

VNG International
committed to
strengthening
democratic local
government
worldwide



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Oumou Sall Seck: Mayor of Goundam, Mali.

Introduction

This document deals with the connection between gender equality and local government and looks at the question why gender matters to local government. The document focuses on two main areas: gender mainstreaming in local governance and gender sensitive leadership.

VNG International's LOGO South Programme is convinced that gender equality and mainstreaming are appropriate frameworks to guide local development efforts to ensure that these benefit those most in need of assistance while gaining the most from their potential in the development process. To this end, VNG International has identified gender equality as a priority for its LOGO South projects and programmes, and for local governance in general.

Activities carried out within the LOGO South gender programmes serve as a model to show how gender issues can be mainstreamed to improve the impact of local government and to reach gender equality.



Field visit Exchange Activity Gender equality and women access to basic service delivery, May 2010, Dar Es Salam, Tanzania.



Why does gender matter to Local Government?

Why is a gender sensitive approach – an approach which takes the socio-cultural and psychological differences between men and women into account and where women are represented in the decision-making bodies – important for local government?

There are four main reasons why gender matters for local government.

Justice

Women account for half the population and therefore have the right to be represented as such. Only by having more locally elected women, will women feel truly represented and recognised in the democratic process. A society in which women are not part of the political system is an unjust society.

Nearly every country has committed to equal rights for women and girls through its ratification of international instruments like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and through commitments made at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo) and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing). Gender equality is also one of the Millennium Development Goals. In signing these conventions, governments agree to remove discriminatory laws and other obstacles to equality; to promote equality by affirmative action; and to eliminate discriminatory attitudes, conduct, prejudices and practices.

In recognition of the linkage between the international, national and local spheres of government, numerous changes have taken place at the local level. In 1998, the then International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), now part of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), issued a seminal policy paper on women's participation in decision-making. Since then, many local governments have adopted the positions outlined in the policy paper and have committed themselves to increasing the numbers and positions of women in decision-

making positions in local government. Today, UCLG continues to champion women's rights and gender equality in decision-making. In 2006, the European Charter of Equality of women and men in local life, a charter for Europe's local and regional governments, committed local authorities to use their powers and partnerships for the sake of greater equality in their constituent communities. The Charter was launched by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and partner organisations.

Local governments have a key role and responsibility in the implementation of international conventions and agreements. This is part of their role as the third, but critical tier of government.

Democracy

Institutions are historically constructed frameworks which continue to serve the political and social interests for which they were designed to serve in the first place. Historically, men dominated the political arena; men formulated the rules of the political game; and men's needs and interests were embedded in the structures and practices of political institutions.

The equal representation of women and men enhances democratisation. Women's experiences are different from men's and need to be represented in discussions. These different experiences imply that women 'do politics' differently from men, which can enrich politics. Women can change politics with respect to language use, times and locations of meetings, speaking priorities, training measures and themes, and availability of family-friendly services for male and female politicians. They can change the rules of the game. In general women are less corrupt, or at least are seen as such. According to the World Bank, increased participation of women in government is linked to lower levels of graft. Indian local government councils (gram panchayets) headed by women have fewer incidences of bribery than those headed by men. Research in Rwanda confirms that women are perceived to be less corrupt, particularly

at the local level. These findings suggest that women could reduce corruption and increase faith in government.

Women have a better contact with the grassroots, since many women make the transition to politics from a leadership role in women's organisations. This is especially so for many women from Southern countries. In this way accountability can more easily become embedded: local female councillors can be accountable to their constituencies and women's organisations can hold their female councillors accountable.

The mere presence of women in structures of governance does not guarantee that gender considerations are mainstreamed in laws, policies and programmes. But a growing body of literature suggests that where women are present in critical numbers and are able to participate effectively, the result is more socially responsive governance outcomes and a more transparent way of working.

Interest

The interests of men and women are different and even potentially conflicting, and therefore women are needed in representative institutions to articulate their interests. It is mostly women who place women's rights and position in society on the formal political agenda.

Decisions by municipalities about development priorities, services and regulation affect the quality of life of both women and men, but not necessarily in the same way. In most countries there are significant differences between women and men in the resources they command, the work they do, and in the responsibilities and the decision-making power they have.

Having the major responsibility for reproductive activities, women have a particular interest in the allocation of local resources and services, such as water, fuel, electricity, sanitation, housing, public safety, and health services. Male politicians rarely automatically represent women's interests. Women's active participation in decision-making is essential in

order to ensure that women can promote and defend their specific needs and interests. They can be prime actors in promoting gender-sensitive governance that addresses the interests of both women and men and enhances access to and control over local resources for both.

Women's interests have mainly included social and welfare policies, environmental protection, equality policies, disarmament policies and educational policies. Men's interests have included economic and industrial policies, energy issues, transportation, national security and foreign affairs. However, the distinction between these 'soft' and 'hard' issues is likely to break down. It is the remainder of a political process that was male-dominated or exclusively male. The distinction will recede as interest in 'soft' issues increases among all politicians, as a result of women deputies becoming more successful in pushing them up the parliamentary agenda.

When women are involved in the governing process, they broaden the political debate to address constituent matters, social concerns, and local issues. In Colombia, Argentina, and Costa Rica, women legislators assign higher priority to women's, children's, and family issues and are more likely than their male colleagues to initiate related bills. Local women government officials in India are more focused on providing social services. They have expanded the political agenda to include water infrastructure, children's education, and gender and matrimonial issues. In Namibia, women spearheaded efforts to combat employment discrimination and land reform as well as gender-based violence. Field research from Rwanda shows that women candidates and officials are perceived to be more likely than men to address the social and economic welfare of constituents.

Development

Addressing the issue of gender is essential in advancing development and reducing poverty. The historical exclusion and inequality of women, even within the same racial groups, has resulted in women having fewer rights,

lower levels of employment, lower levels of income, lower levels of education and fewer chances of upward mobility. Women form a larger percentage (70%) of the country's poor. Worldwide 25% of the households are female headed.

Specific attention to women's needs and to income supplies for women does have a bigger impact on the well-being of their family compared to income supplies for men. Women in Southern countries use 90% of their income for their family, while men tend to spend only 30-40% on their families. In the Ivory Coast, an increase in women's share of cash income was associated with significantly higher spending on food and reduced spending on cigarettes and alcohol. It was also found that in order to achieve the benefits to children's nutrition and health of a \$10 per month increase in women's income, men would have to increase their per month income by \$110. Similarly, in the Philippines, increased consumption of calories and protein is positively correlated to the increased share of income accrued directly to women.

In an evaluation of a pension programme in South Africa, it was found that pensions received by grandmothers result in weight gains for the young girls in the household, while pensions received by grandfathers have no such effect. In sub-Saharan Africa it has been calculated that agricultural productivity could increase by up to 20% if women's access to resources such as land, seed and fertiliser were equal to that of men.

Guaranteeing employment opportunities for women as well as for men and guaranteeing good basic services for all are essential condition for local governments to improve the well-being of all residents and to reduce poverty.

Gender issues in local government focuses on two main areas: gender sensitive leadership and gender mainstreaming in local governance. How can gender sensitive leadership be reached and how can local governments work with a gender perspective? These also are the two main areas of VNG's International gender programme. The examples illustrating these two main issues come from this programme.



SérAPHINE W. Solange Ouedraogo, mayor of Boulmiougou district, Ouagadougou, Burkna Faso.

How can gender sensitive leadership be reached?

There are two ways of reaching gender sensitive leadership: create opportunities for women to become leaders and behave in a more gender sensitive way; and stimulate male leaders to become more gender sensitive.

At present, 20% of local councillors worldwide are female. Sub-Sahara Africa is a positive exception with 30% women in the local council. In parliaments worldwide 19% of the parliamentarians are female. Rwanda is now the world leader in terms of women's representation in parliament (57%), with South Africa, Mozambique and Angola also ranked among the top ten nations.

Quotas give women more access to decision-making positions. However, gender sensitive leadership goes beyond numbers. Women still have to make headway while faced with many obstacles. They face individual and institutional factors that hinder their active participation in politics.

Individual factors address the extent to which individual characteristics favour political participation. In general, women are less interested in politics; both women and men often see politics as a man's affair. Women have not yet learned to develop political capacities, because public sector activities are usually seen as the male domain. As a consequence, women lack confidence in their own political capabilities. Their lower level of education, professional experience, income and time available also disadvantages women as compared to men.

Institutional factors related to the organisation of society, its norms and values. By becoming politically active, women are hampered in their tasks of taking care of others and their responsibility for the household. They often lack support from their husbands or family.

Barriers in the structure of society for women are: limited access to leadership, managerial skills and training; the lack of female role models and mentors; disproportional expectations; and violence against them.

The political participation of women also depends on the social and cultural climate of a country: religious and patriarchal norms and values may exclude women from public life. Women's participation also depends on the gender equality policies within a country. The existence of women's organisations to promote the political participation of women and to give support to elected women is very important. This can serve as a springboard for a political career.

Institutional factors related to the political system. The prevalence of the 'masculine model' of political life and of elected government bodies is another obstacle that women face. Female voters are hampered by registration procedures, by voting procedures that give the control of women's voices to their husbands, or by their lack of mobility which prevents them from voting. Women also have lower education levels and are usually less informed about the electoral process, the meaning of elections and the right to vote.

The political obstacles for female candidates include the lack of political party support. This is embodied in the lack of financial and other resources to fund women's campaigns and boost their political, social and economic credibility. Women are less involved in systems such as patronage and clientelism; systems that bring people into decision-making positions.

Other important factors are the selection process and the electoral system. Important criteria in systems dealing with individual candidates (rather than party lists) are popularity with opinion leaders, the right family connections and sufficient funds. These criteria are more difficult to obtain for women. Preferential voting and specific policies to increase women's participation (reserved seats, quotas) can be an advantage for women candidates.

Women politicians are further hampered by working conditions and by a political climate often characterised by aggressiveness, competitiveness and discrimination or

intimidation of women. These discourage many women from entering politics or from continuing once they have become involved in politics. Political life is organised according to male norms and values, and in some cases even male lifestyles.

How can these barriers be overcome? How can gender sensitive leadership be reached?

Training and networking of current and future women councillors is essential, not only to overcome individual obstacles, but also to empower women and thus enable them to influence institutional barriers.

Communication skills trainings is very important, particularly as it relates to public speaking and conflict resolution. Consistent training and ongoing practice in public speaking can help women gain the confidence they need to participate more in political party and other meetings.

Training on public speaking, working with the media, and interpersonal communication, are among the most empowering and inspiring capacity building exercises for future leaders. For women who have long been silenced, the ability to engage in effective public speaking is a prerequisite for their success. In many societies, people are not used to listening to women; women must therefore be equipped with the knowledge and confidence to make themselves heard.

Leadership skills trainings seeks to build women's skills and self-confidence to empower them to take on leadership roles in their families, communities and public life. Leadership training is therefore aimed at developing effective leaders and encompasses key areas of successful leadership, focusing on topics such as debating, negotiating and managing conflict, team-building and managing change.

Besides this, extensive training is required to develop the type of specialised skills necessary to succeed in public office. Such skills may

be office-specific, such as rules or procedures, drafting and passing legislation, and budgets.

Women councillors mentoring and training each other employing a training of trainers methodology, has proven to be an effective and sustainable way to increase women's political knowledge, skills and capacity. Furthermore, this method is empowering and inspiring to both the women trainers and trainees.

Relationship-building and networking trainings to unite women and men across parties. Given the minimal attention that political parties often pay to issues of particular interest to women, it is imperative to encourage women to work on these issues across ideological lines.

Strengthening partnerships between the constituency, women's organisations and female politicians also is of extreme importance. It is crucial that female councillors are committed, accessible and accountable to their constituents. Civil society organisations are vehicles for women's leadership and have emerged as places for women to cultivate their political, social and personal power.

Women's organisations are vital in putting women's issues on the political agenda and in monitoring progress. Often, gender issues do not reach the policy agenda until powerful women's groups in society identify and assert these issues as problems. In this context, the best gender-sensitive practice for local government would be to maintain open channels of communication and foster mechanisms for dialogue with groups and organisations representing women.

Cultivate women role models.

Of great importance are learning strategies for constituency building. The common perception of women as more honest, more transparent and less corrupt emerges as a viable theme around which women can build their strengths, particularly as role models for other women. Women bring integrity to the political process, and those who hold office are perceived as strong women.

Exchange information internationally.

Sharing experiences and knowledge is very important to gain solidarity and a sense of empowerment. Learning from and interacting with female colleagues around the world is both personally inspiring and professionally useful.

Involve men. Also of great importance is increasing the gender sensitivity of male leaders. What can male political leaders do to encourage more women to run for office? What strategies can women candidates use to get support from male counterparts and voters? How can male political leaders contribute to increase women's access to finance at the party level? One of the key steps in working with men to promote women's political participation is to initiate and maintain an ongoing dialogue.

Identifying male champions is critical to involving men in the advancement of women in politics. Male champions play an important role in legitimising the need for involving women in politics, especially amongst their male counterparts. Male champions play a key role in encouraging and supporting women, who often will not put their name forward until they are specifically asked or have received an endorsement from a male counterpart. Male champions also play a key role in convincing other men in political parties on the importance of quotas in enabling women's entry into politics.

On gaining support from male colleagues for legislation, it is imperative that women are able to talk about their priority issues in terms that appeal to both men and women. If women talk about women's issues as 'women's issues' they will immediately lose the attention of some colleagues - including some women. Next to women-only training opportunities, political training opportunities that involve men as a way to increase gender sensitivity and support for women's political leadership is necessary.



Exchange Activity Female leadership in local governments, Octobre 2009, The Hague.

VNG International support to female leaders

In 2009, twenty female African local leaders visited VNG International for an exchange activity on gender equality in local governance. This exchange activity was named 'African women in local government: Changing the face of local leadership' and aimed to stimulate the capacity building process of female mayors and councillors in African countries.

On the first day, the participants were not only welcomed by Mr. Peter Knip, VNG International's director, they were also addressed by Ms. Mary Okumu, programme director on gender equality in local development at the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). The participants were offered several plenary debate sessions and interesting keynote speeches. Ms. Jon Hermans, Mayor of the Dutch city of Ridderkerk, focused for instance on the importance of a step-by-step approach, and stressed the importance of good leadership. 'It's all about leadership, ladies', was how she summed up her speech. Other participants of the plenary discussion round were Ms. Bregje Kemp, representative of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD); Ms. Jacqueline Baranyizigiye, Deputy Mayor of the Bujumbura municipal council in Burundi; and Ms. Joyce Overdijk, gender and diversity expert at VNG. In the afternoon, two workshops were held with sessions on political and economic challenges and the importance of good national and international networks, and the transformation of cultural traditions and stereotypes. The workshops were hosted by experts of the Dutch Institute for Political Participation, Dutch Institute for Political Participation (IPP), the Dutch organisation E-Quality, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The programme for the second day was largely organised by the Hague Academy for Local Governance. Sessions included role plays on how to take informed decisions in the interest of a local community and the examination of case studies. Self-reflection was an important aspect in this part of the exchange. 'What areas do you want to improve in yourself and where do you want to be in five years?' were

central questions. The obstacles to realising these ambitions were also discussed in depth. Another exercise was held to provide the participants with the theory and tools for inspiring and motivating groups. Furthermore, a field visit to the Dutch parliament was organised to give the participants a good insight into the Dutch political system. It also closed the second day with some fresh air and a pleasant evening stroll.

After a good meal that evening, the group was ready for the last day of the exchange activity. The Hague Academy continued its training programme with a workshop on communication and how to motivate and inspire others. The participants were asked to get out of their seats once again in order to improve their presentation skills. The session ended with an exercise in pantomime to tell the story of women's leadership.

> Participants' stories

I come from a very conservative community in Mali, but I can see things are slowly changing. At the first general assembly there were no women to be found, although I approached a lot of them beforehand and asked them to come. The women that did decide to come left at the start of the meeting, because they were intimidated by the number of men present. I notice that women do come to my office, but they are still shy about going to public events. As female leaders, I think it is important to assume responsibility and pave the way for the women after us.

I am part of a community where women still have the role of giving birth and working in the field. It was not easy to convince these women to come to the meetings, but I was able to interest them. Now all the women in the community come to meetings, they take all the seats! Another valuable contribution I was able to make is that I have convinced the men in my council to give microcredit to women in my community.

> Some electronic remarks received during the closing meeting or afterwards:

May God bless you all. I learned a lot from my colleagues as I am still young in politics. I obtained more experience on how to face the challenges.

A local councillor from Tanzania.

The workshops were a great success and inspiring, especially having shared practical experiences with participants from different countries. Personally, I came back more equipped with skills of good governance like advocacy, lobbying, networking, and others. I hope we are going to be agents of change in our communities.

Youth councillor Tanzania.

The members of the Ugandan delegation were so inspired by the exchange activity that 'since their return they talk of nothing but the wonderful experience and more so about the perspectives they gained from the exchange workshop.'

Mary Okumu emailed the other participants after her arrival back home that 'you are a good example of what democracy, good governance, fairness, and gender justice is in local governance. More power to you all. Let's keep pressing on for democratic and accountable governance in our countries. I look forward to meeting you again in the near future.'



Exchange Activity Gender equality and women access to basic service delivery, May 2010, Dar Es Salam, Tanzania.

How to work with a gender perspective in Local Government?

Attention to differences between women and men (in activities, needs, wishes and priorities) is necessary to obtain accurate information about the population that is required for good planning and management. This means that municipal planners require information and analytical skills to assess whether women and men benefit equitably from particular policy and programme decisions. Municipalities must also ensure that their public consultation processes obtain the views of women *and* men.

Girls and women encounter specific problems when dealing with public services that make it especially difficult for them to hold service providers or authorities accountable. These problems concern women's access to services, the extent to which women are visible and esteemed, and the service providers' knowledge of and conduct towards women.

Women and men use and experience their environment in different ways. This has important implications for the ways in which villages and cities are planned and managed. An engendered approach to local development seeks to ensure that both women and men have equal access to and control over the resources and services.

All municipal functions that affect the population should be considered from the perspective of whether they respond to the needs and priorities of women as well as men. Issues will be specific to each country and municipality and will need to be investigated. However, a consideration of several municipal functions illustrates the issues that may arise. These include the following.

- **Land-use planning.** The distance between residential areas and industrial and commercial zones that offer employment and services may be a more significant issue for women because women tend to carry a larger load of domestic responsibilities than men. Where employment, markets, schools and clinics are hard to reach because of distance and/or transport limitations, the costs to women may be heavier workloads or reduced employment opportunities.

- **Transport planning.** Women and men tend to use public transport in different ways: women tend to make more frequent and multi-purpose journeys at off-peak hours (to reach markets, schools and clinics as well as jobs) rather than longer work-focused commutes. As a result, women and men are likely to have different needs and priorities for route design, service frequency and fare structures.
- **Economic development.** In most countries, women and men tend to work in different industries and occupations, and the impact of policies resulting in the expansion (or contraction) of a particular activity will have different impacts on the employment opportunities and incomes of women and men.
- **Provisions for physical security.** High rates of violence against women in many cities have increased concern about women's physical security. Ways in which municipal planning can promote security include: lighting streets at night, designing bus routes and stops to reduce risk, designing public housing complexes with women's security in mind.

Getting women into the mainstream of public office and the bureaucracy is another vital part of engendering local governance. The employment structure of the administration and delivery system is usually strongly stratified, with women predominating in traditionally female and lower-powered jobs. Although the presence of women in strong positions in public office does not in itself guarantee that the interests of other women will be represented, their presence has a symbolic and practical value: they serve as important role models, which may permit and inspire other women to involve themselves in local governance. Furthermore, they have particular experiences, knowledge and relationships to the local environment to share with men. They have proven themselves to be effective change agents in the neighbourhoods which they know intimately and on which they have strong views and invaluable suggestions, which can be discussed in the workplace. This experience and expertise should be drawn upon. The

organisational culture and working conditions have to be favourable for women and for men.

Similarly, gender knowledge and a respectful attitude towards female as well as male clients are important for civil servants.

The most important test of gender mainstreaming is the extent to which gender awareness is reflected in the deliverables of the organisation. At a programmatic level this is reflected in the selection of programme areas. Because women have been historically disadvantaged, one approach is to ensure that the particular needs of women are addressed through programmes specifically targeted at them. However, this should not be at the expense of ensuring that women benefit equally from existing projects, or indeed that women benefit slightly more, as a means of 'positive discrimination' to overcome the existing inequalities. Programme design also requires an understanding that even if the client is primarily one or the other sex, there are still gender issues to be addressed. For example, a programme for young women only that simply reinforces occupational gender stereotypes does not help to overcome gender inequalities in our society and vice versa.

The financial aspect is another important point with respect to gender and local governments. All budgets are about politics. All politics are ultimately about who controls budgets. Budgets look neutral with regard to gender, but the differentials become manifest largely at the operational level when the allocations are translated into deliveries. Many studies show that women use their money for the well-being of their family, whereas men use it above all things for their personal well-being. Consequently, allocation of resources to women may benefit a wider development scope in which the interests of women and men are served in a more balanced way. In some countries gender budgeting methods have been developed to analyse budgets or to let citizens participate in the decision-making process. Revenue generation also has a gender aspect, as women are generally poorer than men, and

> Services fail poor women

Poor access to services

Girls and women have to work harder than boys and men, and thus have less time to make use of public services. They do not have time to travel to health and education services. Girls are kept out of school to help their mothers with the housework and take care of younger brothers or sisters. Young girls may encounter problems when they start menstruating if their school lacks the necessary facilities. If they get pregnant, they may be forced to drop out of school.

Another specific concern of girls and women is safety. Fear of sexual harassment often causes them to avoid long journeys or travelling after dark. This literally limits their opportunities to attend school or health clinics.

In some cultures men decide about visits by women to health clinics or women cannot move freely without their husbands' permission, even for a visit to a health clinic. Another problem encountered by women is the cost of public services. Women's incomes are lower than men's, or they are dependent on men's income.

Low visibility and undervaluing of women

Women are often invisible to accountability institutions. Public reporting systems often have no information on the number of women and girls making use of public services, or on the specific problems women encounter. Women themselves often have less information than men and their concerns about public services often fall on deaf ears. Women who are aware of a health problem may ultimately choose to remain silent if they fear adverse reactions from their family or community.

Service providers' knowledge and behaviour

Providers often lack knowledge about women's specific needs and rights. They don't know where they can find poor women and girls, or how to reach them. They may lack political will: they simply do not care about women. Women, especially poor women, are often discriminated against in their interaction with service providers.

Corruption at the level of resource delivery may affect women differently than men. First, money for women's development may be more easily pilfered by state agents because women tend to be less aware of their rights, and less willing than men to demand that public authorities account for missing funds. Second, there are sexual currencies of corruption, for instance when state agents demand sexual services in lieu of monetary bribes

many systems do not favour the poor. Gender budgeting examines not only expenditure on social services, but also the gender implications of revenue generation, such as the impact of taxes on women and the poor. Because women tend to earn less than men do, a regressive taxation system disadvantages poor women, since their tax is a large proportion of their smaller income. Another major source of revenue for municipalities is property rates. A step-tariff setting, whereby the first units consumed are cheaper than the further units, favour the poor. Other possibilities to favour them are the provision of subsidies for services, and people-friendly credit collection systems.

What does this mean for the capacities required by municipal institutions?

Effective planning requires capacities to undertake both analyses that take account of the differences in activities and needs of women and men, and consultation processes that allow both women and men to state their priorities.

Analyses for strategic planning (to formulate plans for economic development, public transport, physical planning, housing, etc.) require:

- sex-disaggregated data: municipal data and management information systems that provide the means to compare women and men with respect to employment, income, skills, use of municipal services, etc., and planners with the skills to analyse such data;
- links between planners and research and advocacy organisations concerned with women's access to employment, transport, housing or other relevant matters, to assist with analyses and the formulation of options;
- training courses and operational manuals that provide guidance in identifying the different interests and needs of women and men in relation to municipal functions.

Consultative processes require approaches that:

- are open and inclusive – that use information dissemination methods that target women as well as men (e.g. dissemination through work sites) and that consider the timing and location of meetings to facilitate participation by both women and men;

- draw on good facilitation skills – skills in facilitation of discussions that ensure that women as well as men can express views;
- empower citizens – by building skills for working with municipal officials among different groups, with particular attention to women's equality advocates.

Projects must take a constructive and practical approach to ensuring that the cooperation programme benefits women and men equitably. 'Do's' and 'don'ts' to consider include the following.

- **Do not treat the gender equality objective as separate from other project objectives.** An assessment of the situation of both women and men is necessary to well-informed and responsive planning. Rather than an activity separated from other project activities, *it should be pursued as a normal and essential part* of studies of the economic base, housing needs, the effectiveness of social services, etc.
- **Use clear and concrete language.** Avoid jargon and terms that others may not understand. For example, if you are trying to develop a transport plan that meets the needs of users, both women and men, then say this. Do not say that you are preparing a 'gender-sensitive' plan.
- **Identify local advocates.** Local women's organisations can be useful allies in identifying issues and information and in ensuring that municipal officials understand that attention to women's concerns and views is important to their community.
- **Draw on relevant VNG International experience and resources to demonstrate possible approaches and their value.** Practical experience generally speaks more effectively than abstract discussion.

VNG International has developed a checklist to show how to address gender at four levels: the twinning relation; the project cycle; local government policies; and the local government apparatus. For each level the checklist covers several issues, giving an explanation of the issue and points of attention for integrating a gender perspective. The gender checklist is a useful tool with respect to gender aware planning.

> Gender-specific planning

Participatory planning is not the same as gender-specific planning. It is not sufficient to invite women or women's groups to make the planning process gender-specific. Women have more difficulty than men in expressing their priorities, as they often lack basic literacy and policy analysis skills. Women's efforts to articulate their concerns are often drowned out by other, more powerful and more technically competent civil society groups. Women must be allowed to express their specific needs and concerns, which is not always possible in the presence of men. Often, women echo men, reproducing the desired answers and keeping silent on their own ideas and viewpoints. In this case, specific methods have to be developed and applied to give women the right to speak, such as discussing the subject of women's voice with the male participants in the planning process, working with separate subgroups before plenary sessions, or organising women-only meetings. The involvement of women's organisations is also an important strategy.



Exchange Activity Female leadership in local goverments, Octobre 2009, The Hague.

VNG International activities to integrate a gender perspective

At the start of LOGO South, VNG International identified gender equality as the main priority for LOGO South projects and programmes. Result 4 of the logical framework of the LOGO South Municipal International Cooperation Component is: *'Effective local government strategies on cross-cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, citizen participation, gender and sustainable development have been designed and implemented'*.

Given that gender is a cross-cutting issue, LOGO South's positive first experiences with gender led to the decision being taken at the end of 2008 to develop a LOGO South Thematic Programme on gender for the period 2009-2010. The framework of the Thematic Programme Gender does not allow for specific gender projects to be executed, but assessments were made and will be made of the current projects in which this theme is relevant. Representatives of these projects will be involved in the activities that are executed in the framework of the Thematic Programme Gender in the period 2009-2010.

The proposed thematic programme on gender, the LOGO South Action Plan on Gender and Local Governance, has four strategic objectives and several suggested action points.

- 1 To build internal consensus on, and develop a framework for, a gender and local governance programme in LOGO South, with particular emphasis on Municipal Transformation and Organisational Development.
- 2 To conduct assessment and follow-up on gender and local governance in LOGO South countries so as to strengthen the existing evidence on the benefits of engendering local governance.
- 3 To enhance good governance and poverty reduction through engendering budgets, public participation, local economic development and service delivery.
- 4 To integrate gender considerations into institutional reform, so as to ensure greater responsiveness and effectiveness of municipalities in enhancing good governance and poverty reduction.

Within the Thematic Programme Gender three main activities took place to mainstream a gender approach in local governance: an exchange activity, a training activity and the development of some small innovative initiatives.

Exchange activity

In 2008, VNG International organised an Exchange Activity on 'Gender equality, mainstreaming and local governance'.

The objective of this Exchange Activity was to share experiences and initiatives to achieve gender equality. It also aimed at furthering the quality of programming and cooperation in the LOGO South programme and improving the inclusion of gender in the bilateral inter-municipal projects as a key element for capacity reinforcement.

Participants in the Exchange Activity were municipal officers and council members of the twinning partners from Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Surinam. During the Exchange Activity the participants practiced the tools that will enable them to ensure gender-sensitive programming. One of these tools was VNG International's gender checklist. This checklist was updated and adjusted to the specific needs of the LOGO South programme and with the intention of reaching higher levels of efficiency.

Several experts on gender from VNG International, the Royal Tropical Institute and representatives of E-quality, were involved in the various workshops. According to the participants, the Exchange Activity gave them a good guideline to implement policy on gender equality and an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas and views with each other.

Training

As a follow up to this Exchange Activity, training took place in the field of gender for representatives of the Dutch municipalities that participated in the Exchange Activity in 2008.

During the Exchange Activity on gender in 2008, E-quality facilitated a workshop on gender tools such as the 'quick scan emancipation' and the 'gender budget analysis'. The follow-up training, also facilitated by E-quality, focused on applying these gender tools to the framework of the bilateral projects. During the training, the municipalities worked on a project proposal to integrate gender into their current projects. The proposal would be submitted for a small grant from the LOGO South Thematic Programme gender.

The outcome of this workshop also helped identify innovative initiatives to be submitted for small grants from the LOGO South Thematic Programme Gender. Representatives of the following LOGO South projects were invited:

- 1 Smallerland - Namibia
- 2 Delft - Tschwane
- 3 Eindhoven - Gedaref
- 4 Almere - Kumasi

A delegation of two persons who were closely involved in the LOGO South project was invited from each Dutch municipality. The knowledge that was gained during the training will be transferred by the representatives of the Dutch municipalities to the local partners. As a follow-up of the training both partners will start working together on a proposal to integrate gender in their bilateral project.

Innovative Initiatives

A number of innovative initiatives were developed within the Thematic Programme Gender. These included small scale and creative activities with local ownership around the question of how to connect to local elections. VNG International contributed with capacity building and financial support. Initiatives were developed in Sudan, Uganda and Mali.

SUDAN

In January 2005, long years of conflict between the North and the South of Sudan came to an end with the signing of the Comprehensive

> Planning at the project level

At a project level, gender mainstreaming involves ensuring that the particular needs and requirements of boys and girls, men and women, are taken into account in all stages of the project design, from concept, to design, to implementation. For example, in planning a sports project, unless a conscious effort is made to ensure that facilities are provided for male and female sports, the likelihood is that far more resources will be put into sports in which men predominate. This is an example of gender neutral planning (i.e. no negative harm was intended) that actually turns out to be gender blind (the upshot is negative because sport is so subliminally linked with men rather than women) that can only be corrected through gender aware planning (a conscious effort, at all times, to question the gender implications of what we do).

> Some remarks:

Don't give us fish but teach us how to fish!
Municipal officer Namibia

We would like to fish together with our southern partner!
Municipal officer Netherlands

We will support you and provide you with a fishing policy!
Project manager VNG international.

Peace Agreement (CPA). Among the key milestone events mandated by the CPA is that general elections will be held in spring 2010. Transparent, credible, and peaceful elections would present a historic opportunity for Sudan to consolidate and sustain peace, gain international recognition and allow more participation of the population in decision making.

The Sudanese delegation to the Exchange Activity developed a project for women and youth around these elections to increase citizens' and women councillors' knowledge of the local democratic processes. The project aimed to achieve a greater knowledge of local politics in general and of the timing and significance of the upcoming elections in particular. The project was addressed to three target groups: trainers and leaders of unions of youth, students, and women, and young women farmers of different parties; female councillors; and female and young citizens.

The training for trainers dealt with the Sudan constitution and laws and with being involved in democratic processes. The female councillors learned about leadership, budgeting, women's rights and they attended workshops about the specific problems that women councillors face. These workshops have increased the knowledge and self-confidence of these women.

To stimulate female and young citizens to vote, pamphlets and discussions about the right of citizen's participation in elections were organised. Innovative was a programme for the local mass media concerning women's rights with respect to elections and the importance of women's participation.

The participants' of the Exchange Activity recommended more training for and attention to women. They also advised women from different parties to build networks to put women's rights on the agenda to improve the situation of women in the future.

UGANDA

In Uganda efforts have been made to get women into political positions and to increase accountability towards the public. From local councils at the village level up through the echelons of political power, it is mandatory that one third of representatives are female. In spite of these efforts, women in leadership are still challenged by cultural and stereotyped images which hamper their contribution to decision-making and development as a whole. The focus of these efforts concentrates on meeting women's basic needs with significantly less emphasis placed on women as leaders and decision-makers. Much of both national and district level planning includes gender issues, but budgets are never allocated to key activities. This is because the representatives of gender concerns lack negotiation powers and lobbying skills.

Uganda's delegation to the Exchange Activity intended to expand women's citizenship, participation and leadership. To advance women as decision-makers women need the skills and confidence to influence the decisions that directly affect their lives, including through direct participation in government and the security sector. Women need to be engaged in decision-making on government budgets and resource mobilisation. Women are often denied access to business transactions and are excluded from negotiations surrounding land titles. Legislation needs to change to allow women to access business and land ownership. Women have to develop capacities for social change; to work together to transform society. Women's organisations and networks need to be strengthened to ensure responsiveness to and accountability on gender issues. Equally, men need to be educated to promote gender equality and to support women's empowerment.

Therefore a gender audit was carried out to create a baseline for gender mainstreaming in the participating town councils. . Dialogue sessions for male and female councillors were conducted to sensitise them on gender issues.

Female councillors saw themselves as inferior and a minority group without influence. They felt intimidated and not accepted by their male colleagues. This was exacerbated by the fact that many women are illiterate and shy as they feel unable to express themselves. They lack the words to table their issues. They would benefit from learning communication techniques, advocacy and lobbying skills. They would benefit from knowing how to lobby and table their issues without looking or sounding like they are complaining. Women also felt hampered by their reproductive roles and household chores, which keep them home and away from politics. The gender roles assigned to them by society were seen as very restrictive and not giving them dignity. They lack support from their husbands.

However, in one of the three councils the situation was much better. The female councillors showed understanding of their roles and were on good talking terms with their male colleagues, who were more supportive of the women.

The workshops led to a better understanding of the obstacles that hinder women and the importance of their active participation.

The conclusions and recommendations from these workshops included the following.

- Women need special efforts to be made at policy level to help them improve their governance and communication skills, and thus build confidence and ensure more effective participation.
- Women councillors need to realise that they are just as representative of their constituencies as their male counterparts are. They should therefore vigorously plan and present their issues with eloquence.
- Women councillors need to cultivate the confidence of their male counterparts by participating not only during matters affecting the women but on all issues brought before council. This will help remove the bias that the men in assuming that women are in council for purely enhancing women's rights.

- Women councillors should first discuss their impending presentations with fellow women councillors to create common ground and ensure unified support during open council sessions.

MALI

Since the 1990s, Mali has been involved in a process of decentralisation, de-concentration and democratisation of the public administration that will stimulate the management of local development by local councillors.

Studies and testimonies of locally elected women have revealed that they lack knowledge about their roles and responsibilities as elected officials. As a result they do not receive strategic positions in the councils. These women are interested in further enhancing their skills (leadership, gender and development, management of local development) in order to have greater influence on communal management, and to contribute to greater consideration being given to the needs of women and other disadvantaged groups in the municipalities' development priorities. They also expressed the desire to be coached in their work as councillors.

The Mali delegation to the Exchange Activity carried out a project to strengthen the capacities of women councillors with respect to gender and leadership, and to contribute to an equal and durable socio-economic development in their communities. Female councillors received group training on issues such as the roles and responsibilities of councillors, leadership concepts and practices, and gender and development. Each participant developed an action plan and will take part in follow-up discussions every three months. Follow-up training will be held after one year.



Exchange Activity Female leadership in local governments, Octobre 2009, The Hague.

Conclusions and recommendations

In this document we dealt with the connection between gender equality and local government. This publication shows why gender matters for local government and it illustrates this belief with examples of exchange and training activities and innovative projects developed by VNG International.

To mainstream gender in local governance, VNG International has developed a gender checklist and has trained Dutch municipal officers and council members and their Southern counterparts in its use and in the use of other gender tools. Inspiring exchange activities for female leaders took place to enhance their knowledge with respect to gender sensitive leadership. Innovative projects were developed to train female councillors. Highlights of these projects included the attention to the role of the media in the project in Sudan; the involvement of male councillors in Uganda; and the coaching and follow-up programme in Mali.

The question now arises how these activities can be continued? How can the female and male councillors learn from each other with respect to gender issues? New exchange activities can take place, where participants exchange their experiences with the projects and where a deeper understanding can take place. The activities can focus on how these activities and projects can or have contributed to more gender equality with respect to their constituent communities; and address the questions how can local female councillors be accountable to their constituencies, and how can these constituencies hold their female councillors accountable?

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