Organisational change from two perspectives: gender and organisational development

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Introduction

How do you develop an organisational change process which has gender inequalities at its heart? That is the focus of this article. Organisational change has for many years been informed by organisational development (OD) theory and practice which have traditionally been 'gender blind'. Within the development sector, this gender blindness is increasingly under the spotlight from practitioners or change agents who come with a gender perspective, such as Anne Marie Goetz, Aruna Rao, Rieky Stuart, and Michelle Friedman. As a result, OD practice is being challenged and new ways of addressing organisational change processes are being developed.

OD theory and practice fail to address the impact of unequal gender relations both within organisations and in their programmes. At best, gender issues are addressed as part of a wider package, commonly referred to as 'diversity' issues. Here 'gender' is placed alongside differences of race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, and so on, and is therefore easily and often conveniently lost in the diversity melting pot. Feminists and gender activists take a different approach. From the outset, the key area for analysis is power; women and men experience power differently and unequally. Unequal power relations are, of course, just one of many gender dynamics that come under scrutiny, but are critical in the area of personal and organisational change. At the same time, gender inequalities are understood in a context where other inequalities are interlinked and are of equal importance, notably race and class. However, experience has shown that unless there is a specific focus on gender, it is easily subsumed under these other 'cross-cutting' issues. It is with this understanding that this article focuses on gender.

Gender inequalities obviously need to be out in the open if they are to be addressed, challenged, and changed. 'Gender' can no longer be viewed as an optional topic, a soft or women-only issue relegated to a

second or third level in OD theory. We do not need to search hard for what we are talking about. Gender inequalities are all around us, we face them every day of our lives. We just need the courage to open our eyes and ears, face reality – and act.

The shift in Gender and Development (GAD) theory and practice, from a focus on external programme policy and planning (Moser 1993) to getting one's own house in order, is critical in the change process. It is no longer acceptable for Northern donor agencies to raise concerns about gender inequalities in the South if they are doing nothing about gender inequalities in their own organisations (Macdonald et al. 1997). This shift presents new and potentially exciting challenges. How do you get your own house in order, and how do you manage resistance to change, whether this comes from management or from field workers? Unlike OD, there are no neat theories to draw from, no simple steps. The work is new, the terrain is complex and meets with much resistance; and yet we are slowly breaking new ground.

It is therefore not a question about tampering with OD to make it better, but rather acknowledging the need to look for new approaches to organisational change, that will benefit women and men equally. OD is not the answer.

This article thus begins to explore what motivates and informs gender and OD as two different approaches to organisational change. It presents a new model, drawing on my work as a gender and development consultant working with NGOs in South Africa.

Background

My work as a gender consultant began in 1994, just after the first democratic elections in South Africa. In the context of a country going through total transformation, space opened up for a range of organisational change interventions, including gender and OD. The gender interventions can broadly be described as 'raising gender awareness' and 'institutionalising' a gender perspective.

In the case of gender and OD, organisations have found themselves involved in parallel change processes. In practice, this can result in both processes addressing very similar aspects of the organisation but coming up with different analyses of what needs to be changed. For example, a gender analysis of an organisation's organogram will look at where women are in relation to men in terms of access to information, decision making, and power (and link this with race and class). An OD approach is more likely to analyse the functioning of the

hierarchy of the organisation but not to raise consciousness about gender or other cross-cutting differences. The gender approach therefore deepens the analysis of how organisations work from the outset by acknowledging that unequal gender relations have a profound impact on their efficiency and effectiveness.

The links between gender and OD were the focus of a workshop held in Zimbabwe in August 1997, attended by practitioners from both disciplines who were working in Southern and East Africa. The aim was to explore the dual agenda of gender and OD in making organisations efficient, effective, and equitable, both in terms of their internal structures and systems and in relation to their 'end users' (Made and Maramba 1997). What was striking was the similarity in how we describe what we do as gender and OD practitioners. For example, both engage in processes of strategic planning, leadership and team building, management training, skills development, and monitoring and evaluation. However, it became apparent that these activities are often conceptualised in different ways. Looking at what informs the interventions, techniques, and tools shows that the starting points for gender and OD are distinct.

The debates at the Zimbabwe workshop highlighted the need to re-examine OD practice in the light of gender inequalities and to address organisational change in the context of the growing demand for gender equality.

It is not within the scope of this paper to carry out a comprehensive review of both disciplines, but rather to highlight key aspects of how gender and OD approach organisational change. Before doing so, it is useful to clarify what I understand by these approaches and where they come from.

Gender: meaning and roots

'Gender' means different things to different people and is often used synonymously with 'women'. Here I use the term to mean the unequal social relations between women and men in which unequal access to power and resources ensures that women are kept in a subservient position to men. These inequalities are not natural but are constructed and perpetuated by society. Powerful forces like culture, tradition, and religion ensure that such unjust gender relations are maintained. However, just as society has constructed gender inequalities, so they can also be dismantled; they are not set in stone and they can be changed.

Theorists and practitioners from all over the world have influenced the links between gender and organisational change within the development sector. The first feminist critiques of organisational theory were developed in the mid-1970s. At the heart of the analysis was the need to understand that organisations are not gender-neutral, but mirror gender differences to be found in the external environment. A number of fundamental inequalities were highlighted for examination with a 'gender lens', starting out with a gender analysis of power. Women and men experience power differently and unequally. Just as in the broader society, power and authority within organisations lie with men, as do access to and control over resources (Mills and Tancred 1992).

Other areas for examination include the positions of women in organisations. Women are in general still in the lower echelons of the organisational hierarchy, fulfilling traditional caring and nurturing roles such as administration and personnel. It is well documented that even when women do reach senior management positions, mechanisms are found to keep them in their place, so that they lack the real power to facilitate change.

While this kind of organisational analysis has had an impact in the development sector, the analysis of unequal gender relations began by looking at the position of women outside specific organisations and in the broader society.

At first, the focus was on exclusively on women; it is encapsulated in the Women in Development (WID) approach from the 1970s. Here, women were viewed as an untapped resource in the economy, and it was this aspect of their lives which was targeted for change. Income-generating projects (IGPs) for women are one notable outcome. The analytical framework, however, did nothing to try and shift the position of women in relation to men. For example, IGPs could well result in women having more money but lacking the power within their families to make any decisions about how that money is used. WID did not set out to change unequal gender relations but rather to try and improve women's lot within these.

In response to the limitations of WID, there was a conceptual shift in which it was argued that in order really to empower women, their position needed to be understood in relation to men – the Gender and Development approach (GAD). A key to the GAD approach, as already stated, is the importance of analysing where power lies between women and men. GAD theory and practice are committed to the

redistribution of power in order to bring about gender equality (Razavi and Miller 1995).

These unequal power relations are rooted in the different roles and responsibilities that society prescribes for women and men. Caroline Moser's 24-hour-day exercise, developed as step one of a gender planning framework, is a powerful tool in this regard. By analysing separately what a wife and husband do in the course of 24 hours, the stark differences between the roles and responsibilities of women and men are exposed. Typically, women fulfil the caring, nurturing, and family responsibilities and spend more time in the privacy of the home. In contrast, men have fewer responsibilities in the home and have greater access and connections to the wider world. This translates into more men being in decision-making roles at all levels in society as well as in the home. Men generally have more access to power and control of resources both inside and outside the home. The unequal relationship to power emerges as a fundamental area for change in order to bring about gender equality (Moser 1993).

The analysis of the individual is interlinked with an analysis of the external context, since it is society that shapes who we are. The ways in which culture, tradition, and religion determine how we shall be as women and men all need to be examined. These are not easy areas to explore, let alone change, since they represent powerful sites of learning from the cradle to the grave. However, adherents to the GAD approach believe that changes are possible over time. Unlike the biologically determined fact that you are either female or male, gender refers to relationships between women and men, which can be changed. The concept of a GAD approach was therefore first used in relation to development planning – 'based on the premise that the major issue is one of subordination and inequality, its purpose is that women through empowerment achieve equality and equity with men in society' (Moser 1993:4).

The analysis of what needs to be changed continues to be developed by practitioners and theorists. For example, the Social Relations Framework (Kabeer 1994) identifies five main areas for analysis, including institutions and the application of gender policies. In the case of the institutional analysis, there are five distinct but interrelated dimensions of social relationships that need to be addressed in terms of understanding how gender inequalities persist: rules, resources, people, activities, and power. For each there are new kinds of question that need to be asked, to tease out how women and men are affected

differently, so that the appropriate strategies can be developed to bring about the necessary changes.

Organisations also have a number of choices about how they can address gender inequalities. Kabeer (1994:307) identifies three different kinds of policy options in terms of gender-sensitive policies for external programme development, which I believe are also helpful and relevant to internal organisational policy, namely:

- 'gender-neutral' policies, in which interventions are intended to leave the unequal distribution of resources and responsibilities as they are;
- 'gender-specific' policies, which target the specific needs of women or men within existing unequal relations; and
- 'gender-redistributive' policies, which aim to transform the existing distributions in a more egalitarian direction.

The latter could refer to a less hierarchical decision-making structure and a shift towards a more collective responsibility for the development of internal organisational policies.

While much of the thinking on gender has been in relation to planning a given organisation's external programmes, it is increasingly clear that there is a need to bring a gender analysis into the organisation itself. This requires a shift in understanding about what needs to be changed and how. It is always much easier to raise questions of gender differences in an organisation's programmes 'out there' in the field, than it is to get your own house in order first.

As the links are made between the need to address internal organisational gender inequalities, as well as those found in external programmes, it becomes evident that there is no quick fix. The process of change in the context of the need for gender equality has to be approached with a long-term vision. In this regard it is helpful to think about the steps involved, in order to be clear about target areas and to generate a sense of progress. There are any number of points of departure, but an analysis of the external environment is often a good place to start. Identifying where women and men are situated in the broader political, social, and economic spheres immediately raises consciousness about the institutionalised and structured nature of unequal gender relations. It also makes very clear what it is that we are up against. The analysis can then shift from the bigger picture to the level of the organisation, which is, of course, shaped in so many ways by the external environment, unequal gender relations included.

Of course, the way in which gender is understood and experienced in terms of women's and men's roles and responsibilities is different in different cultures and societies. There cannot be any blueprint for change. Each individual and every organisation will have its own specific needs, for which tailor-made strategies will be needed. In view of its personal nature, the process of change has to be handled sensitively. Unless these fundamental principles are understood, the process becomes confused and frustrating for everyone.

OD: meaning and roots

In contrast to gender, OD comes out of a framework in which gender differences are inconsequential. Traditionally, OD has been developed as an approach to assist organisations to improve how they function in order to help them be more effective and efficient. The following description provides the key:

> Organisational development is an effort (1) planned, (2) organisation-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase an organisation's effectiveness and health through (5) planned interventions in the organisation's 'processes', using behavioural-science knowledge.
> (Beckhard 1969:9)

The OD process is characterised by a number of processes, which include the emphasis on team and group effort and the analysis of systems and structures. Typically, the intervention is carried out with the assistance of an external change agent, a consultant who facilitates the process of change.

The study of what makes organisations more effective, efficient, and competitive began at the turn of the century in the industrialised North. Scientific management made the links between financial incentives and productivity and continues to be enormously influential in mainstream thinking about the world of work. However, as the name implies, the scientific approach neglected to see people as human beings, as distinct from machines. As a result, new thinking developed in which the need for communication and consultative workplace processes were highlighted (Human Relations School). These shifts in thinking took time. By the 1960s, there was recognition of the place of conflict in organisational change, and the need to make work more meaningful and participatory (Sitas 1997).

The concept of OD therefore emerged from a process of thinking in a specific context over a period of time. It is clear that the dominant

theory and practice have been informed by and developed from within the private business sector and in the context of the North. This has raised questions about how OD can be transported into the non-profit development sector in the South.

The introduction of OD into the development sector is relatively recent (in the last ten years or so). After many years of a training-dominated approach to capacity building, NGOs and donors alike have recognised that this has limited impact in terms of improving organisational effectiveness. Hence a need was identified for a different kind of intervention (Fowler and Waithaka 1995). International donors and NGOs have taken OD to be more appropriate.

There are a number of fundamental differences in terms of approach between gender and OD (see Table 1). At the very core of the gender approach is an understanding that both the internal and external aspects of any organisation are negatively affected by gender inequalities. To build healthy, effective, and efficient organisations, women and men need to be able to play their different parts in full. The gender perspective allows gender inequalities to be seen and understood and so gives space for different needs to be addressed in order to bring about long-lasting change. While OD shares a commitment to helping organisations become more efficient and effective, the approach limits the possibility of real growth and personal development by not acknowledging the negative impact of gender inequality from the outset. An organisation may become more effective and efficient, but the failure to address the disempowerment of women severely diminishes the extent of change achieved.

The differences emerge at various levels. The following section considers what informs these differences and begs the question: is it possible to merge the two disciplines, or are we looking for a new approach?

Values and practice

The critical area for examination is what informs OD and gender approaches in terms of values and practice. The values are very clearly linked with the analysis of what needs to be changed. Both approaches are working towards the same goal, in the sense that both want to assist organisations to become more effective and efficient. However, the gender approach starts with the recognition that gender inequalities affect how an organisation functions, so that the links between gender equality, efficiency, and effectiveness are made from the outset.

A healthy organisation is one in which both women and men play equal parts. This analysis and the values that inform it reflect an understanding that such gender differences matter and need to be radically changed. The focus is on changing discriminatory attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs in the context of unequal gender relations.

Gender and OD approaches share many of the more general values, including being respectful, non-judgemental, open, and sensitive. There is also a strong commitment in both to raising awareness about the needs of the individual and supporting self-development. However, by analysing an organisation through a gender lens, the gender approach identifies and exposes the needs and differences for women and men, and helps to identify different strategies and support mechanisms to bring about effective change. For example, this analysis might lead to women attending a women-only management course.

In terms of practice, both gender and OD practitioners are usually involved in a process of engagement with a client before the intended work begins. In most cases this means the practitioner is an external consultant (sometimes a team) who is requested by the client organisation to carry out a set of tasks. The 'pre-engagement' process involves clarifying the actual request, ensuring that there is a close fit between what the organisation wants and what the consultant can offer, agreeing on areas of responsibility (terms of reference), methodology, and the implementation programme.

It is in these first communications and negotiations – before, for example, the strategic planning or organisational audit begins – that both organisation and consultant can share invaluable information about values, beliefs, and what they hope to achieve through the process. In all cases, this is a critical time as both sides lay down their cards. However, whatever their respective agendas, the process is never cut and dried. In the case of gender, there are particular sensitivities and the consultant needs to be conscious of several possible intervention strategies. For example, organisations are seldom likely to 'jump up and down' and ask for work on gender issues if they have requested strategic planning. Nevertheless, the consultant might well see an opportunity to work with the organisation and use it to raise gender issues.

On the one hand, if the organisation shares the consultant's views on the need for a gender perspective or is at least open to exploring what it means, there is a basis from which to proceed. On the other, however, if there is no shared view on the need to address gender inequalities,

the consultant may withdraw. It is, therefore, important to be open and transparent about values at this early stage even before the process gets underway.

In general, the value given to the OD intervention appears still to outweigh by far that given to gender. Gender is typically seen as something that can be addressed in a one-off workshop and as an intervention that falls outside the organisation's mainstream business. However, this is changing, and I have witnessed examples of organisations which are beginning to see the need for a holistic approach to change in which a gender perspective is critical from the outset. There is clearly a need for a long-term vision and support and, as already noted, there is no instant solution.

Recognising fundamental differences: a way forward

The analysis has shown that there are fundamental differences in approach between OD and gender. While the two approaches may use similar activities and tools as highlighted in the Zimbabwe workshop referred to above – strategic planning, organisational audits, developing missions and visions, etc. – the analysis of what needs to be changed in the first place is different.

Many of us involved in the gender approach are thinking about how we can develop new ways of working, drawing on theory and practice from both gender and OD. The following case study describes the ways in which an organisational change process can be approached with a gender perspective from the outset.

Background

My first contact with the client organisation, a South African NGO working in youth and career development, was at a gender-training workshop. The workshop was at the invitation of a donor and aimed to raise awareness and understanding about gender issues and to look at the implications at personal, organisational, and programme levels. The NGO's Director and Deputy Director attended and were obviously very committed and open to the issues being raised.

Following the gender-training workshop, the NGO was invited to participate in a 'sustainability' programme (set up by the same donor) of which one component was an organisational audit. As a result, a number of issues were raised, including a need to re-examine the organisation's mission and vision.

It was at this point that the NGO requested my services to facilitate a process to help them look at their mission and vision. As a 'gender consultant', I was excited about this offer, because for many in the NGO sector such a task is normally the terrain of an OD consultant. I therefore seized the opportunity to take the organisation through a process of analysis which would lead to a revised vision and mission by putting gender differences at the heart.

The first step was to look at the external environment. The task was to identify key events which had affected the lives of South Africans since 1994, and to look ahead to 2002. The events were linked to different spheres of life – political, economic, social, the NGO sector in general, and in terms of funding. The result was a complex table of information.

At this stage there was little or no distinction made about how these events had affected women and men differently. The following question was then posed, with the aim of confronting the 'gender-blind' analysis: *'What has been the impact on girls and women in the past, and how will the environment look in the future?'* This immediately raised awareness about how women and men are affected differently by broad political, social, and economic events and trends. By naming girls and women separately from men, the organisation was able to see that there were specific activities and trends that affected women. (It also opened up gaps in organisational knowledge about girls' and women's lives.)

In a similar way the NGO was asked to analyse the main problem that it is trying to address, incorporating a gender perspective, by answering *'What are the causes and effects of this problem for women and men?'* This led to an analysis of the impact of culture, tradition, and religion on gender roles and responsibilities, and how these limit choices for both sexes, but in particular for women.

In addressing both sets of questions, issues of race and class were also made explicit. The organisation was able to name its target group as black, rural, and working-class young women. Gender was therefore understood as a concept that is interlinked with race and class.

It became clear that if this NGO was going to redress some of these gender imbalances, it had to revise its vision and mission. Previously neither had included any gender analysis, but talked about young people as one, not recognising the different needs of women and men. The inclusion in the new vision statement of the NGO's intention to 'increase the career and life-choices available to disadvantaged South Africans, particularly young women in rural areas' embodied a new

way of thinking. Similarly, in the mission statement which emerged from the gender analysis of the main problem, the inclusion of young women was added: the NGO 'aims to equip young people for the world of work, focusing especially on young women in rural areas'. The previous vision and mission statements had no overt reference to the position of young women.

These important first steps in gender analysis have led the NGO to develop appropriate strategies to meet the specific needs of young women who are disadvantaged in relation to men. The Director claims that, since the workshop, the commitment to raising gender issues, and in particular to focusing on rural young women, has been profound. In all areas of training the NGO is insisting on a 60 per cent quota for female participants, whereas before the workshop, 75 per cent of participants were men. Staff are actively pursing what has become a gender-specific policy for the organisation.

At the same time, the staff recognise that the quota system in favour of women will not work by itself. Other strategies are needed. These include the development of materials to encourage women to explore a wider range of careers and the identification of working women who have successfully challenged existing gender stereotypes, thus providing new role models for younger women. While the impact of these different strategies is as yet unknown, it is possible that more will be developed – for example, training courses for girls. What has changed is that there is now the basis from which this NGO can develop its work within a gender justice framework.

Lessons

What are the lessons that can be drawn from this case study? The first relates to the choice of consultant and role of the Director. In this case, the Director was already aware of the perspective that I would bring to the workshop, from our meeting at the first gender-training event. Her decision to invite me to facilitate this organisational change workshop was therefore strategic, since she knew that I would work with a gender perspective. By the same token, I was aware of the Director's commitment and openness to a gender approach, which was invaluable. I knew I could open up new ways of approaching the questions of vision and mission from a gender perspective.

The Director also believed that attention to gender issues could not be imposed by management, but rather needed to evolve from a participatory process among staff. In this way, she anticipated that

there would be less resistance and a greater acceptance of a gender perspective as integral to the NGO's development. I also made a conscious decision not to use the word gender initially, but rather to talk about the differences for women and men. (In South Africa, 'gender' has become a very loaded term and often meets with resistance before one gets a chance to start working.) This allowed a way into other cross-cutting issues, namely race and class.

It is also clear that just as inequalities of race and class need to be addressed at different levels – personal, organisational, and programme – the same attention needs to be given to inequalities based on gender. While there was little opportunity to delve very deeply into the personal level in this workshop, the process started with the analysis and discussion of the main problem. The links between the external environment and the NGO's strategies for career development and training were more clearly made.

Developing models for appropriate organisational change

New ideas are emerging out of a range of innovative and exciting practices. However, much of this is being carried out by individuals and is not commonly shared, documented, or institutionalised. There is now a need to stop and reflect on practice and situate it within new theoretical frameworks.

While it is increasingly recognised by GAD theorists and practitioners that many of the gender frameworks and tools are limited when it comes to thinking about organisational change within a broad transformation agenda, there are also other issues at stake. As already noted, gender does not stand alone; it is intrinsically connected to other inequalities, all too easily referred to as 'cross-cutting' issues in current development jargon. However, while there is acknowledgement that such inequalities need to be addressed, there is often a lack of any meaningful commitment, at both personal and organisational levels, to developing change strategies that seriously take these dynamics into account. The 'cross-cutting' issues remain outside mainstream approaches to change and the *status quo* prevails.

All of the above raises critical questions that are linked to our conceptual thinking about organisational change: what exactly needs to change, and how is this going to be done?

Table 1: Key differences between gender approach and OD approach

	Gender approach to organisational change	OD approach to organisational change
Goal	Goal of organisational change is to build equitable, efficient, and effective organisations. Gender equality is at the forefront of organisational understanding and change. Gender is one of a number of unequal social relations and is interlinked with race and class, amongst others.	Goal of OD is to build efficient and effective organisations that can survive in the wider world.
Starting-point	Starts with an analysis of the individual, highlighting gender differences for women and links the 'I' with the external context, before coming to the organisation.	Starts with the organisation's systems and structures and links to the external context.
Analysis of organisations	Organisations are like people – they need to be understood in terms of thoughts and feelings as well as intellect and action. Organisations have their own gender dynamics and can be described as exhibiting masculine or feminine traits.	Analysis starts from mission, vision, structures and adds in issues of gender difference later on.
Analysis of power	Gender inequalities in the broader environment, in terms of power, access to, and control over resources are mirrored in organisations which then perpetuate those inequalities. Men continue to dominate in every sphere of political, social, and economic life and women are second class citizens.	Analysis of power relations, access to, and control of resources but not situated within a gender framework.
Analysis of the individual	Analysis of the individual is key to the gender approach which recognises gender differences. This leads to an understanding that self-development for women and men is different and we need different kinds of support and development, e.g. women may need assertiveness training while men require training in listening skills.	Individual development is addressed, but gender differences are not overtly examined.

continued ... .

Table 1 continued

	Gender approach to organisational change	OD approach to organisational change
Analysis of the external environment	Gender analysis, first developed in relation to external development programmes, works from the premise that gender roles and responsibilities are shaped by society – culture, tradition and religion – and can be changed.	Scan of external environment but not carried out with a gender perspective.
Gender and diversity	The need for gender justice shapes internal and external change process and is interlinked with other issues including race and class.	Gender is one of many 'diversity' issues to be addressed, e.g. age, religion, disability, sexuality, and economic status.
Values	Values are shaped by commitment to gender justice. Recognising differences in the way women and men experience life informs the organisational change process. Belief that effective and efficient organisations can only be developed if women and men are involved in equal part.	Values are shaped by commitment to organisational change processes in which people are critical and gender relations and differences are not highlighted.
Culture	Processes of change focuses on organisational culture in which differences in the way women and men are socialised and behave are challenged. Begins with changing discriminatory beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes based on gender.	Process looks at organisational culture without highlighting differences for women and men.

For far too long, gender frameworks have been perceived as limited and concerned only with what are mistakenly referred to as 'soft issues', i.e. to do with women's emotions and feelings. The links with and need to build a gender perspective into broader organisational change processes have only been made more recently. However, OD, in part because of its roots and longer history, is accepted more easily and is clearly perceived to be less threatening since it does not set out to change the *status quo* in terms of gender, race, and class.

Can gender justice and organisational change agendas be linked?

From my experience, there has to be commitment from every level in an organisation – in particular senior management – to the goal of eradicating gender inequality. The enormous challenge is, of course, how to get this. It appears that for some organisations this is not so difficult, because their analysis of the problem they are trying to solve has a gender dimension. For example, a women's organisation working on violence against women already has a commitment to gender justice. While working with women separately as a strategic policy choice, they may well be working with men too. On the other hand, there are many organisations that have no overt commitment to changing unequal gender relations because their main mission is, for instance, to build houses or help to redistribute land for the poor.

How can we help to make the link between organisations' work and gender inequalities? As I have argued, I believe the starting point has to be with an examination of both the internal and external contexts. Friedman and Rao (1998) have recently introduced a conceptual framework which does just this, and only then moves on to questions of vision and transformation, and how organisations can ensure sustainability and also monitor and evaluate progress.

The importance of this and other frameworks is to understand how organisational change can take place in a sustainable and gender-equitable way. The new ways of thinking come out of the frustrations and limitations of the conventional intervention strategies, which are only beginning to scratch the surface of what needs to change.

Dealing with resistance

The gender approach to organisational change inevitably raises fear and resistance, just like any other change process. However, 'gender and change' have a particular dynamic, which makes dealing with conflict essential. Why? In part it forces us to reassess who we are as individual women and men, a level at which the work is immediately personal and can be frightening. Another critical factor is power. Men feel threatened and want to hold on to power, and as such 'it is likely to be in men's strategic interests to resist the idea that gender inequalities exist, that such inequalities might be socially constructed, rather than naturally given, and that they can consequently be challenged and transformed' (Kabeer 1994). This is understood in the context of prevailing gender relations that embody male privilege. Denial of the

root causes of gender inequality is an ever-present challenge and block to change:

- 'Why rock the boat?'
- 'No one has ever said anything is wrong in our organisation. We have just had an organisational audit, and nothing came up about gender problems.'
- 'How will you control the outcomes once you have opened up the can of worms?'

These questions reflect common concerns when trying to raise a gender perspective. To address them is a complex task but not impossible. The overall aim is to bring organisations to a point whereby they can share in a vision of the world in which they are situated in an environment characterised by enabling and enriching values and practices for women as well as men. At the same time, the change agent has to acknowledge that the concerns are shaped by a reality that is going to take time to evolve. There is no simple cure, no magic medicine to make organisations and individual staff feel better quickly. It is indeed a change process.

For this reason, practitioners need to draw on a range of skills, including conflict management. Dealing with resistance should not be seen as proof of failure by the change agent leading the process, but rather an indication that real change is starting to happen and can therefore be embraced and skilfully managed.

Who should be the change agent/s?

One key issue concerns who should be carrying out this kind of work. It is extremely challenging and complex. Practical experience suggests that a team of practitioners may well be needed to assist organisations. The challenge here is that everyone involved shares the common goal that transformation needs a gender as well as a race and class perspective and that these cross-cutting issues need to be addressed at every level.

In Southern Africa today, an NGO may well have a number of external consultants working with it to help bring about change and yet there is often little or no serious attempt to bring these individuals together to discuss and agree on a comprehensive change process. The result is a number of isolated interventions that are unable to build on each other. The idea of a team is appealing, since no one person can offer everything that is needed. In terms of race and gender it may well

be that a mixed team is the most effective, but the critical aspect is that people share the same fundamental values. The commitment to ending discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and sexuality – among other diversity issues – is the essential criterion.

Developing a shared team approach is not easy, especially when so many practitioners work as individual consultants. This links closely to ideas shared at the Zimbabwe workshop referred to above, about the need for more openness about their practice between and among consultants. This discussion also raised issues about a code of ethics for practitioners.

The desire for a shared commitment and common understanding about gender often emerges as a strong need among those of us working in the field, because there is so much resistance to what we are doing. However, a common language about women's empowerment and gender policies can often mask different interpretations for different ends. Research has shown a lack of consensus about the objectives of gender equality and transformation, reflecting different ideological standpoints (Jahan 1995).

Gender and organisational culture

A critical area that has come under the spotlight in terms of the analysis of the internal workings of an organisation is organisational culture. While attention is given to this in OD practice, the difference once again is the way in which the gender approach addresses these questions.

Organisational culture goes far deeper than any formal statement of organisational principles. It is best thought about in terms of how values, beliefs, and attitudes are played out in practice. An organisation may be committed to full participation by its entire staff, while in practice this is rarely experienced. Men participate in full and women remain on the sidelines. There are many reasons why this is so. However, we come back to the fundamental understanding that organisations are not gender-neutral but mirror all the gender inequalities to be found in the external environment.

Questions of where power lies and where women are situated in relation to the seats of power are, therefore, critical. This links into the need to find new ways of understanding what power means. The idea that power is something that we can create as a source of positive energy distributed to everyone challenges traditional notions of power being about control of people (Rao and Stuart 1997). It is only when this

kind of analysis has been carried out that appropriate strategies can be developed for real change; changes that will affect both sexes positively.

Another indicator of gender and organisational culture is how time works in organisations. It is common for NGOs to operate flexi-time. Some organisations have two distinct shifts, e.g. 8 a.m–4 p.m. and 10 a.m–6 p.m. It is not unsurprising that women tend to dominate the first shift and men the second, for powerful gender inequalities persist. Women have to accommodate a whole range of childcare and domestic activities in addition to what they get paid to do at work. Such constraints do not affect men to the same degree.

By bringing a gender perspective to the analysis of organisational culture, it is evident that change has to take place at many levels. For example, once an awareness of the two-shift system is raised, it can be further analysed in terms of when key decisions are made and by whom. When are the meetings scheduled? Who attends? And does it matter if these meetings go on beyond 4 p.m. – if so, for whom? It is this kind of detailed analysis that is needed in order to expose the complexity of what it is that we are trying to change.

Many of the areas for organisational change were identified in feminist theory long ago. For example, the links between the private and public spheres of women's and men's lives. The critical gap in terms of organisational change processes in the development sector is that while the theoretical importance of these issues is acknowledged by some, it is not emerging as a mainstream concern in practice. Rather, mainstream thinking tends to ignore unequal gender relations.

Conclusion

While large amounts of money, time, and other resources are being poured into OD, as an approach to organisational change OD clearly fails to address gender inequality. In stark contrast, the gender approach opens up a very different way of analysing organisations and provides an opportunity to bring to the surface other kinds of inequality. The gender approach to organisational change gets right to the heart of what is fundamentally wrong, namely that power is unequal and remains firmly in the hands of men. From this point of departure, everything else flows. Since the gender approach is breaking new ground, every organisational experience based on using a gender perspective needs to be documented and analysed. Obviously, there is no blueprint for change but important lessons are being learned that can help us in developing new theoretical frameworks and practice.

Building gender awareness is just the beginning; the challenge continues way beyond and takes us deep into organisational culture, systems, structures, and programmes in order to bring about long-lasting change for the benefit of women and men. Breaking new ground requires vision, commitment, risks, and the belief that real change and development is only possible when women and men can be involved and benefit equally.

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