
Background Information

ICA Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality

1995 Adoption of the resolution "Gender Equality in Co-operatives" which established gender equality as a global priority for the ICA and called on members to establish action plans to address the issue.¹

1996 Letter from ICA President sent to members asking for information to evaluate the level of implementation of the resolution (gender disaggregate statistics on membership, information on women's participation in power structures and decision-making, and copies of any plans/policies for achieving gender equality).

Gender disaggregated statistics requested from ICA membership.

1997 Report summarizing the information collected and suggesting elements for inclusion in a strategy presented to the ICA Board. The Board tabled the report and agreed to re-examine ways of implementing the resolution.

ICA Board reviewed proposals to the ICA General Assembly for changes to the ICA Rules and Standing Orders from a gender perspective.

General Assembly approved adding promoting "...equality between men and women in all decision-making and activities within the co-operative movement..." as an objective to the ICA and revised the standing orders to allow equal opportunity for qualified women and men to participate in ICA decision-making structures.

1998 Draft Gender Strategy discussed by ICA Board (Tokyo). No specific action with regard to the strategy was taken.

1999 ICA Board (Quebec) approved "ICA 2005" and implementation plan for 2000 which included developing an ICA Gender Strategy.

Definitions

Gender is defined as the social meanings given to biological sex differences. It is an ideological and cultural construct but is also reproduced within the realm of material practices; in turn, it influences the outcomes of such practices. It affects the distribution of resources, wealth, work, decision-making and political power, and the enjoyment of rights and entitlements within the family as well as public life. Despite variations across cultures and over time, gender relations throughout the world entail asymmetry of power between men and women as a pervasive trait. Thus, gender is a social stratifier, and in this sense it is similar to other stratifiers such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and age. It helps us understand the social construction of gender identities and the unequal structure of power that underlies the relationship between the sexes.²

¹ Prior to the resolution, actions were taken by both the Board and the ICA on issues such as women in development, gender issues in co-operatives and preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women

² UN. Report of the Secretary-General: 1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work (A/54/227)

Gender mainstreaming: Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for men and women of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality" (Economic and Social Council, agreed conclusions 1997/2³).

Rationale for Gender Equality

- * Moral and ethical issue - basic human rights of women and men
- * Promotion of economic growth based on the full use of human resources – "gender equality is good for business" and thus brings added value to its membership and community - valuing differences for social and economic benefits.

Challenges

Achieving gender equality is a difficult task, but one that must be addressed at all levels.

The lack of understanding of what gender equality really means is perhaps the greatest hindrance⁴. The simplistic interpretation is that equality means treating people in the same way and thus applying existing policies and practices in the same way. Equal treatment of persons in unequal situations will simply perpetuate inequalities. The challenge is how to identify barriers and change institutional cultures so as to create a level playing field for equal opportunities for women and men. This is different than simply integrating women into existing policies and practices, as it requires an approach based on gender mainstreaming or assessing the implications for both women and men. Gender therefore is not a women's issue but an issue that must be tackled by both men and women together.

However, once gender sensitive policies and strategies are in place, there is no assurance that organizational, much less individual behavioral change will be forthcoming. For despite the fact formal legislation, regulations and policies are not discriminatory and therefore seem to provide equal opportunity, there are still other invisible barriers which bar women from fully participating in decision-making⁵ and/or make it undesirable to them. Achieving gender equality will involve redefining power relationships, overcoming non-legal barriers to equality, and confronting gender stereotypes.

Recent analysis of progress has also identified a number of other issues indicating that actions taken to date remain insufficient.

- * Despite the emerging focus on issues of masculinity and gender identities, traditional gender stereotypes and

³ United Nations Economic and Social Council, agreed conclusions 1997/2

⁴ The replies to the 1996 survey clearly indicated a general lack of understanding of gender issues.

⁵ On average, only 3 to 6 percent of top managerial positions are held by women. (Marie-Thérèse Claes. « Women, men, and management styles » in ILO International Labour Review, No. 4, 1999.)

discriminatory attitudes towards women continued to pose a barrier to gender equality.

- * The growing political rhetoric in support of gender equality was not matched by policies and programmes to make this a reality.
- * The absence of a critical mass of women in decision-making was a major obstacle to moving the agenda forward.⁶

What this means is that ICA must tackle these challenges from a series of standpoints and in a serious and systematic way. It must look inward as an organization to its staff, its elected leaders, its structures, policies and programmes. It must look wider in terms of its membership and identify ways to stimulate change. Finally, as a member of civil society, ICA also has an obligation to identify ways in which it can contribute to progress in promoting gender equality in society at large.

Simply put, ICA must build its internal and external capacity to promote gender equality – promoting organizational changes and systematically review existing "good" policies and begin "benchmarking" to see if they are in fact creating equal opportunity.

⁶ Report of the Secretary-General: Emerging issues containing additional material for further actions and initiatives for the preparation of the outlook beyond the year 2000 (E-CN-6-2000-PC/4 of 7 February 2000)



ICA Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality

Aim	Implementation of ICA Rules on the aims of the ICA: “to promote equality between men and women in all decision-making and activities within the co-operative movement” ⁷
Target	ICA Structure (Elected officials, staff, ICA bodies) ICA Member Organizations
Actions	Strengthen institutional capacity/arrangements to promote gender equality <ul style="list-style-type: none">* Capacity-building of staff and membership on gender issues* Gender balance of elected officials and staff* Ensure accountability and monitoring* Ensure adequate human and financial resource allocation

Priority and Proposals

1. Genuine and clear statement of commitment from top leadership and visibility of competent women and men leaders

Statements

- * Draft a statement from the ICA President, ICA Director-General, ICA Board and disseminate with the adopted ICA Strategy on Gender Equality

Demonstration of Commitment at ICA level

- * Adopt Policy on ICA Statutory Meetings to include directives on ensuring:
 - gender balanced speakers at meetings at the global and regional levels and strongly encourage SBs to do the same.
 - gender balanced delegations (encourage member organizations to send gender balanced delegations and reward compliance - public recognition, certificates or reduction in meeting fees.
- * Better communicate activities undertaken by the ICA at all levels to promote gender equality especially regional activities in electronic and print formats.
- * Issue annual statement from ICA President for International Women’s Day (8 March) as a means of disseminating information to promote progress in the advancement of

⁷ ICA Rules. Object 2 (e).

women and gender equality, and encourage ROs, SBs and MOs to mark the day.

In order for genuine commitment to exist at the senior level of management whether in individual co-operatives or within the ICA structure, people must understand the issue. It is essential that gender training be provided at all levels of an organization, but beginning at the very top

2. Capacity-building

Gender training

- * ICA Board Members (extend the meeting to allow for a one/two-day session by a gender training specialist – and include in the ICA budget an allocation for new Board members to benefit from gender training)
- * ICA staff including regional directors
- * ICA specialized body Chairs and Secretaries (organize gender training for the Chair and Secretaries as an additional day/s to the annual consultation meeting)

ILO has noted that almost universally, women have failed to reach leading positions in major corporations or private sector organizations irrespective of their abilities.⁸ Yet, it has been proven that “women possess qualities which could contribute significantly to improved communication, co-operation, team-spirit and commitment within organizations – qualities which today are essential for achieving excellence and maintaining the necessary networks of contacts and relationships.”⁹

3. Gender balance of elected officials and staff

Enabling environment for increased participation of women in power and decision-making

- * Achieve target of at least 30% of ICA decision-making positions to be held by women at global, regional and sectoral levels (ICA Board, Regional Executive Committees or Council, SB Executive Committee or Boards) by 2005.
- * Promote public awareness on the positive role and contribution of women in decision-making positions in co-operatives.
- * Review ICA staff and personnel policy and encourage MOs to review their employment policies and rules to enable women to reach decision-making positions.

⁸ ILO.

⁹ Marie-Thérèse Claes. « Women, men, and management styles » in ILO International Labour Review, No. 4, 1999.

¹⁰ The term "glass ceiling" was coined in the 1970s in the United States to describe the invisible artificial barriers, created by attitudinal and organizational prejudices, barring women from top executive jobs.

- * Include in all management programmes an element of gender awareness and studies demonstrating the business savy of gender diverse management. Address issues such as the glass ceiling¹⁰.

In order for gender issues to be considered a real priority of work, responsibility and accountability must be assigned and progress must be measurable both in qualitative terms and quantitative terms. As it is difficult to strike the balance between the marginalization and the mainstreaming of gender activities, real efforts must be made to evaluate progress. "Good data, well used is essential to good policy."¹¹ More consistent documentation and dissemination of experiences, collection of data - disaggregated by sex, will assist in identify progress – or the lack of – and allow the ICA to develop appropriate policy or operational activities.

4. Accountability and Monitoring

Structure:

- * Appoint individuals who will be responsible for ensuring that gender issues are addressed (gender focal points).
 - Ensure that a gender focal point is appointed in each regional office who is able to regularly report on activities undertaken to promote gender equality. (Note: ROAP has a gender advisor. Gender in all other offices is 'integrated' in programme, but no specific responsibility for gender has been assigned.)
 - Request SBs to appoint individual to be responsible for following up on gender equality promotion and providing information regarding their activities dealing with gender issues.
- * Prepare Regional Gender Strategies by 2002 which include a detailed plan of action to improve gender balance in ICA regional structures including regional specialized bodies and member organizations.

Information for monitoring Collection or qualitative and quantitative evidence of progress.

- * Collect gender disaggregate statistics for membership and employees.
- * Collect and share positive experience and replicable models for achieving gender equality from member organizations in their

¹¹ International Labour Review. Introduction. "Women, Labour and Work". 1999.

capacity as employers¹² and within their institutional structures (elected officials).

- * Evaluate and prepare on annual basis a report from ICA Development on the impact of its programmes on promoting gender equality not only for internal reporting purposes, but also for wider dissemination.

Accountability and Monitoring (*continued*)

- * Provide support for initiative to map the participation of women in the ICA as a tool to identify progress or the lack of progress.

Although the allocation of new resources to carry out a number of the activities to promote gender equality will be needed, many can be implemented by the reallocation of existing resources. However, reallocation will require real commitment to making gender equality a real priority.

5. Human and financial resources

- * Assess budget to see what proportion of financial resources are allocated to activities to promote gender equality especially with regard to development programmes, but also with regard to communication and staff training and present this on annual basis to the ICA Board and to MOs.
- * Seek new resources for new and existing programmes with gender issues.
- * Keep gender balance in mind when recruiting for new ICA staff.

Adopted: April, 2000

¹² These could include equal opportunity policies, affirmative action programmes, diversity management total E-quality, mentoring, as well as actions taken to create workplaces that are more flexible, value diverse, people-oriented and family-friendly.