

LEARNING FROM THE CIVIL SOCIETY CHALLENGE FUND: GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



KEY INSIGHTS

This paper explores the ways in which CSCF funded projects have worked to promote gender equality and empower women and girls to have greater voice, choice and control.

- 1 One size does not fit all. Gender and women and girls' empowerment is a challenging and culturally sensitive issue. The most successful projects were those that demonstrated a high degree of sensitivity to cultural norms and political contexts.
- 2 Projects that achieved results in gender equality and women's empowerment had a clear vision of what was to be achieved, made the move from individual to group empowerment, they involved all stakeholders, including men and boys, enabled access to information and were flexible to the changing realities of implementation.
- 3 Understanding and capturing results in a relevant way is an important element of improving performance in gender equality and empowerment.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

DFID has a strong commitment to addressing gender inequality and women's empowerment, to give women voice, choice and control¹, as a goal in its own right, and as an integral part of addressing poverty, insecurity and vulnerability.

Women's empowerment is a complex concept. Within the CSCF it has been broadly defined as the ability of women and girls to participate fully and equally in all aspects of political, economic and social life, with the overall goal of improving quality of life for women, men and the community.

DFID's Strategic Vision for Girls and

The **CIVIL SOCIETY CHALLENGE FUND (CSCF)** was a demand-led fund which aimed to enable poor and marginalised people to have a voice on issues that affect them and to be included in local and national decision making forums. Running from 2000 to 2015, it supported 526 projects in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East, each with a grant of up to £500,000 and running for 3 to 5 years.

This learning brief is one of six, prepared upon completion of the CSCF, focusing on key areas of best practice within the fund. These briefs aim to share learning with practitioners and civil society learning networks, and help inform future fund management in DFID and beyond.

CSCF AND GENDER EQUALITY

All CSCF projects have included gender as a cross cutting theme. The fund has directly supported women's empowerment projects and has facilitated exchanges in learning to improve the focus on gender and inclusion in design, implementation and the reporting of results.

Since 2010, 23 projects have had a primary focus on MDG3, to promote gender equality and empower women. These projects had a total DFID budget of £10.1 million to work with women and girls, as well as men and boys. Target groups included women in poor coastal and rural communities, migrant women, women in low-income sectors and girls in and out of school.

The projects have focused on a wide range of issues, including the protection of women and girls' sexual and reproductive rights, women's rights around access to HIV/AIDS support and the reduction of discrimination, tackling gender-based violence in post-conflict environments, women's political participation and leadership, the rights of migrant women, girls' rights to education.

Women, introduced in 2011, has sought progress against four linked 'game-changing' outcomes:

- 1 **Girls' completion of primary and secondary education**
- 2 **Economic empowerment**
- 3 **Ability to live free from violence**
- 4 **Universal sexual and reproductive health and rights**

Underpinning these four pillars is a focus on the creation and improvement of an 'enabling environment'. DFID has promoted 'gender mainstreaming' as a core strategy to promote and measure gender equality and women's empowerment, and address the Strategic Vision. The CSCF has enabled projects to respond to this by carrying out specific training

sessions on approaches to gender mainstreaming, requiring projects to provide disaggregated beneficiary data and providing technical support to enable them to do so, and by recording lessons on gender equality and women and girls' empowerment.

SUCCESS FACTORS

There is no standard formula for achieving women's empowerment. It is deeply affected by the target community as well as the political, economic and social context in which it operates.

Some CSCF projects worked in contexts where asking women to

RESULTS

All projects funded by the CSCF were required to address the core CSCF objectives below. Of the 23 projects identified as having a main focus on women's and girl's empowerment, the performance exceeded the level of the portfolio as a whole, with 91.3% meeting or exceeding expectations, against 79% for the whole portfolio. This demonstrates tangible contributions to women and girls' empowerment for the estimated 3.2 million women and girls who were those project's beneficiaries. The results against the objectives are shown in Table 1. Below are examples of projects against the 3 objectives.

1 Local and national decision-making, and global advocacy: A project in Peru worked with women members of civil society, training them in monitoring, leadership and communication skills to enable them to monitor policy and change their discourse with local and national authorities. The project beneficiaries campaigned successfully to achieve a Supreme Court agreement on standards of justice for rape survivors, amend a law to widen compensation eligibility for victims of sexual violence and secure a regional policy agreement on services improvements for survivors, benefitting around 500,000 women in the two target regions.

2 Innovative service delivery: A project in South Africa addressing violence against women, combined rights awareness work with targeted provision of medical, police and counselling services, establishing a crisis centre, supported by civil society trained to support and refer the women. This provided better access for women to receive support, and enhanced police understanding of the issues involved and their openness to supporting victims of violence, and greater collaboration between all service providers on these issues, ultimately benefitting around 100,000 women.

3 Service delivery in difficult environments: A project in DRC worked with over 11,000 male and female small farmers to build farmer organisations in a post-conflict environment, to improve food production and food security, whilst also raising awareness of gender equality and enhancing sharing of decision making. Design of innovative 'community fields' have successfully increased production and collaboration, with 40% yield increases and 55% of supported farmers able to sell spare produce at a profit.

CSCF objective	[A]: % of projects that met CSCF objective	[B]: % of [A] that met / exceeded performance expectations
1a. Improve capacity of southern civil society to participate in ...local decision-making	100	91.3
1b. ...national decision-making	65.2	86.6
1c. ...global advocacy	13	100
2. Provide innovative service delivery	43.5	90
3. Provide service delivery in difficult environments	26.1	83.3

Table 1. Results

attend group meetings, or work together as a group, challenged well established social norms. Projects worked to break down barriers to group meetings by initially supporting individuals in private spaces, such as their homes, a process that introduced new ideas and aspirations and built confidence (see the Nepal project, on the right). Other projects used broadcast programmes and phone-ins on local radio to raise awareness of individuals in their own homes.

For projects that dealt with sensitive issues such as gender based violence, or reproductive rights, wider community buy-in, including that of men and boys, was necessary. Different entry points were used to address other issues and target more sensitive issues at the same time (see the Tanzania project, on the right).

Some projects worked in an environment where activism by civil society was widely recognised and accepted, and direct engagement by civil society with government services, to build capacity and advocate for change, was possible. Other projects needed to work initially with local, more informal structures such as user groups, Village Development Committees in order to engage politically and advocate for change.

There are five common factors that support results in the CSCF projects addressing gender equality and women's empowerment:

- 1 Grant holders and local partners have a clear vision of what they want to achieve.** A clear vision stems from a strong understanding of discriminatory social norms and realistic expectations of what can be achieved in a limited project time frame. In most cases this requires consultation with local communities, civil society and stakeholders to understand the constraints and issues faced by different groups, to inform that vision.
- 2 Moving from individual to group empowerment.** Even if a project starts by raising awareness and building confidence at an individual level, working together as a group is an important and powerful step in building a critical mass, to be heard publicly by decision-makers and change the attitudes,

behaviours and practices of others.

Facilitating an individual to use their increased confidence and knowledge to enable others can help to build groups, whilst at the same time building that individual's own empowerment. This has been a regular feature of equality and empowerment- focused projects in the CSCF portfolio. Overcoming fear in the context of women's empowerment is often relevant. As women start to meet and identify common issues, the value of working as a group to address them becomes apparent.

Combining group work with advocacy for those groups to be represented in decision-making structures is an important element in moving from challenge to change. CSCF projects, and the civil society organisations engaged in them, have played important roles in facilitating this.

- 3 Working with all stakeholders, including men and boys.** Working with those who have the potential to block the choices, voice and decisions of women is critical to women's empowerment, including traditional and religious leaders. It is important to find opportunities for them to engage with the target group.
- 4 Access to information, and ability to use it, is a crucial part of the empowerment process.** Information on rights or entitlements, provided in a timely and appropriate manner, has a galvanising effect. Civil society organisations supported by the CSCF have played an important role in providing information, and, critically, supporting target groups to use information to claim their rights.
- 5 Flexibility in adapting the project approach to changing realities on the ground.** For example integrating additional rights issues into the work with women to reflect a need, including an additional key community institution in recognition of its influence, including finance and income generation activities to enable women to become more economically empowered and thus able to participate in advocating for wider change.

WOMEN AND GIRLS' HEALTH

In Tanzania, a project working on girls' access to secondary education, used the entry point of getting girls into schools to also raise awareness and start to address the sensitive topic of their sexual and reproductive health rights. Health clubs were formed at schools to educate girls on their rights to freedom from sexual coercion or violence, to inform them of where to report cases or seek help, and to raise awareness on STIs and HIV/AIDS. The clubs were extended to include boys which helped to raise joint awareness of rights and responsibilities.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SPORT

A project in Zambia working to improve young women and girls' participation in local leadership and community development, engaged girls in sports groups, whilst building their life skills and rights awareness, supporting them to become local peer leaders and lead local development initiatives in girls' sport and more widely.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In Nepal, a project addressing the rights of excluded women in Makwanpur District, spent time meeting individual women to inform them of the seven key rights to which they are entitled under the Nepali constitution. As their confidence and understanding of their rights and entitlements grew, the project facilitated the formation of Community Action Groups (CAGs) and supported CAGs to attend village development committee meetings, participate in local planning and approach local authorities for better provision of services and support. Many local level successes were achieved including allocation of funds from the district council to support single women's vocational training and securing safe drinking water in the villages from the district health office.



UNDERSTANDING AND CAPTURING RESULTS

Capturing results is an important element of improving performance in gender equality and empowerment. CSCF project visits prioritised learning about gender and aimed to facilitate the sharing of approaches and insights. A visit to Uganda in 2014 produced a Practice Brief on gender with recommendations on measuring results for girls and women. Based on a final review of the CSCF projects, the following recommendations are the most pertinent:

- 1 Gender targets need to be informed by robust gender and power analyses that uncover the gendered differences in roles, access to resources and decision making, as well as discriminatory social norms and the institutions that uphold them. Baseline gender data need to reflect this context.
- 2 It is not always appropriate for projects to aim simply at women having a 50% share of project benefits. This may not reflect a change in gender equality. In some cases, specific needs and services are gender specific, such as antenatal care. In others, it may be more appropriate to have proportionally higher resources allocated to women, to reflect a previous imbalance of power, for example, participation in local politics. In some cases, aiming for 50% participation or representation in activities is not feasible in the time period of a CSCF project (3-5 years), where change may require significant time and careful investment to address entrenched cultural norms preventing women's participation.
- 3 Projects need to identify indicators of change for women and girls at outcome and output level, either by including gender specific outcomes, or having gender disaggregated targets within an overall outcome, in order to capture varying degrees of achievement for men and women, boys and girls. It is also important to consider gender results within other vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities and young children.
- 4 Measuring changes in complex gender relations requires qualitative methods to capture subtle changes in the ways in which women and girls interact with their peers, leaders and service providers, or in order to capture changes in the balance of power within households or local political arenas, a key aspect of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Tools such as knowledge, attitudes and practice (KAP) surveys, as well as focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and use of techniques such as 'most significant change' are needed.

ENDNOTES

¹ DFID, 2014, A New Strategic Vision For Girls and Women: Stopping Poverty Before it Starts

REFERENCES

Triple Line and Crown Agents, 2014, Practice Brief: Gender and social inclusion in civil society projects in Uganda

DFID, Triple Line and Crown Agents, 2012, Learning Visit to Nepal and India

Triple Line and Crown Agents, 2015, PCR

Photo (front cover)

Africa Educational Trust, Strengthening village education in South Sudan (Image of girls with their 'school mother', who mentors them and advocates for girls' education)

Photo (back page)

Find Your Feet (FYF), Social and economic empowerment of adolescents in rural Uttar Pradesh, India

This report was prepared by Triple Line Consulting in joint venture with Crown Agents. Any views within are not necessarily held by DFID.



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The CSCF has been managed by Triple Line and Crown Agents from 2010-2015.

This paper looks at lessons and achievements in gender equality made by CSCF funded projects.