducing and eliminating gender-based discrimination in the workplace requires addressing gender norms, roles and relations in institutional processes so as to ensure equitable participation and benefits for all and create an enabling environment for programmatic gender mainstreaming.

The following worksheet helps you to:

- identify strategic entry points for promoting gender equality in three areas – rules and decision-making procedures; human resource management; and staff development and creating a gender-responsive working environment – by answering a series of questions on your best experiences;
- identify gaps and challenges in these areas; and
- develop recommendations to reduce and eliminate gender-based discrimination in institutional processes.

Guiding principle 1

The way an organization or department sets its business rules and decision-making procedures reflects its commitment to promoting human rights and gender equality.

Rules and decision-making procedures

Institutional business rules and decision-making procedures are important mechanisms that govern how an organization operates. They are more likely to empower women and promote gender equality if they are transparent and if they consider the effects on male and female staff members.

1. **Business rules** tell an organization what it can do to implement a strategy, project or programme. Business rules exist for an organization whether or not they are written down, talked about or even part of the organization’s consciousness. An example of an unwritten business rule could be the use of male pronouns or titles (such as ombudsman) regardless of the sex of the actual official. An explicit, written business rule could ensure sex parity among staff.

2. **Decision-making procedures** determine operational mechanisms and contribute to developing institutional structures and practices. Decision-making procedures may be top down (such as only appointed decision-makers being involved), consultative (such as staff consultations), transparent (such as information on senior management decisions being shared) or restricted (such as only certain groups and individuals being allowed to participate). Each procedure responds to different organizational needs.

Involvement in decision-making procedures is an important way to ensure that policies and programmes reflect the needs and concerns of both men and women. Although all staff members cannot always be involved in all decisions, it is important to ensure that both women and men are involved in decision-making procedures that affect both institutional and programmatic issues.

**Critical questions for guiding principle 1**

Answer the following critical questions to identify gaps and challenges in addressing gender equality in business rules and decision-making procedures.

1. Is a senior-level gender task force monitoring and holding the organization accountable for gender mainstreaming in relation to both technical work and administrative procedures?

2. Does your organization, unit or department have written policies on gender equality? (Please list all you consider relevant.)
a. If so, how widely known are these policies?

b. How are staff members made aware of these policies?

c. How is the capacity of staff members developed to put these policies into operation in their daily work?
   (If no support is provided, please provide one or two suggestions for doing this.)

3. How do existing business rules and decision-making procedures reflect a commitment to gender equality?
   Please explain.

4. Do you feel that men and women have an equal voice in how your organization, unit or department operates and in the work you undertake?
   Never
   Sometimes
   Often
   Always
   Please explain your response.

5. How could all staff members, regardless of sex, influence and contribute to the function of your team in useful and equal ways?

6. What mechanisms exist to hold the organization, unit or department accountable for gender mainstreaming?

Recommendations for action on guiding principle 1
How could business rules and decision-making procedures sustain/create an environment of gender equality?
Human resource management

Guiding principle 2 poses critical questions about the root causes of gender inequality as they apply to human resource management. For departments or organizations to take gender mainstreaming seriously, clear human resource plans and strategies must ensure that gender mainstreaming is fully integrated into work plans with the concrete human and financial resources allocated to it. A unit or organization can assign responsibility for gender mainstreaming in various ways:

- designate a gender focal point or gender unit;
- include specific activities in the terms of reference of certain staff members; and
- require gender competencies in recruitment procedures.

Staff members responsible for gender mainstreaming often face challenges such as:

- a gender focal point or unit having limited decision-making authority;
- a small budget for gender mainstreaming activities; and
- high turnover (especially in line ministries).

Remember that gender mainstreaming will not be successful unless a technical unit leads the field and coordinates the process. Focal points with no infrastructure to succeed is the same as adding gender salt to existing policies and programmes!

Critical questions for guiding principle 2

Answer the following critical questions to identify gaps and challenges in addressing gender equality in human resource management.

1. Does your team have enough full-time staff allocated to essential functions?

2. How are women and men distributed among staff positions?
   
   a. Is sex parity an objective?
   
   b. What is the sex distribution in decision-making versus support functions?

3. How do staff members share responsibilities for gender mainstreaming activities?

4. Do job descriptions include qualifications that enable both women and men from diverse ages and backgrounds to be eligible for the post in question?
5. How does the organization, unit or department demonstrate its commitment to gender equality in its hiring practices?

6. Provide recommendations in the following areas to enhance commitment to gender equality in hiring practices.

   a. Transparency of hiring practices.

   b. Interview panels and protocols.

   c. Assessing gender competencies in interviews.

7. What do you think it takes to advance in your organization, unit or department? Are the criteria written down? Is there a difference between what is written down and what is done in practice? Does this differ for women and men?

8. What are the constraints in retaining either women or men in their positions in the organization, unit or department? Are there exit surveys or interviews? If so, have these data been analysed, by sex and function?

9. Do selection criteria for consultants include knowledge or experience in addressing gender inequality in programmes and policies?

**Recommendations for action on guiding principle 2**

How could human resource practices address gender equality goals more effectively?
Staff development and a gender-responsive working environment

Addressing gender equality in the workplace requires more than ensuring that women and men can participate at different levels of the organization. It also requires ensuring that, once they are recruited and hired, they receive equitable treatment and opportunities to perform their duties to the best of their ability.

In a gender-responsive working environment, all staff members, regardless of sex or position, perceive themselves to be stakeholders in effectively implementing organizational objectives, with policies and programmes that enhance their ability to do so. These could include instituting paid parental leave (for both sexes), establishing zero-tolerance policies on sexual harassment and adopting gender-responsive language in official communications.

A gender-responsive work environment also considers the different roles men and women play when balancing the dual responsibilities of professional and personal life. Women often have less time to engage in professional duties due to domestic roles. Equitable, needs-based flexible models of work such as telecommuting and flextime can increase the satisfaction and productivity of both women and men, creating a supportive work environment. This may also require policies that account for the specific needs of women and men such as breastfeeding or accommodating child-care facility hours.

Critical questions for guiding principle 3

Answer the following critical questions to identify gaps and challenges in addressing gender equality in staff development and in cultivating a gender-responsive working environment.

1. How does the unit, team or department ensure equal benefits for women and men in staff training and development activities?
   a. Are these opportunities provided at times when both men and women can participate?

2. How does the unit, team or department ensure that staff members have the opportunity to develop the capacity to address gender inequality in their work?
   a. How is this capacity acknowledged?

3. How are occupational hazards (such as repetitive strain injuries, travel health concerns or stress) for women and men addressed?
4. How is awareness raised about sexual harassment to prevent it among women and men?

5. Are maternity benefits available for staff members?
   a. Are any staff members excluded?
   b. Are paternity benefits available?

6. Are there sufficient flexitime or part-time arrangements for staff members?
   a. Are flexitime and part-time arrangements possible for all staff members, regardless of category and function?
   b. Would flexitime and part-time arrangements result in career disadvantages? What sorts of disadvantages, and who would these affect? Even if people-friendly policies are in place, are staff members afraid to use them? Would they be considered less committed workers?

7. Are there spousal or dependent benefits (such as pension or health insurance) that may place one sex at an advantage over the other? List some.

8. Are staff members expected to work after the normal working day ends? If so, are there differences in compensatory leave or overtime entitlement? For whom?
9. What mechanisms do women and men have to raise complaints within the unit, team or department?

a. How is anonymity assured?

Recommendations for action on guiding principle 3
How could career development opportunities enable staff members to address gender inequality more effectively? How can the organization foster a more gender-sensitive working environment?