TOWARDS GENDER JUSTICE
Mainstreaming A Gender Perspective in Farmers’ Organisations

Oxfam Canada
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What do a Nicaraguan co-operative federation called FENACOOP, a Guatemalan campesina and indigenous organisation named UVOC, and ANAP, the Cuban Association of Small Farmers, have in common?

It might appear that they have no more in common than being Oxfam Canada partners in processes of organisational change to reach higher levels of equality between men and women. However, the three organisations embarked on a journey to share their experiences in mainstreaming a gender perspective both with Oxfam and among themselves. Besides participating in a series of activities to document and “systematise” their mainstreaming processes, the three organisations shared meetings where conversations went far beyond discussing the content or draft versions of the present document. They included an exchange of knowledge and experiences, successes and challenges, and a mutual discovery of diverse realities through field visits to cooperatives and communities in the three countries.

Some of the campesina women gained confidence in themselves, traveling for the first time by plane and overcoming their fear to speak in public about their experiences. For others, it was especially valuable to be able to share strategies on how to empower oneself and take on new roles that generate conflict in the workplace, the family, and with spouses or partners. This path has not been easy, but many of the women protagonists feel strengthened and empowered,
committed, challenged, and motivated to keep pushing for change to benefit all women. The men also contributed to the reflections at various times, highlighting the importance of their joining in discussions and organisational change processes to create allies that support women’s leadership. As men, they talk about experiencing changes, recognising that women have the same rights, and seeing the importance of taking on household chores and improving communication at the family level.

Although it is difficult to reflect this wealth of experience in one document, we hope that the following pages reflect back to these organisations at least a snapshot of one moment in an ongoing process. Above all, it represents our thanks to the women and men of these organisations for the time and effort that they have dedicated, and continue to dedicate, to these processes with their daily struggle for social justice, human dignity, and gender equality.

Marian de Vries
Regional Manager – Oxfam Canada Americas Program
Introduction

How can we raise awareness about the obstacles to women’s full and equal participation in farmers’ organisations? Is it possible to achieve equity between women and men in leadership roles and decision-making? How can we respect cultural diversity while finding appropriate ways to promote equitable relations between women and men in different contexts? How can we re-think social justice in a way that includes the specific visions, needs, and interests of women? These are some of the questions that guide Oxfam Canada (OC)’s work with its counterparts in Central America and the Caribbean.

As part of the commitment to promote gender justice and women’s rights that is set out in Oxfam Canada’s 2006-2012 Strategic Plan, OC prioritised mainstreaming a gender perspective in mixed farmers’ organisations. OC has thus promoted gender mainstreaming with the National Federation of Cooperatives (FENACOOP) in Nicaragua, the Verapaz Union of Farmers’ Organisations (UVOC) in Guatemala, and the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP) in Cuba. Each process has moved at its own pace, with unique achievements and contradictions.

The report you hold in your hands is meant to share the contributions and challenges of these processes with a wide audience of agencies, donors, counterparts, social movements, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and development practitioners in general. It is based on two key reports that document these initiatives. The first, an internal document for OC and counterparts called Systematising the Experience of OC and OC Counterparts in Mainstreaming...
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Gender’ (November 2008), referred to from now on as the ‘Systematisation Report’, describes and analyses the steps taken by each organisation in Cuba, Nicaragua and Guatemala. The second, Deepening our Analysis of Mainstreaming Gender in Mixed Farmers’ Organisations, documents the discussions held in the workshop with counterparts to report back on the consultancy findings. This workshop—referred to from now on as the ‘Workshop with Counterparts’—took place in Managua, Nicaragua in March 2009, with representation from all involved parties. A further case study of FENACOOP and lessons learned was published in the article “Challenging Gender Inequality in Farmers’ Organisations in Nicaragua”. It is important to note that each one of the organisations in question has continued to mainstream gender, experiencing more recent advances and setbacks that have not been included in this report.

This report starts with a brief explanation of OC’s understanding of a gender perspective and mainstreaming. Next, we describe and analyse the different stages and components of gender mainstreaming in FENACOOP, UVOC, and ANAP. The idea is to highlight the particularities of each experience, paying special attention to the activities used to mainstream gender, the roles of the different actors in each case, the factors which hindered and helped, and the achievements. In the final section we analyse commonalities and differences, and put forth some of the reflections shared by OC, OC counterparts, and the gender advisers who accompanied the organisations in their mainstreaming ventures.

In sharing these experiences, our hope is to contribute to building equity between men and women in mixed organisations, using lessons we have learned from various cultural and social contexts.

1 The report, based on fieldwork in all three countries, was written by Morna Macleod (primary consultant) and Ángela Ixkic Duarte Bastian (secondary consultant).
2 The author of the report is Diego García Radkau. The workshop was facilitated by Morna Macleod and co-facilitated by Vilma Castillo. Members of OC, ANAP, UVOC, FENACOOP and their respective gender advisers participated in the workshop.
Mainstreaming a gender perspective

It is neither possible to eradicate poverty nor achieve social justice without creating equitable relations between men and women. Gender inequity is deeply embedded in social, political and economic institutions, and often power relations are so entrenched they seem normal. A gender perspective is a fundamental tool that creates new ways of seeing the same reality. Often, gender equity in mixed organisations is understood as increasing women’s participation to match that of men’s. This is particularly true in rural and farmers’ organisations, where women’s participation has been historically low. However, a gender perspective is something much greater and more profound than this. It first identifies gender-biased power relations, which are usually ‘naturalised’ and thus appear normal. After being identified, these power relations are questioned in an attempt to create just and equitable relations between men and women.

In gender analysis, changes in everyday attitudes, subjective opinions, and private spaces such as the home are as important as the changes that must be sought in broader structures such as organisations, the State, and the workplace, and are seen as a fundamental aspect of social transformation. It is imperative, therefore, to analyse behaviour, power relations, and decision-making in couples, families, communities, and organisations. It is also important to analyse the factors which contribute to the *modus operandi* of both private and public spheres.

In gender analysis, we find a powerful impetus for change. We come to understand that neither development nor family and social well-being can be achieved if women’s situations and conditions are not radically improved. This analysis
Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Farmers’ Organisations shows that systems (which vary from country to country, from culture to culture, and over time) subordinate women and are reproduced both by men and by women. It is up to each person to question their own attitudes, prejudices, and behaviour, to make the necessary changes; and it is up to social organisations to modify their structures to favour change.

In rural and campesino organisations, inequalities between men and women are evident in various ways. Generally, women are not owners—or even co-owners—of the land they cultivate, nor of their homes. Nor do they have access to necessary resources such as credit, agricultural inputs, and tools. Development projects, like mainly-for-export cash crops such as coffee⁴, tend to be thought of by and for men, while women are given support only for vegetable gardens or the ‘patio economy’. As a cooperative member of FENACOOP aptly asks: “Why cows or 15 manzanas⁵ of maize for the men, and only chickens and pigs for women?” Furthermore, key positions in the organisation are usually filled by men, and women participate little in decision-making. Thus, as organisational priorities and advocacy targets are defined, the needs and interests felt most acutely by women are frequently not taken into account.

For OC, mainstreaming a gender perspective in mixed organisations is a strategy meant to advance the rights of women, taking gender relations into consideration and incorporating capacity-building and accountability into all parts of the organisation. This is based in the idea that organisations cannot promote gender equity effectively if they do not fully incorporate measures to change their organisational practice and culture. This implies a constant and structured support for organisational capacity-building with regard to gender. It also requires sustained effort to transform policies, programmes, advocacy strategies, budgets, and general organisational culture, with the aim of bringing about deep-rooted changes in gender relations. This is no easy task: it entails changes in attitudes and behaviour, as well as questioning the ‘normal’ ways of doing things. In short, it implies a loss of male privilege and necessarily entails a sharing of power. Furthermore, true integration of gender requires a full commitment to the process on the part of both women and men.

OC identifies as a mixed organisation, and in 2006 OC brought its commitment to gender justice home by carrying out a gender audit, which identified the strengths and weaknesses facing its own internal transformation in gender relations. In dialogue with counterparts, OC has shared its own challenges and internal

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⁴ Although women often work in coffee production, they are usually not included in defining priorities, nor in the most important decisions regarding the growing and marketing of the crop.

⁵ A measure of land equivalent to 1.43 hectares.
contradictions in a spirit of mutual learning. We understand that there is no magic formula for success in mainstreaming gender, but it is possible to glean examples of best practices from sharing diverse experiences.

The next section documents the processes undertaken by FENACOOP, UVOC and ANAP to bring about changes in gender relations in their organisations.
The Experiences
The National Federation of Cooperatives - FENACOOP, Nicaragua

1. Some History

Founded in 1990, FENACOOP is a third-level federation of cooperatives bringing together approximately 41,000 farmers in 620 first-level cooperatives. 39 per cent of the membership is made up of women. The Federation is comprised of agricultural, livestock, agro-industry, savings and loan, beekeeping, service, and production cooperatives. FENACOOP provides farmers with support services to improve production and marketing, offers training, credit and legal services, and lobbies the Government and other national and international institutions on policy issues relating to rural development, microfinance, and trade. Agriculture represents 17% of Nicaragua’s Gross Domestic Product, including cash-crops like coffee, grains, sugar, and bananas. Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America, with more than two-thirds of its population living in poverty. Food insecurity and malnutrition are endemic. Rural women are shouldered with a disproportionate responsibility in responding to the challenges of work both inside and outside of the home. In recent years the situation in the countryside has become increasingly precarious in the face of climate change, which has brought about long periods of drought. The president of FENACOOP describes

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6 Grassroots cooperatives form regional affiliates or second-level cooperatives, which in turn are affiliated to FENACOOP on a national level.
this critical situation: “The severe shortage of water has meant the loss of livestock, an increase in poverty, and an increase in malnutrition. Above all, it has increased a sense of hopelessness”\textsuperscript{9}. In this context, FENACOOP promotes food sovereignty for its member cooperatives and pilots environmentally sustainable farming methods.

Women in Nicaragua have a long record of fighting for their rights, which dates back to the Sandinista Revolution (1979-1989). Although it has not been easy to maintain the progress made, there are large numbers of organised and socially conscious women, as well as some men who support women’s causes. Furthermore, FENACOOP’s cooperative principles and values have, from the start, included elements that favour equity in general, and gender equity specifically. Before starting their mainstreaming process, FENACOOP had carried out some isolated actions to promote women’s participation, with varying degrees of success. A key element was the longstanding collaborative relationship between FENACOOP and OC, as well as on-going discussions about gender. FENACOOP’s president said fondly, “I tell our colleague from OC that she started a conspiracy”, a comment that reveals both the amiable relationship between donor and counterpart, and a certain uneasiness that gender issues often provoke. He also mentioned in an interview with the consultant for the Systematisation Report: “Where women have been more outspoken, there’s more resistance. It’s best to combine negotiation, pressure, and passion, in order to not create unnecessary resistance”. We will return to this point later.

2. Negotiation and Development of the Gender Audit

FENACOOP began to mainstream a gender perspective in 2006, after accepting OC’s invitation to carry out a gender audit. This decision reflected the Federation’s interest in increasing their female membership, which at that moment represented 18 per cent of all members. As one Administrative Council member put it: “for political, economic, social, and humanistic reasons, it was important to have more women”.

Mainstreaming gender in FENACOOP initially included the following measures: a) carrying out a gender audit of the organisation and three projects; b) ensuring the participation of key leadership and staff in the process, who would later provide support for gender justice initiatives; c) drawing up a participatory action plan; and d) strengthening the team of women in charge of the process. A gender specialist with longstanding and recognised expertise, trusted by OC and capable of building a relationship with FENACOOP, became gender adviser to the process.

\textsuperscript{9} Sinforiano Cáceres, “Siembran promesas y cosechamos desengaños” [“They Plant Promises and We Harvest Disappointments”], in Revista Envío no.338, May 2010, Nicaragua http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/4175
The audit was based on participatory methodology\(^{10}\) to begin a longer process of promoting women’s rights in the organisation. The adviser reviewed the organisation’s documentation and held various interviews and awareness-raising workshops with men and women, leaders, technical personnel, and project beneficiaries. It also included auditing three projects, presenting the findings of the audit, and holding follow-up feedback sessions. A workshop was also organised to share the experience with other Nicaraguan organisations.

The audit found that between 2001 and 2005 there was a large gap between male and female participation in FENACOOP’s assembly (72 per cent men and 28 per cent women). It found that almost no data were available on the number of women in grassroots and second level cooperatives, and made interesting observations about FENACOOP’s staff composition. While FENACOOP’s coordinating and technical staff (legal, cooperative services, advocacy, financial services, and communication) were mainly men, administrative and support staff were almost exclusively women, with the exception of the chauffeur and security guard. Neither the technical nor the administrative staff had ever received gender training before the workshops that formed part of the audit. The audit also analysed gender roles and responsibilities in the cooperatives, concluding that men were generally in charge of cash crops with greater commercial potential, while women were in charge of activities meant to improve their family diet, including small scale maize and bean production, and raising chickens. Women had less access to land and other resources such as credit, and the organisation had no mechanism to ensure women’s interests were represented\(^{11}\).

The participatory nature of the process raised awareness of gender issues amongst leaders, technical staff, and women in FENACOOP, contributed to ownership of the process, and built certain capacities which were further developed with the implementation of the Action Plan.

3. Implementing the Action Plan or Gender Project

The Gender Action Plan was designed after a three-day workshop that brought together 35 people. One group worked to define short-term goals related to the development of policy, strategies, and representation mechanisms, while a second group defined a specific set of production-oriented actions, which depended on increased financial resources and fundraising in the medium-term. The plan also identified indicators, named those responsible for each component, and defined strengths and risks. The most salient action points included the creation of a Women’s Consultative Council, the commitment to

\(^{10}\) The methodology used was designed by the Netherlands Development Organisation SNV in the manual Hacia la equidad de género en su organización [Towards Gender Equity in Your Organisation], written by Elvia van den Berg and adapted by Maruja Barrig for Latin America, published in Peru by SNV in 2002, adapted by the gender consultant to meet the needs of a cooperative federation.

\(^{11}\) See: Vilma Castillo, Hacia un cooperativismo solidario: La equidad de género, desafíos y oportunidades de la Federación de Cooperativas [Towards Cooperativism with Solidarity: Gender Equity, Challenges, and Opportunities for the Federation of Cooperatives], FENACOOP, Managua, Nicaragua, 2006.
developing an organisational policy on gender equity, and the establishment of mechanisms to promote women’s leadership in FENACOOP.

One of the key mainstreaming achievements was the subsequent incorporation of the Gender Action Plan into FENACOOP’s Strategic Plan. This moves gender away from a relatively marginal place in the organisation’s agenda and turns it into a responsibility shared by everyone. The gender audit and Action Plan in some cases initiated, and in others consolidated, various measures for building gender equity:

- Incorporating the Gender Action Plan into FENACOOP’s Strategic Plan means that the Administrative Council will monitor the achievement of agreements, aims, and action points, and revise and update their relevance, on a quarterly basis. One of the Plan’s seven strategic objectives refers specifically to the increase in participation and integration of women in FENACOOP, both in qualitative and quantitative terms.
- Women in the Federation have established alliances12 with kindred women’s organisations, amongst them the Maria Elena Cuadra Women’s Movement and the Coordination of Rural Women for the Right to Land. Two of FENACOOP women’s cooperatives are also full members of the latter. Women in the Federation have carried out exchanges and shared their experience with other women from rural organisations in the region. This has been particularly promoted by OC.
- A Cooperative Census was carried out using a gender perspective.
- Through FONDEFER13, more appropriate financial products have been tailored to meet specific needs. Measures include: training for women, the inclusion of women in decision-making, support for women’s cooperatives, more specific gender indicators, and an explicit recognition of the need to promote empowerment processes for women before giving credit or receiving requests for credit.

The process created a great deal of interest in various regions, and the Ahmed Campos Corea R.L. UCA14 (a member of FENACOOP) asked to carry out their own gender audit. The then-president of the UCA said: “We men were fearful. But this was the moment to bare ourselves, to be able to talk about these issues and take them on, and to promote these new experiences”. The experience for the UCA was intense and enriching, and the process helped empower women. As one woman leader said: “I now feel I have greater authority, greater leadership; women pay attention to me. And solidarity—before I dreaded having to go places—now I grab the motor scooter and I drive out to the communities; there’s greater solidarity between women”. Various FENCOOP male members

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12 According to the interviews cited in the Systematisation Report, OC has helped them to understand that the most useful way of forming alliances is on specific issues and points, rather than trying to coordinate on every issue.
13 The Development and Rural Economic Initiatives Fund (FONDEFER) is a specialised FENACOOP programme. FONDEFER has six offices which distribute their own funds in Managua, Esteli, Chinandega, Leon, Matagalpa, Nueva Guinea, Masaya, Carazo and Rivas.
14 UCA stands for Union de Cooperativas Agropecuarias, or Union of Agricultural Cooperatives in English. It denotes a second-level cooperative with individual cooperatives as affiliates.
have changed their land titles to co-ownership to include their wives. Importantly, spaces have been created to talk about various issues—not only credit, but also, for example, “how a person feels emotionally, how one is living, in terms of one’s economic situation, but also with regards to health and education”. This has been widely accepted by both men and women. One woman leader also expressed that people in other FENACOOP UCAs “have congratulated us on being open and sincere with ourselves”. This recognition has had a positive effect on motivation to continue the gender mainstreaming process within the organisation.

**Achievements**

According to the *Systematisation Report*, FENACOOP’s gender audit contributed to:

- Generating awareness and understanding of mainstreaming a gender perspective
- Raising awareness in a large portion of the FENACOOP staff and providing tools to work on various issues in the cooperatives from a gender perspective
- Involving key members of the Administrative Council more in the mainstreaming process
- Developing a Gender Action Plan that included a conceptual framework, strategic actions with accompanying indicators, observations concerning strengths and risks, and criteria to ensure gender equity in the organisation’s policies.

Leaders and technical staff agree that there has been a significant increase in awareness of gender issues, which has encouraged more women’s participation on more equal terms in FENACOOP projects. This means that more project beneficiaries are women; one of the most significant advances is the co-ownership of land. A member of the Administrative Council referred to the gender audit achievements by saying, “We were able to use aspects of the audit in the strategic plan; concepts have been clarified. It was very useful, since it enhanced awareness and we got the leaders involved. In particular, it helped us to take on gender issues with less fear and see them more as a challenge.”

According to women in FENACOOP, the audit helped them to learn “…to decode the problems, to understand that we have been made invisible and excluded”. They appreciated that the gender analysis was based on their own reality and not limited to theoretical concepts: “It was very useful to start from our own experience (…), for example, the chores men and women do (…) By highlighting women’s excessive workload, people become more aware”. They also thought that the audit helped them think about relevant aspects of their own lives, helping
to bring about necessary changes: “It transforms you, you realise that violence has been present in all aspects of your life, and you start repositioning yourself. Starting from my own experience, valuing my own life and how to contribute to making changes, has been very important”. The women feel proud that the effort to integrate a gender perspective is being recognised both within the Federation and externally. In FENACOOP, people talk about ‘before and after’ the gender audit.

4. Facilitating Factors and Obstacles

Facilitating Factors

1. The presence of empowered women in FENACOOP who are indisputable and recognised leaders
2. The method used to address inequalities between men and women, linking gender justice to cooperative values, which helped to lessen conflict
3. Political will amongst FENACOOP leaders, and the Federation’s president in particular
4. The involvement of the Administrative Council
5. Financial resources earmarked for the audit and related activities
6. The fame brought to FENACOOP’s commitment to gender equity by the publication of the gender audit. This launches a virtuous circle, as commitment to maintaining this reputation goes hand in hand with concrete actions that favour women
7. The alliance with women’s organisations, which was enhanced by exchanging experiences, holding joint trainings, and getting to know each others’ demands and aspirations

Obstacles

- A fragmented vision which separated economic from social issues. Some members used the primarily economic nature of FENACOOP as an argument to declare gender issues irrelevant; according to them, gender had more to do with social and cultural concerns. In other words, placing higher priority on social issues and their relationship to economic issues leads to greater ownership of a gender perspective
- Pace. Some technical staff expressed that the process was too abrupt
- Difficulties in understanding the issue. Gender equity is not easy to understand, and it is necessary to design specific strategies that best reach people with different levels of education
- The naturalisation of power. Some people find it hard to question naturalised and entrenched power relations, particularly because they maintain that cooperatives benefit the entire family, and they simply don’t see that men have more advantages and power than women do.
Conclusion

The Federation has reached significantly higher levels of awareness and has placed the issue of gender equity firmly on its agenda. There are various committed women who enjoy leadership, respect, and recognition, and there are some men in strategic positions who are allies. There has been progress made for women in terms of public policy advocacy, although the agenda continues to be largely defined by men. There are still relevant issues pending, such as the need for more human and financial resources to be earmarked for women, and the tendency to prioritise other issues over and above gender. However, the changes made by mainstreaming a gender perspective are tangible. Various factors contribute to this success: greater gender awareness, ownership, and commitment to a gender perspective by an increasing number of women and men, the adoption of politically correct discourse (accompanied to a lesser extent by more equitable practices), and the public positioning of FENACOOP as a cooperative organisation that respects and promotes the rights of women. It is important to note that it was OC and a few key people in FENACOOP who initially promoted this process. However, after the audit, the process has been driven, deepened, and multiplied by a growing number of women and men within FENACOOP, including national to local leadership, technical staff, and cooperative members.
1. Some History

The Verapaz Union of Farmers’ Organisations is an indigenous and campesino organisation formed in 1999. It brings together Mayan communities from the provinces of Alta and Baja Verapaz to defend campesinos’ right to land and labour rights in the large land estates (fincas) that still operate on the semi-feudal system of bonded labour. The Q’eqchi’, Poqomchi’ and Achi’ Indians, natives of the lands, receive a pittance to work the landlord’s property, and are lent a small patch of land for their own subsistence farming. They live in extreme poverty, with no access to health or schooling. Although less frequently than in the (recent) past, indigenous bonded labourers are still sold together with the estates. Other land owners simply throw families off their estates with no severance pay whatsoever. The German landowners-to-be who arrived in Guatemala to grow coffee with the 1871 Liberal Reform were explicitly invited by the government to “improve the race”. Thus the Droit du Seigneur was the norm in the Verapaces, and there were estate owners who fathered more than 100 children. As a social organisation-cum-movement, rather than an NGO, UVOC has waged an intense
struggle for land for the ex-bonded labourers over the past 15 years. Of the three cases presented in this document, it is the only indigenous organisation.

UVOC never had financial support from aid agencies before becoming an OC counterpart in April 2005 and receiving funding for a project to promote sustainable livelihoods. In contrast to FENACOOP and ANAP, it did not have a solid, long-lasting relationship with OC; rather, this was a first experience, with no previous shared experiences to build mutual trust.

### 2. Negotiation and Development of the Gender Diagnostic Study

In mid-2006, UVOC and OC agreed to look for a consultant to carry out a gender diagnostic study. UVOC has had a Women’s Commission since 2003, and women had received training; however, there was little previous work on gender within the organisation. The gender study included analysis workshops, and capacity-building with the Women’s Commission. The consultant carried out a critical review of UVOC’s structure, functioning, vision, and resource distribution. The study showed that women were not participating as much as men, rarely reached leadership positions, and had little say in decision-making. It also found that the Women’s Commission was weak, that many women were illiterate, and that UVOC had little institutional capacity. To overcome some of these weaknesses, the gender consultant put forward a detailed action plan.

The findings were hard for UVOC to process. It was felt that exposing these organisational weaknesses could be used to promote internal divisions, and that the critique of power relations had not been handled properly. When it came to relations between men and women, there was resistance to accept the term ‘gender’, as it was regarded as alien to Mayan culture. They maintained that the concept was neither comprehensible nor appropriate for work in the communities, and that they would prefer to work from their own vision and in their own terms. Swallowing their reservations, OC agreed to support a second process to address these concerns.

**The Second Stage of the Diagnostic Study**

Another Mayan consultant was found to develop two products: a strategy promoting women’s participation and leadership, and a document conceptualising gender from the indigenous perspective used by UVOC. The consultant set out to recuperate the viewpoint of their ancestors, and to use a Mayan perspective on the relations between men and women as a benchmark to analyse today’s reality. Instead of ‘gender’, UVOC and the second consultant jointly proposed the exploration of their own concept of ‘balance and imbalance’ in personal and community relations.
In the opinion of the Systematisation consultants, this initiative needs to be understood as part of a growing tendency amongst Mayan organisations in Guatemala to create their own discourse, analyses, and methodologies, based on their worldview (cosmovision). Concepts like balance, complementarity, and duality are being increasingly used to address relations between men and women. The consultants explain that, in their opinion, although sometimes this is mere discourse (used to hide, rather than change, practices), many Mayan women have taken on these principles and are developing their own ways of working. This has resulted in interesting critiques not only of male chauvinism (machismo) but also of racism, of colonial relations, and, importantly, of some feminist positions which tend to ignore cultural differences and construct an image of ‘women’ as an internally homogenous group.

A woman leader from UVOC remembers the way the study was done for the above-mentioned UVOC concept paper on gender from an indigenous perspective: “She (the consultant) asked us what we wanted to learn. We told her that we were interested in ways of organising, the history of women (in the area), and land conflict and health issues. This is what the women came up with (…) She sent us points to discuss with the elders, and told us that we should ask them the reasons why we are as we are and that we should seek out the 80-year-old elders. The women really liked this, and there were women at the meeting who were 40, 50, 60 years old who shared their life histories (…) The women talked a lot about their lives, they really enjoyed this, and they participated much more as they talked in their own languages”.

The complex debate about cultural appropriateness in gender work went beyond the on-going dialogue between UVOC and OC, and was taken on by all participants in the Workshop with Counterparts. A CONGCOOP\(^{15}\) coordinator expressed the following sentiment: “A gender perspective which is imposed dogmatically is no good. The process is facilitated by the search for common codes”. The coordinator of UVOC’s Women’s Commission added that it was important to take cultural particularities into account when working on gender issues: “We are new to the work of gender. We have made progress (…), however, it is difficult to explain the issue using our language, our dreams, our ideas. The balance/imbalance approach helps us”.

UVOC members stressed the importance of collectivity (and collective, rather than only individual rights), of men and women working together, and of not separating gender equity from other social struggles: “we don’t want to build enemy fronts, we want to create balance”. Gender issues should be linked to other necessary changes at various levels, including access to education, health, and land for the communities. Individual and collective changes should not be seen as mutually exclusive. The collective is central to an indigenous worldview and to the contexts in which UVOC works. This does not mean avoiding an analysis of power relations or refusing to scrutinise relationships between men and women.

\(^{15}\) The Coordination of NGOs and Cooperatives of Guatemala (CONGCOOP) is the organisation that accompanied UVOC in its sustainable livelihoods project with OC from 2005 to 2008.
3. Implementing the Action Plan or Gender Project

The second gender adviser designed a strategy to strengthen women’s participation in the organisation. This was comprised of 4 components: a) organisational strengthening in UVOC; b) increasing women’s participation and decision-making in the communities and within the organisation; c) food sovereignty through sustainable production projects for women and communities; and d) the recuperation of the elders’ knowledge about women’s health.

This proposal went much farther than simply gender. It included questioning of the use of agrochemicals and the market economy and proposed growing crops for the community’s own consumption instead; it also included recognising the need for decolonisation and recuperation of ancestral knowledge and wisdom, and strengthening self-esteem and empowerment through a process of prioritising and practising Mayan values such as ‘balance’. OC’s concern regarding this strategy is that it doesn’t explicitly address the problems which impede women’s participation. Certainly, incorporating this aspect would make the plan a powerful tool for building gender equity and self-determination.

Various activities were carried out as a part of the strategy during and after the project:

- The creation of the above-mentioned document, in which UVOC attempted to conceptualise gender from an indigenous perspective
- Constant reflection (difficult to quantify) about the cultural complexities of promoting discussion on gender relations in indigenous communities
- Inclusion of Gender Action Plan points in UVOC’s 2007-2008 Annual Operational Plan and the 2009-2011 Strategic Plan
- Strengthening the Women’s Commission
- Various training sessions that were of interest to the women who participated
- The start of an important process to empower women in the organisation, and in particular members of the Women’ Commission
- Setting up 20 women’s committees in the communities
- Participation of women from UVOC as speakers at different public forums (including the World Social Forum of the Americas in October 2008 in Guatemala)
- Creation of a central Directorship Council, and directorship councils in the communities, with equal numbers of women and men, although work still needs to be done for women to be able to participate equitably in these councils
Achievements

According to the *Systematisation Report*, the gender study and subsequent follow-up strategies in UVOC contributed to:

- Strengthening women’s capacities and participation in UVOC
- Strengthening the Women’s Commission
- Forming women’s committees in the communities
- Reflecting upon equitable relations between women and men, and including these in the UVOC agenda
- Progress in the way UVOC names and addresses the gaps between men and women
- Changes made so that an equal number of women and men are included in UVOC’s organisational structures (though still not under equal conditions)
- Women’s participation in national coordination initiatives and international events

The following comments by some of the Q’eqchi’, Poqomchi’ and Achi’ women in UVOC speak of achievements reached within the organisation through this process. “We now have rights, we’re rising now” is an indicator of empowerment. They also talk about ‘power between women’: “We’ve been given ideas and we’ve shared our ideas, we’ve learned to express ourselves. Before, I used to feel bashful, but no longer. Now I know where I’m going and what I want to do”. They also recognise the timely support of the agency: “The support we received (project funds) helped us to change. If it hadn’t come, we’d still be weak. We have support in the communities. This support now comes with our ideas included, we’re now thinking about the future of our communities. We designed a small strategic plan. Once the money comes in, we’ll see what we can do‖. Furthermore, they recognise that there are more women participating and being included in spaces which were not previously open to them: “Before, as a woman, you could only participate as a representative in the women’s committee. Before, there were only men in the health and education committees, but now more women are going to participate, although (not all) these councils have been formed yet‖.
4. Facilitating Factors and Obstacles

Facilitating factors

- The gender advisers’ knowledge of the region and the fact that they based their work in the women’s reality and not in theory
- The gender advisers’ capacity to speak or understand the Mayan languages
- The inclusive and equitable principles of Mayan worldview regarding relations between women and men
- Local women’s participation in the history of land struggles
- The previous existence of a Women’s Commission with a certain degree of importance within the organisation

Obstacles

- The lack of trust between OC and UVOC: not having had a previous solid relationship or experience of working together had an impact on the gender mainstreaming process. This is analysed later on
- No previous experience with external evaluations: the diagnostic study was a new and disconcerting experience for UVOC, as it did not have a previous organisational culture of critical assessment. This differs from the other two organisations’ long-term relationships with international aid agencies, and sets UVOC apart from organisations where evaluations are a standard part of the institutional cycle
- Not sufficiently taking into account the kind of organisation UVOC is: there was a lack of clarity about the implications of mainstreaming a gender perspective in a social organisation such as UVOC, which does not have the same characteristics as an NGO
- A lack of shared vision about exactly what a ‘gender diagnostic study’ involved: the study identified institutional weaknesses, for example in decision-making mechanisms, which went beyond relations between women and men
- The gender diagnostic study feedback meeting was threatening: this was due in part to a lack of experience, but also to some leaders' unwillingness to open up to external scrutiny
Conclusion

Starting to mainstream a gender perspective in UVOC was not an easy or fluid experience for a variety of reasons. Despite this, according to OC staff, as well as other organisations, the gender advisers, and UVOC itself, significant progress has been made towards women’s empowerment. There has also been progress made in terms of UVOC reflecting on and accepting the need to increase women’s participation, and to work on building more equitable relations between men and women in the organisation and in the communities.

Using the Mayan worldview had its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it created a ‘safe space’ and reduced resistance within the organisation. It also contextualised the communities’ harsh experience of economic exploitation and social marginalisation, and empowered not only women, but also men who have suffered exploitation, racism, and marginalisation. However, a drawback to this approach is that it carries the risk of glossing over naturalised gender inequities and imbalanced power relations between men and women, making it hard to push for change.

For OC as an international aid agency, there were also a number of lessons learned from the experience with UVOC. When working with indigenous organisations, gender should not be separated from other oppressions such as extreme poverty, racism, and cultural devaluation. This has brought up the need for further reflection on the balance between strengthening harmony (and self-esteem) and/or confronting inequities. Additionally, it brings to light the need for each organisation to take ownership of and name gender processes using their own terms. This creates a dilemma for the donor agency, however, about whether or not to accept an approach which it doesn’t necessarily find convincing, or—even when accepting other entry points—whether or not to insist on introducing an analysis of women’s subordination and power relations.
1. Some History

The Cuban revolution has historically sought equity between women and men, and has made significant progress in this regard. In spite of this, introducing a gender perspective to public policy and the work of social organisations has been, as in the other cases, a long, complex, and contradictory process. While Cuban women have ample representation in the public sphere, women’s—and in particular young women’s—leadership has been marginal in the agricultural sector. Women’s contributions to the home economy and to reproductive work remain largely invisible.

The National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP) is a mass organisation that represents the campesino population in Cuba and promotes sustainable agricultural development. Created in 1961, ANAP is comprised of more than 4,000 cooperatives, with a base of 362,000 members. Of these, only 11 per cent are women16. ANAP has been supported by Oxfam since 1997 in mainstreaming a gender perspective, developing a series of programmes for campesina women’s empowerment, primarily through paid agricultural labour and increased women’s participation in the cooperatives and ANAP.

16 2008 statistics.
A 2004 evaluation concluded that some of the main challenges facing ANAP in their work to bring about gender equity included women’s double workload in cooperatives and at home, limited opportunities for paid employment, the persistence of sexist stereotypes, the need for greater recognition of women leaders, and the lack of gender awareness among leaders at different levels. With the aim of responding to these challenges, ANAP approved its Gender Strategy as an institutional policy in 2005. From then on, the strategy has been a key tool for promoting new women’s involvement in the cooperatives and women’s participation in decision-making. In 2006, the *Pilot Project for the Implementation of ANAP’s Gender Strategy* was drawn up, with the aim of increasing ANAP’s institutional capacity to implement their strategy and to document learning about successful implementation.

2. Negotiation and Development of the Gender Project

The project was an ANAP-OC joint initiative, which is not very common in Cuba, but which reflects the mutual trust between the organisations. The initiative was a novelty in the way that it pushed for women’s participation and emphasised intangible results such as the transformation of unequal male-female relations. The methodology proposed for the project was also a novelty, not only for ANAP, but rather, in a sense, for the Cuban context in general, in that it intended for the communities themselves to be decision-makers when it came to investing a portion of the project funds to generate employment opportunities for women and improve quality of life in the communities. Previously, ANAP had practically no experience in the use of participative methodologies.

The consultants who carried out the *Systematisation Report* wrote that opinions varied on the initial disposition of leadership and grassroots of ANAP to undertake gender equity work. Oxfam staff in Cuba and the gender advisor highlighted the political will present in ANAP and explained that several key leaders in ANAP had promoted and facilitated the project. On the other hand, those interviewed from outside ANAP shared that there was initially a greater opening in the grassroots than in the leadership to discuss gender issues: “The leaders were not initially open to it. The grassroots raised the consciousness of the elite. It was the success in Holguín that demonstrated the potential of this type of project”. In either case, OC staff and the leaders and officials of ANAP agree that linking gender relations to the quest for social justice was the key to reaching agreements and implementing the project with conviction and enthusiasm. “Here, when you talk about justice, everybody enters through that door”, affirmed Oxfam’s representative in Cuba, and “gender equity is one part of justice that we have yet to master.”

17 The Project, financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), was carried out from 2006 to 2009 in five Eastern provinces of the country.

18 Norwegian People’s Aid (Ayuda Popular Noruega) began a process of consciousness-raising with ANAP in 2000, in the province of Holguín, as part of an institutional capacity-building project that included a basic course in gender issues for leaders and departments in the province, and an in-depth course with municipal cadre. This experience with women leaders in Holguín is part of a coordination process with another, similar, experience in Cienfuegos.
3. Implementing the Action Plan or Gender Project

ANAP’s Gender Strategy was piloted in ten cooperatives in five provinces in the eastern part of Cuba. It was agreed that a gender adviser would be included in the project and would accompany the process on a permanent basis. This accompaniment particularly strengthened the project’s participatory methodology, and the trusting relationship built between the gender adviser and ANAP enriched the process.

The project brought together five key components, designed to reinforce one another so as to create a greater impact:

**Communication:** The communication component consisted of disseminating the Gender Strategy, project aims, and expected results through local communication channels and ANAP’s magazine. Emphasis was put on reaching out to boys, girls, youth, teachers, community health workers and delegates from grassroots organisations (the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution, Popular Power, and the Federation of Cuban Women) to create ownership of the project. When interviews were carried out for the *Systematisation Report*, an initiative was underway to publish a book containing life-histories of 50 campesina women, some of whom were also involved in the project. The book sought to highlight the role of campesina women in Cuba’s economy and development.

**Investment Fund:** The project included an investment fund managed by the communities. The project sought to fund production initiatives defined by local community decision-makers, including significant women’s representation. This required previous activities to raise awareness and enhance women’s participation and contributions to decision-making.

On the whole, implementation of the investment component took longer than expected for logistic reasons. However, its results contributed to changing the vision held by ANAP and community members. As one interviewee explained: “People understand now that a substantial part of the project wasn’t about giving women jobs, but about creating gender equity” (*Systematisation Report*).

**Exchanges:** This key project component promoted exchanges between all the communities involved in the project. The exchanges included sharing reports and analysis and discussing success stories and obstacles to implementing their plans. This work did not begin in a women-only setting, because some sectors of the organisation viewed that as exclusionary. However, the methodology assured that women had their own spaces during the workshops to discuss and reflect together. In addition, ANAP carries out annual reviews to assess their progress and challenges in terms of gender. Members of the project communities have presented their results at these events.

**Training:** This component consisted mainly of a series of workshops on different themes. Beginning by introducing the simplest gender issues using practical
activities related to agricultural and economic production, the workshops gradually built up to more complex issues like the difference between sex and gender, the sexual division of labour, self-esteem, alcoholism, violence, and masculinities. The workshops were instrumental in broaching the taboo subject of violence in its different manifestations; while an issue in the communities, violence had not, until then, been talked about openly.

In the final stage of the project, a training programme with a built-in multiplying effect was designed. It included issues such as violence, feminisms, and masculinities, and has also contributed to organisational capacity-building. The establishment of a Gender Course at ANAP’s National Training Centre is a direct spin-off of the project funded by Oxfam. The aim of the Gender Course is to promote and monitor implementation of a gender perspective in ANAP, and to increase awareness-raising programmes about gender hand in hand with agricultural production.

Follow-Up/Systematising: Documenting and ensuring learning is key to the success of this project. OC and ANAP worked together to document the developments of each component. A “systematiser” was appointed in every community to document and present reports on all activities. The idea was that systematising the process provided a basis for future reflection, so that ANAP could learn from its own process. Resources were earmarked for documenting these learning processes, for example, the publication of a technical and practical manual called *Gender, Participation, and Power*. This became a tool for gender training follow-up within ANAP.

Actions carried out during the project can be summarised as follows:

- Widespread dissemination of ANAP’s Gender Strategy and the project’s objectives and intended results
- Active participation, not only of women, but of the population in general
- Creating ties with other organisations, in particular with the Federation of Cuban Women
- Design of local strategies for the use of the investment funds
- Training on gender equity, violence, alcoholism, and other relevant issues for the communities
- Training of women and men to replicate gender trainings in their communities, and the preparation of the technical and practical manual *Gender, Participation, and Power*
- Organising events for peer learning and exchange of experiences
- Ongoing documentation of the process
- Documenting the life histories of campesina women in ANAP and the project
- Establishing a Gender Course in ANAP’s National Training Centre
Achievements

According to the *Systematisation Report*, ANAP’s Gender Strategy contributed to:

- Increasing the number of female members of ANAP grassroots organisations and the number of women in decision-making positions in the cooperatives
- Workshops training more than 7,000 women and men on different gender-related issues
- Reflection on the importance of having more women in leadership positions
- Greater understanding among both the base and leadership that mainstreaming a gender perspective goes beyond increasing the number of women affiliates to touch on issues of power
- The ongoing process of gender training for activists
- Awareness-raising of decision-makers
- The development of the Gender Course
- Lessons learned about the need to respect the distinct characteristics and different rhythms of each community and/or cooperative

It can now be said that the issue of gender has been incorporated into the leadership’s discourse. One director noted that gender work “is a strategic, long-term issue. Cuban society is not going to develop without its women”. At the same time, he recognised that there was a long ways to go: “We are at the point where we need to go beyond discourse to change our practice”. It is important to highlight that the capacity-building needed to effectively include women’s interests and aspirations in the organisation’s agenda takes time. However, ANAP now has gender-aware project coordinators who are able to reinvent their ways of working to incorporate a gender perspective. One coordinator claimed that in all the projects under his responsibility, “I now ask myself: how many women are there? How many men? What kinds of relations exist? How can we benefit women? I think about how to raise awareness about justice before investing in a hectare of irrigation”.

Also apparent are changes in the values and behaviour of cooperatives and communities, women’s greater confidence in their own capacities, and a deeper awareness of the obstacles to women’s full participation in ANAP. “We’ve removed the blindfold,” one project beneficiary explains, “If a man can, so can a woman. If he can be a leader, then so can a woman. If a man can leave home for three or four days at a time, then a woman can too, and the man can stay and look after the home”.

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4. Facilitating Factors and Obstacles

Facilitating Factors

- Political will on the part of the State and Cuban authorities, and particularly within ANAP
- The excellent relation between ANAP and OC, and satisfactory negotiations between them before project implementation
- The level of organisation in Cuban communities
- The persistence and motivation of the campesina women involved in this project
- The achievements of the revolution in terms of education, health, and food security, which mean a very different starting place compared to the other countries
- The gender adviser’s clarity about the need to respect the distinct characteristics of each community
- The role the exchanges have played in building networks and sharing experiences
- ANAP’s openness to include suggestions that arose from the project’s midterm review

Obstacles

- The tradition of top-down decision-making within Cuban organisations
- The cultural and political tendency to constantly emphasise achievements rather than analyse challenges
- The need to import inputs, materials, and equipment which are not available on the Cuban market; this slows processes down

Conclusion

ANAP has made its Gender Strategy a priority, and the political will of leaders at different levels of the state has been instrumental in strengthening this work. Linking gender relations to social justice has been the key to reaching agreements and ensuring a commitment to project implementation. The involvement of ANAP farmers in all project decisions, particularly in relation to the investment fund, generated crucial levels of ownership and awareness-raising which moved the process forward. The participatory methodology used in the project has allowed ANAP to learn important lessons about the advantages of basing their development work on the knowledge and experience of the communities, creating social transformation that goes beyond mere mobilisation.
Gender equity has been firmly placed on ANAP’s agenda, and many more women are joining cooperatives and taking on decision-making positions at different levels of the organisation. There are also more women incorporating gender-based perspectives into their leadership roles. It can be said that gender has been included in ANAP’s very identity, although women’s empowerment and transforming power relations in practice necessarily require a much longer process.
Key learning and discussion points

Lessons learned from the case studies were discussed at length at an internal OC meeting with the primary Systematisation consultant, and at a feedback workshop in Managua with Oxfam Canada, farmers’ organisations, gender advisers, and consultants. The need to understand context is of paramount importance: the three contexts in these case studies are incomparable. Neither the Cuban context, with its huge steps forward in social benefits resulting from the revolution, notwithstanding some outstanding challenges in terms of women’s condition and situation, nor the advances made by FENACOOP in Nicaragua, are comparable to the extremely precarious conditions and day-to-day struggle for survival in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. Secondly, there are no one-size-fits-all solutions or panacea for achieving equity between men and women in mixed organisations, although the case studies provide some useful hints and lessons.

Framing gender as an integral part of social justice was crucial for the three organisations, providing an impetus for questioning and broadening their understanding of transformational social change. This suggests that technical methodology used for mainstreaming a gender-based analysis should always complement, and never replace, an ethical commitment to gender justice. Institutionalising a gender perspective without a true conviction and willingness to question and change attitudes, behaviours, and practices can lead to politically correct discourses, but not to gender justice. This was not the case in the three organisations, where technical methodology was consistently accompanied by other activities and reflections.
Relations between the aid agency, counterpart, and consultant

A fundamental aspect of mainstreaming a gender perspective was trust—in all its forms, directions, and levels. Trust between the agency and counterpart was a facilitating factor in the cases studied here, as was the farmers’ organisation’s trust in the mainstreaming process, confidence in the gender consultant accompanying the process, and trust in the women leaders’ judgement about when to push and when to pull back. The process was easier when Oxfam Canada had a long-standing relationship with, and proven commitment to, the counterpart’s strategic aims.

In the group discussions prompted by the Systematisation Report, a series of criteria were identified for selecting external consultants. These include trust and a commitment to the farmers’ organisation’s ideals and objectives, as well as the capacity to promote ownership and commitment to the gender mainstreaming process within the organisation’s membership. Great emphasis was placed on the ability to handle emotionally-charged issues and situations, good judgement in how far to take a discussion, and the ability to put a halt to discriminating and aggressive attitudes (in both men and women) without offending. Good facilitation on gender issues also meant knowing how to not react to provocations, how to say things subtly and with diplomacy, and when silence is called for. In short, a gender consultant needs to have moral authority and gain the organisation’s respect.

Oxfam Canada staff working in the region recognise that power relations exist between aid agencies (who have the funds) and partner organisations (who need the funds). To counteract tensions which could arise from this asymmetrical relationship, OC seeks to work horizontally, developing the capacity to listen and fomenting mutual respect, even during disagreements. This sometimes meant giving partner organisations the benefit of the doubt when they suggested new ways of doing things. OC tries to use its power to promote gender justice as flexibly and democratically as possible. For those who don’t share the commitment to gender justice, the issue of agency imposition never completely disappears, particularly when future funding is at stake. There can also be a tendency to reject anything that remotely ‘smells’ of ‘imposition’, or any and all suggestions that come from outside, rather than assuming a more open and affirmative attitude that supports doing what is good for the organisation, independently of where the ideas come from. This is particularly important, because gender is often one of the issues most identified as an imposition by organisations that receive aid agency funding.
Women’s leadership and empowerment in farmers’ organisations

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is more effective when there are already strong or potential women leaders within the farmers’ organisations. The Systematisation Report found that “virtuous circles” were created in the cases where women with strong leadership qualities in the organisations, together with the support of OC staff and gender consultants, could push for deeper changes. This, in turn, was crucial for the women who moved into the spaces opened up by gender mainstreaming. In addition, horizontal peer-to-peer learning through exchanges and workshops that brought together women from the different farmers’ organisations was useful to share experiences and develop strategies. Fomenting alliances with women from other organisations was also important. It meant, for example, that women from FENACOOP received training and diplomas in programmes organised by the Maria Elena Cuadra Women’s Movement, and that some of UVOC’s female leadership represented women farmers nationally and internationally, including at the World Social Forum. Importantly, women leaders themselves decided who to coordinate with, how, and on what aspects of their work.

These activities contributed to building a critical mass of women within the farmer organisations. The case studies show an increase in women leadership in all three organisations, as well as more women organising at the grassroots level. However, even when the critical mass of women was strong, further steps were needed to consolidate the progress made and not let gender equity slip off the organisation’s agenda. The case studies also suggest that women need to have their own resources and separate spaces (such as women’s commissions). They also need to be equitably represented in decision-making positions.

Gender, multiple oppressions, priorities, and loyalties

Another complex issue is mainstreaming a gender perspective when women—and men—face multiple oppressions, including class, race, and ethno-cultural discrimination. While the Systematisation Report consultants consider that an intersectional approach19 is more appropriate than using gender as a single organising principle, they also recognise that the conceptual and methodological tools for this approach are still in their early stages. The ways many agencies promote general and universal approaches to gender are still problematic, as they don’t connect to people’s daily lives, nor do they fit closely with the visions, needs, and aspirations of local women, particularly indigenous women. The Maya K’iche’ gender consultant working with UVOC expressed, “my criticism is that concepts created by feminist theory are applied to all groups and contexts.”

19 Intersectional analysis, developed by African-American women in the United States like lawyer Kimberly Crenshaw, seeks to simultaneously take on board the different oppressions faced by “women of colour”, the way these interact, and the need for solutions that take into account their specificities. See K.W. Crenshaw, ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality’, www.wcsap.org/Events/Workshop07/mapping-margins.pdf
I think these concepts need to be better defined to take into account the context they are being applied to, or the content [of those contexts] can be lost”. UVOC’s women’s commission Maya Q’eqchi’ leader explains: “it is very difficult to explain the (gender) perspective in our language, in our dreams, in our ideas. The focus of balance/imbalance helps us”.

‘Losing the content’ of a context can entail losing sight of important unique aspects, such as the economic boycott in Cuba, the pressing struggle for land and against the landowners and land evictions in Alta Verapaz, or the situation of drought and hunger in Nicaragua. It can also entail losing sight of oppressions not only related to gender, but also to racism, devaluation of culture, imperialism, and economic exploitation; or the fact that collective rights are equally as important to indigenous women as individual rights and women’s rights. In other words, there are a series of factors and priorities which often bring together men and women in an organisation, including loyalty to the organisation itself. It is sometimes difficult to bring up inequity within these same organisations. However, by now it is clear that equity between women and men is an urgent demand, not merely a ‘detail’ to be resolved later on after the ‘real’ priorities.

Gaining ownership over gender processes and promoting them under an organisation’s own terms and parameters is key to truly contributing to social justice and not just rote ‘fulfilment of aid agency requirements’. There are many valid entry points to the issue. For example, Oxfam Canada staff has been open to UVOC naming their own concepts and entry-points. This re-naming is good, they say, as long as it does not ‘whitewash’ gender inequality. The use of cosmogonic concepts to promote gender equity—or to idealise and hide naturalised and entrenched power relations between men and women—has become contentious terrain for donors, feminists, and indigenous organisations. However, an increasing number of indigenous women are using concepts such as complementarity, duality, and balance to forge more equitable relations between indigenous men and women, and at the same time to strengthen indigenous culture and urge men to walk the talk.

Rather than ‘taking a stand’, seeing this as a creative tension—culturally and geographically diverse women may have quite different needs, interests, and aspirations on the one hand, and on the other, naturalised power relations seek to make women’s subordination appear ‘normal’ in all cultures—can enhance deeper reflection, debate, and action for agencies, local organisations, and gender consultants.

**Resistances and the nature of change**

An interesting exercise in the Systematisation Report follow-up workshops was to explore the meanings of ‘resistance’. Feminist perspectives were quick to highlight its negative connotations: men’s resistance to a gender perspective and resistance generally to change. The indigenous and Cuban participants in the
systematisation workshop, on the other hand, immediately related the concept to indigenous peoples’ ‘five hundred years of resistance’ to colonialism and the Cuban revolution’s capacity to resist imperialism and economic blockade. In-depth discussions helped bring about more shared understanding of both positive and negative aspects of resistance. These also helped to overcome certain fears and reticence in the context of gender relations.

It was recognised that women voicing their grievances in farmers’ organisations were often accused of being aggressive and trying to turn the tables20. It was also pointed out that bringing in more women is looked on favourably by men, so long as they simply participate, and do not question power relations or take over positions of power. In terms of leadership positions, power is indeed finite, and the more women leaders, the fewer men, as one ousted male leader poignantly pointed out. Sharing power doubtlessly has an impact on men, but some are prepared to make this sacrifice.

The issue of men as allies proved to be contentious. While some women neatly divided men into ‘foes and allies’, recognising a mere handful of exceptionally gender-sensitive men as allies (among the organisations’ leadership, technical staff, and grassroots), others were more understanding of the contradictory nature of change, especially when it comes to gender issues. These recognised that specific leaders were supportive and played a crucial role in promoting gender mainstreaming, despite their inconsistencies and occasional pitting women against each other in a move meant to divide and rule. Interestingly, it was some of the women leaders who had borne the brunt of these contradictory attitudes who were most adamant that those male leaders were real allies. They also pointed out that women themselves are not always allies in the struggle for gender equity.

**Generating win-win situations**

As mentioned previously, the president of FENACOOP spoke of the need for ‘passion, pressure, and negotiation’ to move the process forward without generating unnecessary resistance. He argued that rather than promoting confrontation between women and men—with the risk of dividing the organisation21—mainstreaming gender needed to become an essentially win-win situation for all, that is, for both women and men. He and others talked of the benefits of men being ‘allowed’ to have emotions, being able to participate more significantly in

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20 In the same way that indigenous and afro-descendents who denounce racism are frequently labelled ‘reverse-racists’.

21 This is not simply a hypothetical concern. In Nicaragua a fellow organisation suffered the loss of many women’s cooperatives that, after years of struggle, opted to form an autonomous organisation.
family life, and, in particular, setting the example of joint land-tenure and recognition of women’s increasing participation in food production. The insistence on harmonious, rather than confrontational, methods was echoed not only by most men, but also by many women in the three farmers’ organisations. In contrast, some women doubted that power inequalities can be addressed if they are not identified and named. Even the most critical agreed, however, that it is important to gauge when to push and when not to, and some saw politically correct discourse as a starting point.

There was a general agreement that gender mainstreaming implies the art of understanding the larger context and developing sensitivity to rhythms, timing, and short versus long timeframes. The risk is that not applying pressure may well mean that no significant change occurs. While much is to be said for approaches that build on strengths rather than dwell on deficiencies, many of us feel that some level of confrontation on certain issues and at certain points is not only inevitable, but necessary, for change to happen.
Conclusions

These reflections illustrate the highly complex dynamics accompanying gender mainstreaming in farmers’ organisations, and mixed organisations in general. They also aim to question the comfortable assumptions that often underpin universal, individual-rights-based approaches to gender mainstreaming. They suggest that rather than discrediting the (internally diverse) perspectives of the women and men who are members of farmers’ organisations in the global south, these perspectives need to be taken on board and balanced with an analysis of power and gender subordination. It is also important to recognise that women farmers often find themselves in double-binds with mixed loyalties, given the multiple dimensions of their identity as women, as indigenous persons, as members of an organisation, or as members of a process, as in the case of the Cuban revolution. If the organisation takes on equity between women and men as an ethical value, these difficult situations and double-binds are diminished.

This document tries to show that there are no catch-all solutions or simple formulas to follow for successful gender mainstreaming, though there are clear examples of good practices. These include mutual respect and trust between the donor, counterpart, and gender consultants, and their commitment to the ideals and objectives of the farmers’ organisations. It is crucial to frame gender in terms of social justice. This puts gender squarely into the arena of transformational social change, away from purely technical, depoliticising approaches. Creating a critical mass of women in the farmers’ organisations is vital. Women also need to have their own spaces and resources, as well as being fairly represented in decision-making positions within the organisation. Timing and knowing when to push and when to pull back are key issues; though “passion, pressure, and negotiation” can mean quite different things to different stakeholders. It is vital to understand that change is often contradictory, never linear, and takes time. Due respect to process and not just to end results is good in that it distances one from ‘quick fix’ approaches and promises more sustainable results for gender equity. FENACOOP, UVOC, and ANAP have made undoubted progress in this area in recent years, but there remains a long road ahead.