



Your own ideas and experiences of gender equality issues in your day-to-day life and work are the starting point for this Action Guide.

This unit will help you to:

- describe and reflect on your own ideas and experiences of gender equality
- explain why gender mainstreaming is an issue for your organisation
- describe your own working context and what stage it is at in gender mainstreaming

Allow about an hour for this unit, and extra time if you want to discuss your ideas with others.

These first activities relate to the personal and professional. They are to help you think about your own ideas, and also to give a taster of the kind of activities you might undertake with others.

Personal

Reflection

As a starting point for thinking about gender equality it is helpful to reflect on your own experiences. This can help you remember the messages, spoken or unspoken, you received from family, friends and peers. You become more aware of the complex influences that shape expectations of men and women – how they behave, what they can do and what they are like. The first activity therefore asks you to think back to when you first became aware of gender equality in your own life. Spend a few minutes thinking about these questions and make brief notes. Try to tease out your own values and assumptions and how they came about.

When did you discover that you were different from the opposite sex?

What messages did you receive as a child about gender – about the roles and qualities of and expectations of women and men?

Where did these messages come from?

How did this early learning shape your adult values and assumptions?

ACTIVITY

Definitions

How do you define gender? How would you explain the term to someone else? Try not to look at the definitions below before writing your own definition.

"I think gender is..."

ACTIVITY

One dictionary definition is: "**Gender**: the state of being male, female or neuter".

A sociological definition is: "**Sex** refers to the biological division into male and female, while **gender** draws attention to the socially constructed differences between women and men". For example, while only women can give birth (biologically determined), biology is not a factor in who raises the children (gendered behaviour).

The *GMS Handbook* definition is:

Gender is "the set of characteristics, roles and behaviour patterns that distinguish women from men which are constructed not biologically but socially and culturally. The sex of an individual is biologically determined, whereas gender characteristics are socially constructed, a product of nurturing, conditioning, and socio-cultural norms and expectations. These characteristics change over time and from one culture to another. Gender also refers to the web of cultural symbols, normative concepts, institutional structures and internalised self-images which, through a process of social construction, define masculine and feminine roles and articulate these roles within power relationships." (Glossary, p 61)

Gender is an issue in development work because men and women have different life courses and are affected differently by development policies. As well as being an end goal of development, gender equality is also a route through which other human development goals can be achieved.

Timeline

The next activity asks you to describe how your ideas, awareness and knowledge regarding gender issues developed in your work. For example:

- How did you come to be doing your present job, with your present interests or responsibilities in relation to gender equality?
- When did you first become aware of gender equality as an issue?
- When did you first become involved in work on gender issues?
- What external events or interventions influenced you?
- What key personal experiences or learning influenced you?
- What turning points/changes in values and assumptions can you identify?

Take a sheet of paper, turn it sideways and draw a line. Mark the decades on it. Then use it to answer the questions above and to plot the stages in your development. Show personal events above the line and public/political events below the line (see example on next page).



ACTIVITY

Personal events

1970 1980 1990 2000

Public events

The kind of personal events you might have described include: key moments in education or training; books you have read; people you have met (friends, colleagues, teachers); experiences at work; sudden moments of insight; or experiences like parenthood.

Public events could be things like: international mandates or agreements; the impact of public policies or legislative changes; and external or political events in the world/region/country/locally.

Your timeline may also show how personal and public events interact.

Further activity

Discuss ideas and compare your experiences with a colleague or friend.

Professional

First some more definitions:

Gender mainstreaming "is the process of bringing a gender perspective into the mainstream activities of government at the policy, programme and project levels" (*GMS Handbook*, p 9).

The **Gender Management System (GMS)**, developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat, is "a network of structures, mechanisms and processes put in place within an existing organisational framework, to guide, plan, monitor and evaluate the process of mainstreaming gender into all areas of the organisation's work, in order to achieve gender equality and equity within the context of sustainable development.

"A GMS may be established at any level of government, or in institutions such as universities, inter-governmental or non-governmental organisations, private sector organisations or trade unions. The Gender Management System as presented in [the GMS] handbook is designed primarily for governments." (*GMS Handbook*, p 11)

Why now?

The next question is, why is gender mainstreaming an issue for your organisation now? For example, what are the factors that have led you to being in your role, faced with your particular task and seeking help from this Action Guide?

In a few words, say what you see as the three main factors for wanting or needing to learn about gender mainstreaming and the GMS (try to do this without looking down the page first).

ACTIVITY

1

2

3

Some factors you might have listed include:

- awareness of international mandates
- change of government
- change of management
- pressure from within
- condition of funding/aid
- political pressure
- economic pressure
- new position
- personal interest

What stage?

What stage is your organisation at in relation to gender issues and, more specifically, to gender mainstreaming and the GMS?

The activity that follows will help you build up a picture of your organisation in relation to key features of the GMS (covered more fully in Unit 3 'Using the *GMS Handbook*').

ACTIVITY

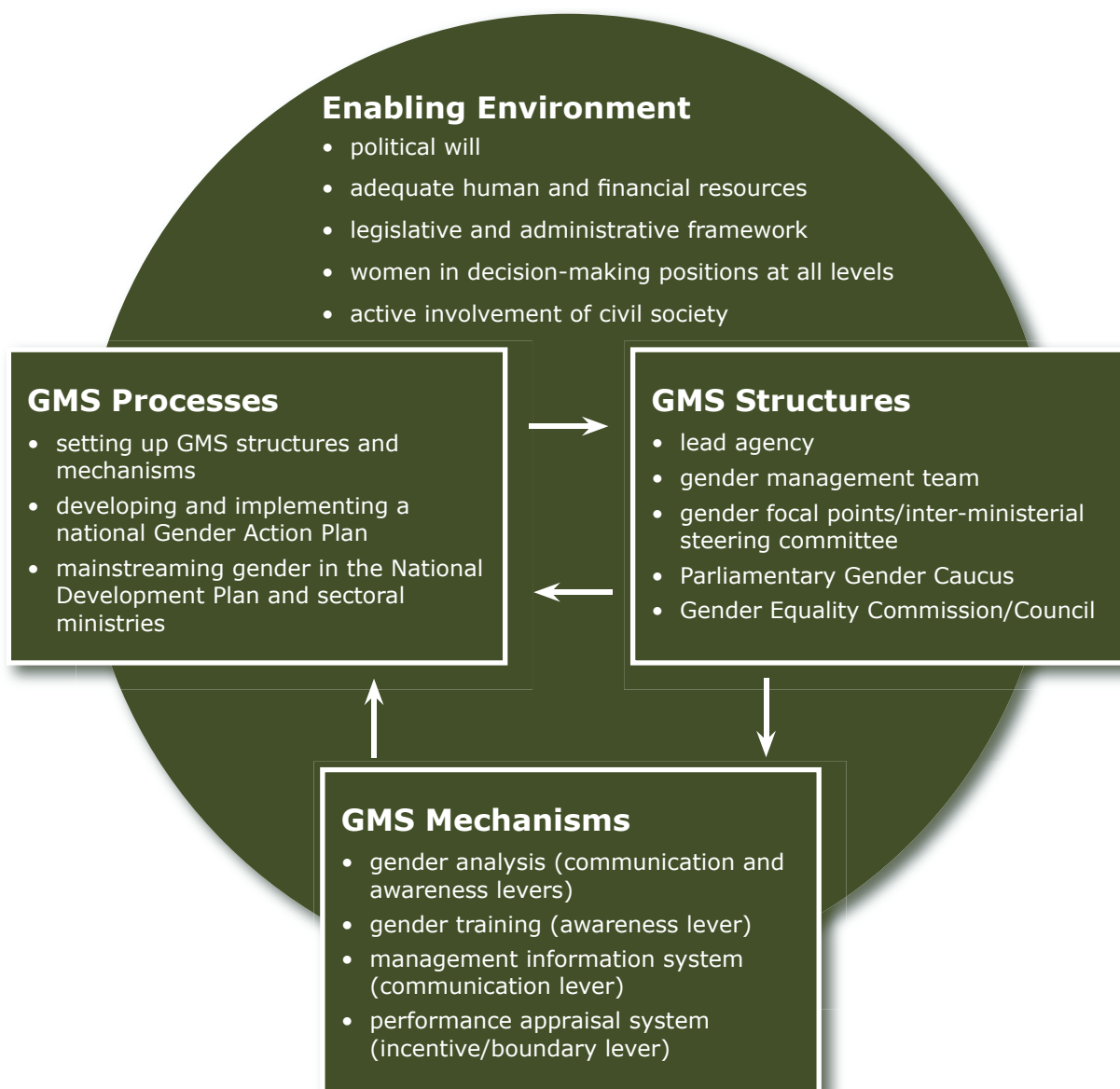
Name of organisation:

Your position in the organisation:

Your role in the organisation:

Look at the diagram of the GMS on the next page. Which of the features apply to your organisation? (For example, in your view: Is there political will? Is a gender management team in position? Is gender analysis being carried out?)

Mark each feature Y, N, DK, NA (yes/no/don't know/not applicable).



For the items you marked 'yes' on the diagram, rate the progress that has been made in your organisation on a rising scale of 1-5 (1 = no action; 5 = successfully in place).

This gives you a rough picture of where your organisation is now in terms of introducing a gender management system.

Further activity

Discuss your assessment of your organisation with a manager or colleague. You could carry out short interviews, using the same questions, to find out if others agree with your assessment.

Checklist

At the end of each unit in this Action Guide there is a list of what has been covered. Use it to review your progress.



- Describe and reflect on your own ideas and experiences of gender equality.
- Explain why gender mainstreaming is an issue for your organisation.
- Describe your own working context and what stage it is at in gender mainstreaming.



Use this page to make notes.