



AN INTERNATIONAL GENDER STRATEGY TO TRANSFORM HOW WE ADDRESS HUNGER

MAY 2020

AN INTERNATIONAL GENDER STRATEGY TO TRANSFORM HOW WE ADDRESS HUNGER

HOW THE INTERNATIONAL GENDER UNIT CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVIDENCE-BASED ADJUSTMENT OF THE GENDER STRATEGY

By Action Against Hunger Canada's International Gender Unit

BACKGROUND

In 2010, as part of the learning process that followed the implementation of a gender-based violence and food security and livelihoods programme in Uganda, Action Against Hunger identified a policy and technical guidance gap pertaining to gender equality and gender-based violence. It was apparent that a plausible link existed between gender inequality and hunger, yet proper evidence was needed to explore this further. Additionally, although Action Against Hunger had largely integrated a gender-sensitive approach into its work, there was a need to formalise the technical framework and commitments of the organization to a gender-focused approach.

This realisation triggered wider constructive discussions on gender equality, especially in relation to hunger, with a range of operational and technical staff. These discussions revealed contrasting opinions and approaches, however they led to the general acknowledgment that gender inequality acted as a barrier to adequate nutrition and that the organisation should commit to understanding and addressing it more comprehensively. It was decided that Action Against Hunger would prioritise gender equality at strategic and technical levels by developing a gender policy and technical tools to facilitate gender-sensitive programming. Thanks to the concerted efforts of committed staff, a proposal was submitted to SIDA in 2012 and funding was subsequently granted in 2012 and 2013 for the development of

the gender policy, the toolkit, as well as a comprehensive training plan to operationalise the changes.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENDER POLICY

To lead this substantial work, the International Gender Unit was formed. From 2013-2015, technical tools were designed and capacity to implement the new policy across the network was strengthened. To support the process, our team of Gender and Protection Advisors evolved from one Gender Advisor in 2012 to a team of 17 in 2021. Our work frequently includes cross-departmental involvement to integrate the gender policy into all areas of the organisation. Over the years, we have encountered global challenges to achieve gender equality and produced the technical tools

required at field level. Each challenge has presented opportunities to learn and improve our technical support and evidence-based programming.

We found that the rollout of our Gender Taskforce has been essential for organisational acceptance and consistent uptake of the gender policy and toolkit. The Gender Taskforce (now called Gender Community of Practice) is a group of motivated staff from different offices, departments, and managerial levels, who support gender initiatives in the network beyond their habitual roles and responsibilities. It took time and effort to set standards across the network to provide technical guidance and offer opportunities to learn and implement principles as part of our gender policy. Sharing of this key information is largely due to the commitment of the Gender Taskforce at the programmatic level. Altogether, they effectively supported an organisational culture that has allowed for widespread acceptance of gender inequality as a driver of hunger.

Organisational acceptance has been one of the main forces behind identifying the importance of conducting gender analyses at both office and programmatic levels and achieving Action Against Hunger's Gender Minimum Standards, which assess whether

basic requirements in achieving gender equality are met at the office level across the network. This allowed for comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of our programmes. It also enabled us to improve our scope within research and syntheses of information on gender inequality and nutrition, strengthening adherence to Action Against Hunger's mandate that prioritises evidence-based efforts that produce no harm.

Action Against Hunger's approach to gender equality aims to be dynamic. A dynamic approach acknowledges that every office in our organisation is at a different stage of implementation but that we are all on the same path towards gender transformation. This dynamic approach begins with basic gender sensitive approaches aligned with the Gender Minimum Standards, and then evolves towards a gender transformative approach aligned with the International Strategic Plan.

ADOPTING A GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

At Action Against Hunger, we prioritise evidence-based programming and a level of preparedness to mitigate harm. This mandates an international gender strategy that evolves with research and the

identification of changing needs that must be addressed to end hunger. For this reason, the International Gender Unit is now promoting the adoption of a gender-transformative approach. Primary evidence collected by our nutrition and gender technical staff, as well as secondary evidence, including case-study projects on gender and gender-based violence in Bangladesh, Mauritania, and South Sudan, clearly indicate that a gender transformative approach is required to ensure that the expressed needs and interests of all people are considered. It has become clear that gender sensitive programming is not enough.

As a result, in 2021, global objectives to address gender inequality and the persistent burden of malnutrition evolved to include more transformative objectives and policies to reduce harm and better address gaps in ending global hunger. Action Against Hunger will release a new Gender Equality Strategy in 2021 that lays the groundwork for the organisation on gender transformation. This policy will be committed to active examination, questioning, and challenging rigid gender norms and imbalances of power that exist in all societies.

Commitments made by the International Gender Unit, the Gender Community of Practice, and evidence-based support

from the Mental Health and Child Protection team of Action Against Hunger France led to the conceptualisation of new standards and practices that extend past gender sensitive and responsive efforts to prioritise a strategy that will transform how we address hunger. For example, we are integrating the steps required to move past simple gender disaggregated data by including gender-based violence mitigation measures and improved ISP3 indicators. We are also revising our policies and strategies to better capture contextual features on gender inequality, and the positions of women, girls, boys, and men that link to hunger.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our learning success is driven by our commitment to collaborate across the network and its departments, and by the determination of those working at the programmatic level to fully operationalise gender-based tools for more transformative change. Gender-based technical support is disseminated through our digital platforms, reporting, Gender Champion workshops and training, evaluations and analyses, and we continue our rigorous efforts to capture changes and support implementation. As we move forward, continued network support and committed efforts from Gender Champions will be required to ensure compliance on these changes and the tools provided.

