The power of gender-just organizations: A conceptual framework for transformative organizational capacity building.
Acknowledgements

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Foreword

Oxfam Canada works with courageous and creative women and men all around the world who are committed to promoting the rights and improving the lives of women and girls living in poverty. We understand the transformative nature of gender justice and the importance of integrity and coherence, where an organization’s ways of being and working reinforce the outcomes and impact they are seeking. We have learned a great deal from the experience of our partners and are pleased to share some of that learning with you. Gender-just organizations can change the world. We are pleased to contribute to their power.

Robert Fox, Executive Director, Oxfam Canada

The Power of Gender-Just Organizations was written with the participation of more than 35 organizations working in 10 countries in Africa and Latin America. United by a strong commitment to women’s rights and gender justice, we have been fortunate to have the opportunity to share and learn from our experiences on gender-just capacity building, made possible by the generous support of the Canadian International Development Agenda (CIDA) and wonderful donors from the Canadian public.

Even those organizations most committed to gender equality realize that walking the path of transforming power relations is never easy and is usually, in fact, terribly difficult. We hope that you will find this resource helpful as you undertake, or continue, your own unique journey. We would be pleased to hear from you about your experiences with organizational gender transformation, to learn from you, to improve our model and, most importantly, to know that we are expanding the network of organizations committed to walking the talk on gender justice.

Caroline Marrs, Director, Program Development, Oxfam Canada
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## Acronyms

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<td>ABCD</td>
<td>Assets-Based Community Development</td>
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<td>CAT</td>
<td>Capacity Assessment Tool</td>
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<td>CSOs</td>
<td>Civil Society Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEMUPROCAN</td>
<td>Federation of Women Farmers and Ranchers (Nicaragua)</td>
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<td>FGM</td>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation</td>
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<td>FENACOOP</td>
<td>National Federation of Cooperatives (Nicaragua)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FXT</td>
<td>Feminist Tech Exchange</td>
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<td>GAL</td>
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<td>GHCGs</td>
<td>Gender and HIV/AIDS Core Groups</td>
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<td>HUNDEE</td>
<td>Oromo Grassroots Development Initiative (Ethiopia)</td>
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<td>ICTs</td>
<td>Information and Communications Technologies</td>
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<td>JAW</td>
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<td>MTLR</td>
<td>Mid-Term Learning Review</td>
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<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organizations</td>
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<td>SEDA</td>
<td>Sustainable Environment and Development Action (Ethiopia)</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>Women on Farms (South Africa)</td>
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<td>WSA</td>
<td>Women Support Association (Ethiopia)</td>
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Oxfam Canada is committed to working for a world free of poverty and injustice. We know that gender is the attribute that most persistently predicts poverty and powerlessness in our world today. This is why we believe that ending global poverty begins with women’s rights.

Oxfam Canada seeks to strengthen the capacity of women’s organizations and other civil society organizations (CSOs) to defend and promote the rights, priorities and interests of women and to advance gender equality. Oxfam Canada’s approach to capacity building draws on our long history of working in partnership with a diverse group of civil society organizations.

In recent years, Oxfam Canada has consolidated a portfolio of partners who share our commitment to the goals of gender equality and women’s rights and who seek to become stronger agents of change by delivering quality programs and advocacy to advance gender justice. Our southern-based partners include women’s NGOs, feminist NGOs, mixed NGOs 1 as well as membership organizations, cooperatives and networks of different sizes and missions, working in regions and countries as diverse as Central America and Cuba, the Horn and East Africa, Southern Africa, and Asia.

This document outlines our approach to organizational capacity building for ‘gender justice’ which builds on the depth of experience of our partners and is the result of our ongoing collective efforts to make sense of how organizations change. The document consolidates learning about organizational capacity building drawing largely, but not exclusively, on the implementation of a five-year program, Engendering Change, co-funded with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and ending in 2014. As this document goes to print, we are more than half way into that program and much of what is presented reflects our efforts to improve our organizational theory of change and model of organizational capacity building in line with the learning to date.

What do we mean by Gender Justice?

Gender justice brings work towards gender equality into a rights based framework. It is the goal of full equality and equity between women and men in all spheres of life, resulting in women jointly and on an equal basis with men defining and shaping the policies, structures and decisions that affect their lives and society as a whole, based on their own interests and priorities. Gender Justice commits us to taking a gender perspective on the definition and application of civil, political, economic and social rights.

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1 Oxfam Canada uses this term to refer to organizations that employ both male and female staff. These mixed organizations often focus on a variety of development issues, including gender equality and women’s rights, but not only gender equality and women’s rights. For more information on Oxfam partners please visit www.oxfam.ca.
— prompting us to share our approach with a wider audience.² For example, the Mid-term Learning Review (MTLR) of the Engendering Change program, carried out in 2011, validated the effectiveness of Oxfam Canada’s capacity-building model, which the evaluators find “structured yet flexible”, allowing partners to transform “at their own pace and according to their own context.”³

This document outlines Oxfam Canada’s conceptual framework for organizational capacity building on gender justice. The first section describes Oxfam Canada’s societal Theory of Change which holds that CSOs are key actors in making change happen in their communities, countries and beyond, and justifies our focus on working to strengthen them. The next section explores our organizational Theory of Change, which is embedded in our societal theory of change, given the importance we attach to building strong, gender-just CSOs. The following section presents a schema of ten characteristics of strong, effective, gender-just organizations — based on the perspectives of partner organizations. Then, we explain in some detail our model of organizational capacity building, which includes five domains that we have identified as fundamental. This model provides the basis for our approach to programming on capacity building, which is briefly described in the final section as a summary of our Toolkit for Transformative Organizational Capacity Building. The full Toolkit accompanies this document.

² Partner Feedback Report: Oxfam Canada, Keystone Performance Surveys, INGO Partner Survey, Keystone, 2011, available at: http://www.oxfam.ca/sites/default/files/imce/partner_survey_oxfam_english_2011.pdf. Oxfam Canada partners participated in a confidential survey through which they were asked to rate and comment on different aspects of Oxfam Canada’s performance. The responses were benchmarked in reference to other international non-governmental organizations that have carried out the survey with their partner organizations. Keystone’s approach holds that satisfaction is a proxy for impact: See: www.keystoneaccountability.org. The Feedback Report also provides information on the size, type and focus of partner organizations; for example, partners’ annual budgets range from less than US$50,000 to more than US$5 million. See also Engendering Change Program Mid-term Learning Review: Final Report, November 25, 2011, Oxfam Canada, available at http://www.oxfam.ca/sites/default/files/MTLR%20Final%20Public%20document.pdf.

³ The review also notes that capacity building in the Engendering Change program is effective because it considers organizational system strengthening as having the potential to support deeper organizational transformation around gender equality and women’s rights.
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING

Our organizational capacity-building programs are built around a conceptual framework that involves a number of elements, including: a theory of change about the role of CSOs in gender-just development; a related or ‘nested’ theory of change about how CSOs can be most effectively supported to fulfil their vision and mission in relation to gender-just development; a vision of what strong, gender-just organizations look like; and our five-domain capacity-building model. Our capacity-building work is underpinned by a particular approach to partnership, based on long-term relationships and a positioning of Oxfam as a co-learner alongside partners working towards gender-just societal change. In sections below we attempt to consolidate our current thinking on each of these elements.

As an organization, we are continually challenging ourselves to be more explicit about our understanding of how change happens and our role within this vision. This helps us to be clearer about the relationship between our programming strategies and their intended outcomes. It also ensures greater program transparency and accountability to our multiple stakeholders. Oxfam partners have much to gain from capacity building and much to lose from poorly designed or executed capacity-building programs, and we take our accountability to them seriously. This document reflects program learning from the analysis of partners’ and Oxfam’s experiences to date on how organizations become stronger, gender-just organizations — revising previous conceptualisations and tools where necessary in the interests of program improvement.

The conceptual framework laid out in this document is essential background for the Toolkit for Transformative Organizational Capacity Building, which supports the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of an organizational capacity-building program for gender justice.

Why focus on capacity building of civil society organizations?

For Oxfam Canada, capacity building of southern-based CSOs on gender equality and women’s rights is consistent with our theory of how change happens. We believe that CSOs are autonomous development actors and that southern-based CSOs are key agents in determining the direction of change in their societies. As such, the more capable they are of articulating, defining and acting on the issues they face the more likely they will be able to effect long-term changes in their societies.

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4 See Oxfam’s Partnership Principles at http://www.oxfam.ca/who-we-are/partnership-policy.
6 The conceptual framework and tools developed and documented in the Oxfam Canada-CIDA co-funded Engendering Change Transition End of Program Report, January 1, 2007 to February 28, 2009 have been reviewed and revised as a result of program learning since that period.
Oxfam’s partners, like other CSOs across the globe, play diverse yet fundamental roles in the development process as agents of change; they work toward gender-just social transformation at multiple levels, using a variety of strategies:7

- **Developing and refining their gender and power analyses** to support approaches that challenge the systemic and structural nature of gender inequalities, including values, attitudes and behaviour;
- **Innovative programming**, backed up by targeted policy reform, to increase women’s productive assets and control over resources;
- Monitoring government and donor policies and practices while **undertaking research, policy advocacy and alternative policy development** on women’s rights and gender equality;
- **Mobilizing and organizing women** to claim their rights; and
- **Building or participating in relationships and alliances, including networks, movements and coalitions** of civil society actors on gender equality and women’s rights, to strengthen their power, share learning, expand their influence and visibility, and gain access to new spaces and processes.

Our approach to organizational capacity building recognizes and identifies opportunities for supporting partners in these diverse roles and strategies. We are particularly aware of the role that women’s and feminist organizations and movements have played worldwide as key drivers of social change.8 Southern women’s organizations continue to play a central role in advancing women’s rights in development, ensuring national policies and plans reinforce those rights and holding governments accountable through democratic participation. In the current political and economic context, they are struggling to keep women’s rights on the policy agenda and are working to create bridges across movements towards a common agenda. Social change in support of gender justice will depend on women’s mobilization and empowerment, whereby “women build their resources as movements and use these movements to claim their rights”.9 Women and their organizations must become more effective actors in diverse arenas and at different levels, and be prepared to adapt to changes and to reinvent themselves as necessary. Stronger, diverse, better-resourced women’s organizations are key actors in realizing our vision of gender justice.

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7 This list is an adaption of the typology of multiple strategies used by women’s movements and organizations outlined in Srilatha Batawala, Changing their world: Concepts and Practices of Women’s Movements, AWID, 2008, p. 62-63.
While Oxfam Canada is committed to supporting women’s organizations and movements, we also believe that there is an ongoing, and often unmet, need for mainstreaming gender in organizations that do not have gender equality and women’s rights as their primary organizational mission. These organizations may be led by men and may reach women and men, girls and boys, in their programming. We use the term ‘gender mainstreaming’ to refer to the integration of gender equality into all aspects of an organization and its work. In working with partners, we take a transformative approach to gender mainstreaming, which seeks to address gender power relations and promote structural and institutional change (See BOX 1: Reclaiming Gender Mainstreaming as a Transformative Strategy). Oxfam Canada is also committed to supporting men to become change agents for equality, which includes working with a variety of CSOs that can reach a cross-section of social groups with innovative programs to promote changes in attitude and behaviour, for example.

**BOX 1**

**RECLAIMING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AS A TRANSFORMATIVE STRATEGY**

Over the past decade, there has been some disillusionment with gender mainstreaming as a strategy for promoting gender equality and women’s rights, both among feminist activists as well as gender advocates working inside development institutions. Among the criticisms:

- the technocratic approach to gender mainstreaming involving ‘gender checklists’ and ‘box ticking’ adopted by many development institutions has been largely devoid of its feminist origins as a political and transformative process intended to challenge unequal gender power relations;
- it has been driven largely by asking what development needs from women (e.g. instrumentalist approaches related to generating economic growth) rather than asking what women need from development regarding to improve their rights, power and lives;
- it has failed to keep in focus the importance of collective action and the role of strong and autonomous women’s movements as development actors to hold development institutions accountable to gender equality commitments;
- the reduction of dedicated staff as well as targeted women’s rights and empowerment programs — following the logic of mainstreaming gender as a cross-cutting theme — has effectively meant that gender is ‘everywhere and nowhere’;
- huge gaps continue to exist in the availability of gender-disaggregated data necessary to effectively mainstream gender into policy and program design, implementation and monitoring across all sectors; and
- the move to mainstreaming has negatively impacted on the availability of resources for gender equality and women’s rights work and for women’s rights organizations.

Oxfam Canada’s approach to transformative gender mainstreaming attempts to avoid these pitfalls.

Transformative gender mainstreaming supports organizations to bring about changes in their own power structures and ways of working as a necessary condition to making broad and lasting change in unequal power relations in society. Because each organization is unique, a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to gender mainstreaming will not work. Nor can we expect the same pace of change or the same outcomes from every organization.

Transformative gender mainstreaming takes a particular approach to programming and advocacy — one that involves challenging gender power relations at all levels.

Transformative gender mainstreaming also seeks to foster leadership for transformative change — particularly women’s leadership — and ensuring that leadership is connected to women’s constituencies which can voice their own vision of programming priorities and entry points for what some have called ‘bottom-up’ gender mainstreaming.

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Why focus on organizational capacity building for gender equality and women’s rights?

Oxfam Canada focuses on organizational capacity building because strong CSOs are key agents of change in realizing our vision of gender justice. We take a dynamic approach to capacity building, recognizing that each partner is distinct, operating in its own context and with different levels of capacity. Regardless of their context, organizations are themselves embedded in social structures and practices through which gender bias, along with other forms of discrimination, is perpetuated. For organizations to effectively promote gender equality and women’s rights in their programs and advocacy work, they must acknowledge and seek to address gender bias and other power imbalances within their internal structures and processes. This means working to foster ‘deep structural’ changes within their organizations; that is, addressing the “hidden sites and processes of power and influence, the implicit culture, the informal systems of reward, all of which have enormous impact on how people and the organization actually function”. ¹¹

Simply put, an organization that cannot recognize and challenge unequal power relations in its own internal culture and practices is, we believe, poorly prepared to recognize and transform power relations in society.¹² Nor will the organization have the necessary credibility with its stakeholders to work effectively on gender equality and women’s rights. This analysis has fundamentally influenced our organizational Theory of Change which suggests that partners can become more effective change agents related to gender equality and women’s rights at the local/community level when their organizational structures, policies, procedures and programming are also democratic and gender just. This applies equally to mixed organizations and to women’s and feminist organizations, though the nature of organizational power inequalities may differ.

To shift the bias in favour of gender equality and women’s rights within mixed organizations actions are needed at a number of levels: promoting leadership on gender equality and encouraging dialogue on gender issues, improving staff gender capacities and knowledge, reaching a critical mass of women in leadership positions, ensuring adequate budgets, enforcing zero-tolerance on sexual harassment, and supporting work-life balance, to give a few examples. The primary aim is to shift attitudes, values and ways of working to create an enabling environment for women and a women’s rights agenda to thrive. This includes surfacing and addressing attitudes and behaviours that are deeply gendered, but often unquestioned, including: perceptions about women’s capacity to serve in decision-making roles; taking for granted women’s ‘triple roles’ and the implications these have for participation in the work of the organization; and informal reward structures favouring certain styles of leadership or ways of working. Approaches to gender mainstreaming have often overlooked the importance of fostering an organizational culture shift through changes in individual consciousness and attitudes, alongside formal organizational gender policies.¹³

Our experience with capacity building, particularly the challenges faced by women’s and feminist organizations, has also challenged us to think more broadly about the capacities and organizational characteristics that will contribute to strong, gender-just organizations. Our approach therefore highlights other areas as well: for example, supporting knowledge-sharing and learning, and facilitating collaboration and linkages between and among organizations working towards gender justice. Indeed, supporting organizations to collaborate with and engage other actors is an essential component of our capacity-building approach and consistent with the need to build strong movements that can support and sustain gender justice. For women’s and feminist organizations, financial sustainability is crucial and strategies for building capacity in this area have been incorporated into our model.

What do strong, effective, gender-just organizations look like?

As part of the Mid-Term Learning Review of the Engendering Change program, Oxfam Canada asked thirty partners to explore their vision of the characteristics of strong, effective, gender-just organizations. The set of ten core characteristics they identified, listed in Box 2, is a key component of our organizational capacity-building framework. The characteristics our partners identified help to link our capacity-building strategies to outcomes, allowing us to be explicit about what success
would look like. Oxfam’s partnership portfolio is diverse, yet the commonalities across partner organizations should not be underestimated, even if the way these characteristics manifest themselves in each partner reflect the organizational context and priorities. This list of characteristics, co-created by a particular set of partners at a specific juncture, now part of our capacity-building framework, will be revisited based on program learning going forward.

Beyond these ten core characteristics, the review found that gender-just organizations do better, more effective programming when they consider their context as well as their internal weaknesses and strengths. This involves exploring questions such as: Who is out there that can support us? What individuals and organizations should we partner with? Who are our allies? Who do we need to influence/convince? More effective programming comes from both internal and external reflection to establish where strategic improvement is required at an organizational level, as well as how best to influence policy and provide leadership in their communities.

**BOX 2**

**THIS IS WHAT GENDER-JUST ORGANIZATIONS LOOK LIKE**

Oxfam partners identified these characteristics of strong, effective, gender-just organizations:

1. There is gender equality in staffing at all organizational levels.
2. All aspects of organizational structure and procedures are fully gendered. There is overall organizational reflection around performance and the inclusion of gender.
3. There is an official organizational policy on gender equity, reflected in actions, with an accountability mechanism and equity grievance processes.
4. There is an ongoing staff development program for building female confidence, assertiveness and capacity.
5. There is a system for identifying and responding to needs for gender training.
6. Gender equality is a strong central element in programming which is gender-sensitive and empowering of partners, communities and individuals.
7. Leadership is decentralized.
8. Programming is attentive and flexible in listening to and working with communities.
9. The organization is seen as a credible partner/player by other gender-engaged international and national agencies.
10. The organization is able to influence government and community agencies, and provide leadership to stakeholders and beneficiaries through political positioning, effective communication, policy influence, networking and knowledge sharing.
How to foster strong, effective, gender-just organizations?
Our capacity-building model

What do we mean by capacity building?

Before exploring our capacity-building model in more detail, it may be useful to describe briefly how we understand the concept capacity building. Over the years, Oxfam Canada staff has struggled with the term, citing its inability to adequately capture the nature of organizational change, especially in challenging areas like gender equality. Much of what was termed capacity building focused on training individuals in technical skills for delivering development aid, rather than promoting strong civil societies and effective civil society organizations. It was often based on problematic assumptions about a one-way transfer of knowledge and skills from North to South, rather than embracing approaches that value joint learning among stakeholders, including South-to-South learning. It relied heavily on a relatively limited number of methods, such as training, knowledge transfer and technical advice over more participatory learning processes, often adapting adult learning methodologies.14 Moreover, capacity-building activities were regularly designed without prior consultation with recipients; hence activities were often not informed by felt needs.15

Our experience suggests that long-term relationships with partners create positive conditions for effective capacity-building work: an in-depth knowledge of the partner organization, an understanding of the context in which the partner operates, and strong relationships with the partner organization that foster trust and mutual respect. We place a high value on mutual learning and accountability. We often position ourselves as co-learners working alongside our partners to identify relevant issues and effective strategies. Oxfam Canada’s own internal organizational change and capacity-building efforts are expressions of our understanding that learning and growth is a continuous process.16 This is as humbling as it is necessary: admitting that there are as of yet no ‘quick fixes’ or ‘blueprints’ to achieving the development outcomes we all want to see happen. We see effective capacity building as primarily an internally driven process: partners are ultimately responsible for the process of change in their organizations. We understand that capacity building often involves identifying potential capacity and/or nurturing existing capacity rather than starting from scratch. Our partners’ interest and openness to learn and apply new concepts and approaches in this regard is truly inspiring.

Embracing complexity

As a result of the above, we have worked to ensure greater clarity on what we mean by organizational capacity building and how it can be supported in practice. A ‘Complex Adaptive Systems’ approach to organizations has helped us to understand organizational change and the dynamic, flexible methods that we know from experience are necessary. A ‘Complex Adaptive Systems’ approach views organizations as “human or social systems that evolve organically in unpredictable ways in response to a wide range of stimuli and through multiple interactions”.17 As living systems, organizations “constantly adapt and change in the face of new circumstances in order to sustain themselves. This process of change is only partially open to explicit human direction and, importantly, cannot be predetermined.”18 From this perspective, the task of capacity development involves shaping and influencing processes that are driven by local contextual factors, including culturally defined norms, values and practices, as well as politics.19 The way in which capacity evolves in any organization arises from a continuous process of organizational adaptation as the organization interacts with its environment. This type of change is by definition, complex, non-linear, and largely unpredictable.

So what does this approach mean for capacity-building programming? It does not mean that we abandon designing them. Taking a systems approach means being more attentive to the complex nature of organizations and the multiple influences upon them — and understanding that the direction change takes may be unpredictable. Capacity building is fundamentally

15 These concerns were raised in internal reflective spaces and program team discussions and resonate with the available literature on civil society capacity building. See, for example, R. James (ed.) Power and Partnership? Experiences of NGO Capacity-Building, INTRAC NGO Management and Policy Series No. 12., 2001 and R. James and J. Hailey, Capacity Building for NGOs, Making in Work, INTRAC Praxis Series, No.2. 2007.
17 Ibid., p.2.
18 This point is made in: http://www.snvworld.org/sites/www.snvworld.org/files/publications/18_measuring_capacity_development_-_combining_the_best_of_two_worlds_in_monitoring_and_evaluation_-_david_watson_.pdf
contextual and capacity-building needs and strategies are powerfully influenced by the culture and changing context in which a partner operates, not to mention the specific history and ‘life cycle’ in question. This requires working in a collaborative way with partners to understand their specific needs and the strategies that will most effectively meet those needs.

**An overview of our five-domain model**

Drawing on the vision of what strong, effective, gender-just organizations look like and our analysis of what needs to change within organizations, we have developed an organizational change model with five broadly articulated capacity domains, shown in graphic form below.

**FIGURE 1: The five-domain model**

This model emerged from program learning over the past three years, and builds upon a previous three-domain model [see Annex 1 for a summary outline of the changes].

Table 1 below provides a further elaboration of the model. Our concern was to develop a model that would make sense to our diverse partners, their different capacities and aspirations with regard to gender equality and women’s rights, and the realities of their distinct patterns of organizational growth. In revising the model, our aim was to bring into sharper focus key capacity domains that we and our partners have begun to identify as particularly important for building strong, effective, gender-just organizations. We believe that this revised typology will continue to strengthen our programming practice — that is, it will shape the design, implementation and assessment of our organizational capacity-building programs for gender justice.

Essentially, the five capacity domains are designed to guide and support organizational change strategies in a complex system. Each capacity domain represents an aggregation of a number of capacities, competencies, functions, skills (individual and organizational) that, taken together, contribute to creating overall ‘capacity’ in each domain. Taking a systems approach, we see the five capacity domains as interconnected and interdependent. That is, change in one is likely to affect changes in the others. We explore the relations between the domains briefly below; the case studies shared in the following sections also illustrate relationships between the domains. In practice, of course, capacity-building activities may be designed to address skills and functions that touch on multiple domains — or may indirectly impact on multiple domains even if they are designed primarily to build one skill set.

In our earlier version of the capacity-building model, we had hypothesized that what we referred to as organizational transformation — that is, supporting deep culture changes that enabled an organization to ‘live the values’ of gender equality and women’s rights — was a key factor in building strong, gender-just organizations. Learning from the *Engendering Change* program over the past three years, in particular data analysis of change stories collected in the Mid-Term Learning Review (MTLR), has helped us to take a more nuanced approach to the concept of transformation.

In this new model we see transformative leadership as a key driver for gender-just organizational change, enabling or facilitating changes in other domains and supportive of deep culture change. We focus on Women’s Transformative Leadership as a key driver for gender-just organizational change, enabling or facilitating changes in other domains and supportive of deep culture change.
Leadership in our model because we believe that fostering women’s leadership capacities and roles is an important dimension of building gender-just organizations. However, we are aware that in mixed partner organizations, male leaders can also play a key role promoting gender equality. 21 Within the literature on women’s transformative leadership, there is ongoing debate about what transformative leadership means and who can exercise it. 22 We continue to explore this issue with partners, as we describe more fully below.

We also know from experience that working to promote Gender-Just Structures and Processes — which are supportive of an enabling environment ‘to live the values’ of gender equality and women’s rights — is important and has a positive impact in other areas. In particular, gender audits can play a critical role in facilitating a broader and more sustained focus on transformative organizational change. Strategic planning processes also provide significant opportunities for making progress on integrating gender-equality issues into organizations.

We have learned, as well, that organizational change takes root differently in each organization — and even across departments of larger organizations — and there may be a greater readiness to embark on work in some domains compared to others. For some organizations, change will be at a more cautious pace — and what may appear to outsiders as slow and incremental changes, may in fact be perceived as hard won achievements to those on the inside. Sometimes there will be setbacks or backsliding. In some contexts, just surviving (and not closing down) can be interpreted as success. For some organizations, there will be a readiness to embark upon a profound exploration of internal power relations related to gender (as well as age, class, ethnicity, ability and sexual orientation) and how they may hold the organization back from meeting its objectives.

All of these factors influence capacity-building interventions. Different organizations will have their own pathways. We need to

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**TABLE 1: THE DOMAINS EXPLORED**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAPACITY DOMAIN</th>
<th>CAPACITY AREAS (Organization or staff competencies, functions, skills)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Women’s Transformative Leadership | • reflective leadership on gender and diversity  
• women’s confidence and leadership capacity |
| Gender-Just Structures and Processes | • ‘living the values’  
• Gender-sensitive HR policies and practices |
| Organizational Resilience and Sustainability | • strategic planning  
• mobilizing resources and financial management  
• gender-sensitive monitoring, evaluation, learning and accountability |
| Strategic Gender-Justice Relationships and Linkages | • relating and networking  
• communicating & sharing learning & knowledge |
| Transformative Gender-Justice Programming and Advocacy | • designing and implementation of gender-sensitive thematic or mainstream programs or projects  
• designing and implementation of women-specific programs or projects  
• gender equality and women’s rights-focused advocacy and campaigning |

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21 This is backed up by research on gender mainstreaming which points to the role of supportive managers and board members, often male, can play in promoting successful gender mainstreaming in mixed organizations. See for example H. Derbyshire, Recognizing and Building on Progress in Gender Mainstreaming, draft, June 2012, Gender and Development Network, p. 3.

work with organizations where they are at — and support them to move further along their pathway to gender justice. Ongoing monitoring and learning activities help to determine when it is appropriate to move faster or to slow down and reassess. The accompanying Toolkit attempts to support this flexible approach to capacity-building programming.

The Toolkit for Transformative Organizational Capacity Building is structured around the five capacity domains (and 12 capacity areas) and the tools are designed to support an organizational change process and capacity-building interventions that are reflective of a complex systems approach. To help familiarise readers with the domains, we provide a detailed summary of each in the following section, drawing on case studies from our organizational capacity-building programs to highlight different strategies and the results they have achieved. We note that there has only been space to include a small number of the many programs we have supported with the dozens of partner organizations with whom we work. Where possible we have indicated sources for other change stories and more detailed information.

**Internal change for external impact**

Finally, it is important to make a few observations about the relationship between internal capacity-building efforts and improved program performance, noting that this is dealt with more fully in the sections on Monitoring and Evaluation in the Toolkit.

Oxfam Canada believes that building strong, effective, gender-just organizations is a development outcome in its own right: namely, that increasing the power of CSOs as critical actors contributes to ending gender inequality and discrimination. As such, we are making an effective contribution to this outcome through our support to organizational capacity building. However, we also believe that by becoming strong, effective, and gender-just, organizations are more likely to have a positive impact in supporting changes in the lives of women and girls in their communities. The capacity-building model we put forward is based on the hypothesis that transformative organizational change across the five capacity domains contributes to strong, effective, gender-just organizations that are better able to achieve development outcomes related to improving the lives of women and girls. The graphic below provides a visual representation of how we understand this relationship.

**FIGURE 2:**

**Relationship between internal change and external impact**

We are working with our partners to build a strong evidence base to support this hypothesis, from a feminist evaluation perspective that brings with it a unique perspective on tracking gender-equality results. (This approach is described in detail in the Toolkit.) The stories of organizational change included in this document, provide some insights into the relationship between improved internal capacity and improved program performance, in the form of positive outcomes for women and girls.
WOMEN’S TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

Oxfam Canada believes that the kinds of changes we want to see happen in organizations and in societies requires transformative leadership. For leadership to be transformative, it must seek to challenge existing power structures and consciously move towards an alternative vision. Transformative leadership can be individual or collective, exercised by women and/or by men.

Oxfam prioritizes Women’s Transformative Leadership as outlined in Box 3. Women’s Transformative Leadership is one of the approaches underpinning transformative gender justice programming and advocacy described below. It is also a strategy to promote gender-just organizational change. The meaning of the concept and the strategies used to work towards it are often different for women’s organizations and mixed organizations, though there are some common elements.

Within mixed organizations actions may be needed to shift gender bias to ensure that women are included in decision-making positions and can effectively set their own change agendas. The latter point is significant. Increasing women’s representation in decision-making positions is an important goal in itself, and speaks to the issue of gender equality. However, translating representation into power, in the sense of enabling women in mixed organizations to exert influence

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**BOX 3**

WHAT IS WOMEN’S TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP?

Women’s continual exclusion from institutions and decision-making positions, and the resistance of key institutions, structures and systems (at all levels) to become more inclusive and accountable to women, are crucial barriers to achieving gender justice. Often women are prevented from setting their own agendas for change, or effectively advocating for the kinds of change that lead to social transformation – even when they are in decision-making positions.

A transformative approach facilitates and supports stronger individual and collective capacities to make lasting change. It encourages women’s political voice to assert their rights and access resources, and it creates an enabling environment for women to practice leadership at all levels (economic, social, political, cultural) and in all domains (family, community, organizations, state and religious institutions, schools and the market).

A transformative approach to women’s leadership is rooted in the values of diversity (regarding age, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and ability), of empathy and humility, of democracy and participation, and of transparency and accountability. It recognizes the connections between the individual and the collectivity. A transformative approach values all contributions, no matter how small, as steps by which women set their own agendas in all decision-making processes.

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over decisions and set the organizational agenda, is crucial if women are to exercise transformative leadership. Equally important is ensuring diverse women are able to exercise leadership and decision-making, and occupy agenda-setting positions — a key area of focus in women’s and feminist organizations.

To achieve Women’s Transformative Leadership women’s leadership capacity must be built, via strategies such as mentoring and leadership training of individual female staff members, or establishing formal or informal women’s groups or gender and diversity committees. In some organizational contexts, gender officers or focal points can also take on leadership roles — as gender champions who inspire, spearhead, support, challenge and sustain organizational efforts on gender equality and women’s rights — but only if they are backed up by strong gender working groups and management buy-in. Working to increase the presence of women in decision-making positions is another strategy to support women’s leadership and partner organizations, especially mixed organizations, have worked towards increasing gender balance in management positions. The example of SEDA, a partner in the Horn of Africa, (described in the next section, see Box 7) illustrates the relationship between capacity building of women’s leadership skills and the broader organizational processes and policies needed to support women who take up leadership roles, such as rethinking and revising human resources policies and practices in ways that help to create the enabling conditions for women’s employment and promotion.

**BOX 4**

**BRINGING FEMINIST IDEALS INTO WOMEN’S TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICE: WOMEN ON FARMS, SOUTH AFRICA**

Women on Farms (WFP) works with women who live and work on commercial farms or in the agro-processing industry. For many years, the organization has been working to bring its feminist ideals of transformative leadership into practice. A seminal moment in WFP history occurred in June 2003 when a decision was made to build an independent membership organization of women farm workers. WFP had represented the voice of women farm workers but believed the time had come for leadership and agency to be taken up by the women farm workers themselves. A strong organization of women farm workers, led by women farm workers, was seen as vital to bringing about change in the sector. The outcome was the women farm workers organization, Sikhula Sonke, which came into being in August 2004.

In 2009, WFP made another important decision: to identify itself as a feminist organization and to explore what feminism means for its organizational structure and practice. One of the structures reviewed, in part with support from Oxfam Canada, was the WFP Board. A participatory feminist board development process addressed both Board membership as well as Board processes. One desired outcome was that women farm workers would be directly represented on the WFP Board. In practice, this has posed some challenges, including the creation of a very diverse Board in terms of education level, language skills and experience. In response, WFP has fundamentally restructured Board meetings: where they are held, the agenda and the way meetings are organized and run.

As WFP was committed to Board members’ participation being meaningful and valuable to them and to the organization, rather than merely notional, new ways of ensuring an enabling board meeting environment and process were sought. To enable this, WFP contracted external facilitators to work with the Board during the quarterly Board meetings to build a feminist Board which would function in a ‘non-traditional’ way. Many creative and participatory methodologies have been used to maximize and equalize participation of such a diverse group: using “buzz” pairs; free writing; drawing and collage-making; employing a bilingual facilitator; translating Board pack materials such as minutes into Afrikaans. The nature and quality of Board meetings have greatly improved, especially in relation to farm women’s participation. With the recruitment of four new Board members in 2011, including a young farm woman, the Board has continued working with a feminist facilitator in order to enhance the participation and ownership of farm women, as well as to create an enabling and participatory context which reflects WFP’s feminist ideals.

When asked whether the work on Women’s Transformative Leadership strengthened the organization, one Board member gave this response: “Absolutely.. I think that although it is a work in progress, our Board is much better in terms of the quality of the representation of farm women, in terms of the ethos of the way we work, the manner in which we work, there is a respect for each other, there is an acknowledgement of the different roles and backgrounds that people bring... And it is a learning board, a self-reflective board, not complacent.”

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24 See H. Derbyshire, Recognizing and Building on Progress in Gender Mainstreaming, draft, June 2012, Gender and Development Network, p. 3.

Through capacity-building on Women’s Transformative Leadership, women’s and feminist partner organizations in Southern Africa have explored the characteristics they seek in feminist leadership, which they have defined as leadership that is reflective and self-critical, inclusive and nurturing; it seeks to build and draw on the capacities of other women, where the collective is as important as the individual.26 Capacity-building processes have supported partners to explore current forms of leadership and leadership styles as well as decision-making processes and to help them identify ways of bringing their feminist ideals into their leadership practice. (See for example in Box 4, the review process by Women on Farms, South Africa, to bring feminist principles to its Board.) Such activities contribute to Oxfam and partner efforts to build conceptual clarity and strengthen program practice on Women’s Transformative Leadership.

While Oxfam prioritizes Women’s Transformative Leadership as a capacity-building strategy (within organizations as well as in communities), we continue to explore the role that men can play in pushing for change that is transformative. In some cases, male leaders within organizations (e.g. management or Board members) may act as gender advocates to foster or support women’s leadership within organizations. In others, gender-sensitization training may inspire them to take stronger leadership roles on gender equality and women’s rights, for example, in the form of ensuring organizational accountability to gender policy commitments. Transformative leadership may also involve opening up space for reflection and learning about what it means for the organization to embrace and practice gender-justice goals — all of which can be done by male and female leaders. Analysis of program data from the Engendering Change program suggests that leadership support is a key factor in promoting transformative organizational change. This is consistent with findings from research on gender mainstreaming more broadly and the role that those in positions of power can play as advocates for gender equality.

Finally, program learning thus far points to the significance partners attach to modelling the leadership behaviours related to gender and social justice that they are supporting in the communities in which they work — something which applies equally to women and men. Another key learning is that activities in this area should be seen as ‘works in progress,’ as organizations continue to aspire to live their transformative ideals in their leadership styles and practice.

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Gender-Just Structures and Processes

The focus of capacity building in this domain is to support the alignment of key organizational structures and processes with organizational commitments to gender justice. This includes identifying and implementing specific changes to organizational structures, policies and practices, especially human resources policies. The aim is to shift gender bias and create an enabling environment for gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness — thereby enabling the organization to 'live the values' of gender equality and women’s rights. Research and practice on organizational change suggests that in addition to changing formal policies and structures, it is important to work to change 'mindsets', that is, the 'consciousness' of men and women that influences cultural/normative change. The nature of culture change will be related to the organizational environment — in some contexts this will be more challenging than others. Whatever the context, leadership is a key factor in supporting organizational culture change and enabling an organization to move in the direction of ‘living the values’ of gender justice. The first and second domains in our model are closely linked, as the partner stories clearly illustrate.

There are many actions an organization can take to build an enabling environment for gender equality and women’s rights. Many of the tools related to gender mainstreaming (awareness raising, technical training, action learning, and audits) were initially designed for working with large, mixed organizations, though some are also relevant for women’s organizations. Gender audits are one of the key tools for mainstreaming gender into organizational structures and processes and many of our partners have participated in gender audits, with our support. There are numerous gender audit methodologies available. In most cases, external facilitators led partner organizations through participatory, reflective review processes — enabling them to understand their own organizational culture, explore the extent to which they believed the organization was already promoting gender equality and women’s rights across its work, assess current gaps, and identify opportunities for future work.

Oxfam Canada partners who have participated in gender audits consistently cite these exercises as key factors contributing to other activities, such as the development of gender policies, and generally more sustained work towards gender equality and women’s rights within their organization.

Value of a Gender Audit from a partner’s perspective

“This was extremely helpful for our organization as we had never been through a gender audit before. The process was enlightening for the organization, giving us insight into the main considerations, challenges and possible strategies to address gender disparities in the workplace and in programs. A gender plan of action was developed as part of the outputs of the process [which] provides a roadmap on where the organization would like to be in terms of gender awareness and mainstreaming.”

Anonymous partner feedback on Oxfam Canada’s Capacity-building support, Keystone Partner Feedback Survey

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27 Oxfam Canada’s Gender Audit report, cited above, includes a set of lessons learned about the process and methods used in our gender audit.
The experiences of the Woman Support Association, Ethiopia (Box 5) provides one example, while the story of FENACOOP, a cooperative organization in Nicaragua (Box 6), describes the gender audit as a milestone for the organization. The development of a gender policy is often a first step after completing gender audit and many of partner organizations have been supported through processes to develop their own gender policies and gender action plans to implement these policies. Once gender policies are in place, many organizations then work to develop or revise their human resources policies or manuals to bring them in line with the aspirations of the gender policy. This tends to include the following: development of gender-sensitive recruitment, pay and promotion policies; performance appraisal systems that value gender work; measures to improve work-life balance, including parental leave provision; measures to increase the security of female staff while travelling; and provision of gender segregated facilities and accommodations. The gender-sensitive revision of human resources policies is often accompanied by personal development activities to build women staff members’ confidence and leadership capacity.

Gender sensitization training is another popular activity to raise awareness of gender issues among staff members. Many partner organizations have participated in some form of sensitization training, though increasingly we are working to support other processes to raise awareness and create ‘safe’ spaces for learning and reflection beyond one-off gender training sessions. One strategy that has been used successfully for learning and reflection on gender and other diversity issues within partner organizations is Gender Action Learning (GAL). GAL is a methodology developed by Gender at Work to address the gap between gender equality policies and deeply held cultural norms that are manifest in everyday unequal power relations within organizations. It aims to facilitate a reflective peer-learning process whereby participants choose a real problem they wish to solve in their own organizations or programs to make them more gender equitable. The approach allows participating organizations to question their assumptions about gender and other internalized norms that negatively affect their ability to live the values of gender and diversity. A GAL process, which may last from 9 to 18 months, is meant to feed into existing organizational processes and dynamics and to be ‘owned’ by the organization, and not externally driven. In this way, the process helps to ensure that ‘gender’ is not seen as something extra or added on, but as an intrinsic part of the ongoing organizational process. Box 7 describes the experience of SEDA (Ethiopia) in using the GAL process to address inequalities in staffing, while Box 5 relates WSA’s experiences using the same process which led to the reform of the organization’s human resources policies.

In the earlier version of our capacity-building model, we had hypothesized that women’s and feminist organizations — which have gender equality and women’s rights at the very core of their missions — would be less likely to seek out capacity building support in relation to organizational culture change. In this we were mistaken. What we have discovered and what is now integrated into our model is that the challenge of ‘living the values’ of gender equality and women’s rights is shared across organizations, whatever their context, size and purpose. Not only have these partner organizations explored what it means to live feminist values within their organizations, through core-values workshops that surface and address issues of power and hierarchy or GAL processes, they have brought to the fore ways in which gender intersects with other forms of discrimination (age, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and religion) to maintain unequal power relations inside their organizations. This has also challenged us to think more carefully about anti-oppression in our approach and to work to build intersectional analysis into our methodologies. We have been reminded, as well, that ‘gender’ itself is a contested concept and that sexual orientation is an issue that needs to be addressed from a social justice perspective inside organizations as well as in communities.

In the previous section we described how women’s and feminist organizations have been supported to explore approaches to leadership and their role in transformative organizational change. This has also led them to explore what management
structures and decision-making mechanisms are most likely to nurture an enabling environment for their staff and their programs. Feminist analysis of organizations tends to value consensus-building, facilitation and collaboration in decision-making processes, along with flat or horizontal management structures — juxtaposing these with more conflictual (patriarchal) ways of working and hierarchy. Through reflective processes, partners have questioned how democratic and inclusive their organizational cultures really are and have worked to build more inclusive management practices and democratic decision-making — though many have admitted that it is very challenging to put these feminist values into practice. As part of capacity building processes, smaller, founder-led organizations have looked at options for succession planning, which include thinking about innovative ways of structuring organizations in line with their feminist values. Reflective processes have also looked more closely at assumptions about the relationship between flat structures and feminist transformative change. Research coordinated by AWID on women’s movements, to which Oxfam has contributed, concluded that “meaningful hierarchy, with careful attention to democratic representation and downward and upward accountability, are critical to the effectiveness of feminist movements.”

The challenge of translating feminist values into feminist practice that ensures inclusiveness, participation and accountability, while at the same time producing results, continues to be a concern for many of our partner organizations.

Finally, as noted in the introductory sections, Oxfam Canada’s organizational theory of change holds that internal organizational practices must be gender-sensitive as a matter of principle as well as to enable organizations to deliver quality, effective gender-equality and women’s rights programs and advocacy. First, an organization’s credibility may be bound up with its internal organizational culture. If an organization is not perceived to be ‘living the values’ or ‘walking the talk’ on gender equality (and other areas of diversity) by staff members, particularly gender leads, and by external stakeholders, this will undermine the organization’s legitimacy, especially as regards gender equality and women’s rights. Second, a strong cohort of committed gender champions within an organization can support the implementation of some quality programs while pushing around the edges to shift the organizational culture. But they often do so at tremendous costs to themselves, in the form of frustration and burnout, as well as to the organization, in lost opportunities to scale up work on gender equality and women’s rights and realize results where they matter most — in the lives of women and girls.

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32 See these issues explored in greater detail in the Report of the Women’s Transformative Leadership Learning Event, May 2012, Oxfam Canada and Oxfam Australia. See also the illuminating DOES IT WORK? Feminist Analysis and Practice at Inter Pares, Inter Pares Occasional Paper, No. 8, March 2011 which explores these challenges in a frank and reflective manner.

BOX 5

CHANGING KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICE — THE STORY OF THE WOMEN SUPPORT ASSOCIATION (ETHIOPIA) 34

Women Support Association (WSA) is an Ethiopian NGO working with poor women and their communities on issues such as gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices and HIV/AIDS. WSA participated in the GAL process in Ethiopia described above. The organization had already taken steps to create a favourable workplace culture for gender equality. With the support of Oxfam Canada, WSA had undertaken a gender audit in 2009 and adopted gender policy and human resource policy in 2011, which included provisions for affirmative action. Gender and HIV/AIDS Core Groups (GHCGs) were established at all levels of the organization to promote shared understanding and commitment among WSA’s management, staff members and volunteers towards pursuing gender mainstreaming and implementing the gender policy.

As part of the GAL, WSA staff members identified a number of obstacles to ‘living the values’ of gender equality in the organization: among them, the use of gender-biased language in written and spoken communication; gender imbalances in the recruitment and participation of staff in training and workshops, with men favourably treated; discrimination against female job applicants, particularly of childbearing age, due to limited gender-awareness of staff on recruitment committees; undue focus of gender training on program staff with other departments left out. Many staff members were not even aware of the gender policy. Like many other organizations, WSA was experiencing ‘policy evaporation’ in relation to its gender policy.

Through the GAL process, spearheaded by the GHCGs, WSA worked to change knowledge, attitudes and practice across the organization. Greater efforts are being made to include a wider cross-section of staff in gender awareness training and gender is now integrated into induction orientation for new staff. Female staff are receiving coaching and mentoring. Measures are in place to implement affirmative action, with vacancy announcements specifically targeting women. A gender-sensitive staff performance appraisal format is being introduced and staff members who are role models favouring gender equality in their work will be rewarded. Addressing gender inequalities in the organization through different gender mainstreaming mechanisms is seen to be motivating the female staff and building confidence and team spirit within the organization.

In an innovative effort to bring a successful community level program methodology for addressing culture change into the workplace, WSA has adapted the Community Conversations methodology35 to conduct family dialogues on a monthly basis. The conversation brings together staff and their families to discuss issues related to gender as well as HIV/AIDS, demonstrating that gender inequalities exist across public and private space. One discussion about the gender policy inspired a female staff member to bring her new understanding of gender justice into her home: “After I went home and conducted a round table meeting with my family, I openly admitted that I was burdened with household chores and requested their assistance. Consequently, we agreed to share roles irrespective of the traditional gender division of labour. Now my husband and children are helping me in washing clothes and preparing food. When I get back home from work, I am not worried about what to cook or feed my family; my husband has started to take care of that now. This in return has strengthened our family bond.” In another conversation, female staff members raised issues related to their security when travelling on foot during field visits or working late – now transport is being provided. In an important symbolic move to challenge gendered division of labour, the coffee making and serving during the conversations are now totally carried out by male staff members, against the convention that associates coffee making with women.

34 Source: Learning From Within: The Gender Action Learning Experiences of Oxfam Canada Engendering Change Partners in Ethiopia, Oxfam Canada, June 2012. Community Conversation refers to regular, facilitated exchanges among representatives of all parts of the community that are used to foster and reinforce attitudinal change around a variety of issues.
THE IMPACT OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF COOPERATIVES

The National Federation of Cooperatives (FENACOOP), a mixed organization in rural Nicaragua, represents farming and agro-industrial cooperatives. Approximately 41,000 farmers, 30 per cent of them women, are affiliated through their local cooperatives. If women’s interests, priorities and concerns related to food production, marketing, laws and policies, are to be taken up by governments and other key institutions, women’s voices must be heard in these cooperatives. However, these cooperatives tend to be male-dominated, with few women members (membership is often linked to land ownership which is in the hands of men) and even fewer in leadership positions. With support from Oxfam Canada, FENACOOP has worked to address gender biases embedded in its structures, policies and programmes. In 2006, FENACOOP agreed to commission a gender audit — a milestone in the organization’s ongoing gender mainstreaming process. The participatory audit was followed by the development of a Gender Action Plan with clearly defined responsibilities and indicators, which was then incorporated into the broader organizational strategic plan — a key step in bringing gender issues from the margins into the core of the Federation.

Interviews carried out with leaders and staff two years after the gender audit, reflect a ‘before and after’ perception in terms of the significance of the audit to their organization. The number of women on the Board increased from one to three and there is now a Gender Commission more systematically engaged in decision-making in FENACOOP. It is worth noting that the number of women on the Board had dropped down to two and then went back to three in the most recent election, indicative of the fragile nature of advances towards gender equality. Staff also reported an increase in the number of women beneficiaries in new projects and an increase in co-ownership of land between men and women. The head of the Gender Commission reported: “[The gender audit] has really moved things and brought about a new way of looking at things. Women are taking part in a lot of training and capacity building. The technical staff is more open, and if a male leader makes a disparaging comment or a member of staff doesn’t want to take up a suggestion, we’re now able to raise this at the meetings, before we were too timid to do so.” Three other gender audits of second-level coops (known as UCAs) were also carried out. While they had different results, depending on the level of development of the UCA, in all cases, the audits revealed findings far beyond gender.

A key issue in gender mainstreaming is the extent to which the process transforms the lives of the women, men, their families and communities. Already FENACOOP women farmers’ essential contributions to food production and the rural economy are becoming increasingly visible, as they benefit from these changes and persist in claiming their space and rights. In some affiliated cooperatives, land is increasingly being put jointly into women and men’s names and some women are accessing their own land, thus making them eligible for credit, though this is not yet true across all cooperatives. This is a direct effect of the gender mainstreaming work, as women’s access to resources, and particularly to land, was part of the audit and the actions that followed. Women in FENACOOP have become more active in advocacy, particularly around land rights. A bill to create a Women’s Land Fund was passed by Nicaragua’s National Assembly in May 2010. FENACOOP women leaders joined advocacy initiatives that contributed to this success. Women farmers are also now receiving more targeted technical training from FENACOOP which responds better to their situation, knowledge and interests. Another benefit from gender mainstreaming is that issues such as violence against women and reproductive health are considered legitimate components of FENACOOP’s agricultural projects, particularly when gender is included up front in project design, and work continues on appropriate methodologies for this. Women members of FENACOOP have also participated as part of a larger group in the formulation and lobbying for the Law on Violence Against Women. Alliance building between women workers and farmers organizations has contributed significantly to the empowerment of women in FENACOOP. National and local women’s leaders from FENACOOP took Leadership and Gender and Development diploma courses organized by a grassroots feminist organization made up of poor urban and peri-urban women. These courses have not only contributed to women’s leadership training, but have also provided opportunities for exchange and joint strategizing.

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37 In one case, a gender action plan was developed; in the second, a restructuring of the UCA has resulted in drawn-out legal procedures and not many advances have been made in relation to gender; in the third, a very new UCA, institutional needs beyond gender were identified as being critical. In this last case, the gender audit report resulted in the technical team meeting and reviewing its strategy for organizational support.
Towards Gender Equality in Staffing and Decision-Making Positions: The Experience of Sustainable Environment and Development Action (SEDA)  

SEDA is an Ethiopian NGO which works in drought-affected districts of the Central Rift Valley, Oromia region. Supported by Oxfam Canada, SEDA conducted a gender audit in 2009, and based on the findings, developed an organizational gender policy. In 2011–12, SEDA participated in a Gender Action Learning (GAL) process along with five other Oxfam Canada partners. In this process, SEDA selected gender imbalance in staffing as a key problem it wanted to explore and resolve. Analysis of gender balance in staffing levels revealed 23 permanent male staff to 6 female staff (mainly on contracts). Women were also not represented in any decision-making functions — the General Assembly, Board and the Management Team. Nor were women employed at the project manager, project coordinator and team leader level. This, despite the fact that Human Resources Manual of SEDA clearly stated that the organization was an equal opportunity employer.

A Gender Task Force was set up to lead the GAL process internally with the support of the Gender and Social Development Program Office. Staff explored reasons for the low representation of women, particularly at decision-making levels. SEDA programs are related to water, irrigation, and agricultural technologies, presenting obstacles to women’s employment in the organization given their historically low representation in higher education science and technology programs. Regarding on-the-job education and training, there was a perception that these were dominated by male staff members, with few training and capacity-building opportunities for women. While mentoring does happen in the organization, there were concerns expressed that mentoring for women staff by male colleagues could be misconstrued. More practical obstacles to women’s representation in certain posts were also identified, such as the lack of suitable transport to visit project beneficiaries, as well as accommodation arrangements that did not take into consideration women’s needs.

Not only did the learning process provide staff the opportunity to express their views and concerns, the process also culminated in some concrete actions. One action was the development of an affirmative-action policy for recruitment, promotion, transfer, educational support and training. A formal Gender Task Force, consisting of three women and three men, has been formed to monitor the implementation of the affirmative action policy along with the gender policy and gender action plan. Changes are already evident. The representation of women in the General Assembly has doubled (from 13 women and 27 men to 26 women and 18 men) creating the conditions for a critical mass of women to influence the agenda. In addition, one new female Board member has been appointed, so there are now 2 women and 6 men at the Board level. In the words of one female staff member, “GAL has helped us to look at the deep problems we have as an organization regarding gender and also to seek solutions accordingly. Hence, there have been improvements ever since our engagement in the process. Changes are being made, female staff members are given the opportunity to get promotion and also acquire senior positions and Board membership. I want to continue contributing to the effort that is being made to fill the gap and bring both the female and male staff members on the same page.”

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ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

As part of their pathway to becoming strong, effective, gender-just organizations, some partners may need to strengthen capacities in a range of areas, beyond those specifically related to gender equality and women’s rights. The functions, competencies and skills emphasized in this capacity domain include strategic planning, resource mobilization and financial management, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) — all identified by Oxfam partners as areas where they would like more capacity-building support.39

Oxfam Canada has accompanied many partner organizations through strategic planning processes to reassess and revise operational priorities and strategies. The case study in Box 8 describes the changes unleashed by the strategic planning processes in FEMUPROCAN, a federation of women cooperative members in Nicaragua. In some instances, strategic planning processes have created the space for gender equality and women’s rights to be integrated as a key pillar of organizational strategic plans. This is significant as it places gender equality and women’s rights firmly on the organizational agenda, which ultimately provides greater accountability than typically exists for standalone gender policies. Oxfam Canada’s experience also suggests that including gender in strategic planning processes is often a stepping stone to a broader transformation of gender-related structures and processes.

For many organizations, particularly women’s and feminist partner organizations, financial sustainability is an ongoing challenge. Oxfam Canada has supported several partners through financial planning processes, including efforts to reassess their funding models. The experience of Agenda Feminist Media Project (Box 9) describes a change process, which they characterize as feminist that ensured the survival of the organization in the face of threatened closure. Few of our smaller partner organizations have the resources and skills to look strategically at their financial situation and to build internal capacity for financial planning, fundraising and resource management. But a proper analysis of their funding structure resonates with the call by AWID for women’s and feminist organizations “to radically change how they relate to money” if they are to build strong organizations and movements.40

CSOs working on gender equality and women’s rights have been under increasing pressure to demonstrate the impact of their efforts. For reasons we describe in more detail

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39 In the Keystone partner survey, cited above, partners asked for more support in relation to long-term planning and viability, diversifying funding sources, leadership and management as well as monitoring, evaluation, learning and knowledge sharing, pp. 22-23.

40 Building Feminist Movements and Organizations, op.cit., p. 8.
in the accompanying Toolkit, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) related to changes in gender equality and women's rights is in many ways more challenging than other kinds of social change. Oxfam Canada has been working to support partners to navigate these challenges by introducing them to a variety of tools and methods that help them tell a meaningful story about the changes they are making in the lives of women and girls [see for example, Box 10, for an example related to evaluating women’s networks]. This includes MEL tools that are part of the Toolkit, as well as training in participatory video (Box 11) and in Most Significant Change methodology. Partners have also been introduced to Constituency Voice through the Keystone partner survey mentioned above and at least one partner in South Africa intends to use this methodology to canvas feedback from its own constituents.

**BOX 8**

**STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY – THE STORY OF FEDERATION OF WOMEN FARMERS AND RANCHERS (FEMUPROCAN) IN NICARAGUA**

The Federation of Women Farmers and Ranchers is a national federation of women cooperative members made up of ten cooperative unions which in turn integrate 71 first-level cooperatives with approximately 4,200 women members at the grassroots level. FEMUPROCAN’s objectives are to increase women’s access to land, credit and markets and their visibility as farmers. The Federation also works for policy changes in areas affecting rural women and provides training on such issues as gender, self-esteem, cattle and crop management, irrigation, organic farming, credit and literacy.

With the support of Oxfam Canada, FEMUPROCAN carried out an evaluation of its 2006-2011 Strategic Plan as a building block for the development of a new strategic planning process. The process included the participation of 63 women members at different levels in the organization and furthered the organization’s reflection on its achievements and difficulties related to each of the four strategic components: Organization and Leadership, Production and Commercialization, Advocacy, Training and Empowerment. One of the results of these reflections was the development of a set of recommendations to be taken into account for the next step – the new strategic planning process.

The process highlighted achievements as well as challenges that were important for FEMUPROCAN to take into account, such as the weak identification of some women members with the cooperatives, a ‘handout mentality’ of some cooperatives regarding their relationship with the Federation and a lack of entrepreneurial spirit and capacities among some women members. The process led the organization to name several significant weaknesses that are not always easy to recognize and analyze, and FEMUPROCAN considered this an opportunity to critically review their work. As expressed by the Federation in its report:

“The evaluation represents an important step to see ourselves clearly—our successes and our mistakes. The evaluation went beyond describing the activities carried out in the past few years and went deeper into other aspects, like the identity of the Federation and affiliate cooperatives, and the organizational and operational model, as well as its implementation.”

One factor that contributed to the success of these processes was the care taken to find the right consultant to work with FEMUPROCAN: in addition to having clear concepts on gender and feminist political theory, she was an economist with extensive knowledge of the rural sector. This allowed her to relate to cooperative members in a language that was familiar to them, and to develop a comprehensive analysis as well as practical recommendations for FEMUPROCAN on how to strengthen each of the strategic components of its work. These recommendations have been incorporated into the new strategic plan and have important transformational potential as the Federation implements a new model of operation that allows for more targeted types of support that better serve the needs and interest of different groups of women members, as well as training programs that strengthen technical capacities as well as gender identity.

For Oxfam Canada this process demonstrated once again the importance of contributing to the internal strengthening of organizations in a non-invasive way that respects the members’ timeframes, needs and approaches.

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41 FEMUPROCAN, *Strategic Plan, 2012-2016.*
**BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY: AGENDA (SOUTH AFRICA)**

Agenda Feminist Media Project is a non-profit organization, based in Durban, South Africa, committed to giving women a forum, voice and skills to articulate their needs and interests to transform unequal gender relations. Founded in 1987 by a group of women activists, students and academics from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Agenda works to address the marginalization and oppression of South African women through the creation of spaces to reflect on and make sense of their experiences, including a feminist journal. Oxfam Canada supported Agenda to carry out a reflective organizational change process throughout 2008 and 2009, with the aim of finding a sustainable operating model at a juncture when the organization was threatened with possible closure. This included a scoping of options for the survival of the organization and the funding of its journal.

By Agenda’s own admission, “It was a turbulent time in the organization’s herstory.” The process entailed a hard look at the most viable way of structuring and staffing the organization, including role differentiation, balancing the aims of the organization with the need to be efficient and effective. Difficult choices had to be made, the organization had to reinvent and adapt itself, working in a more focused way, in order to become more sustainable. One of the scoping options was the possibility of negotiating a publishing contract with an international publishing company. There were core feminist values at stake, not least putting control over what were seen as local issues into global hands.

By 2010 key decisions had been taken to put in place a more sustainable model for the future of Agenda. Some activities were scaled down and the flagship of the organization, the Agenda journal, was retained. A collaborative partnership was established with the international publisher to mobilize and manage resources. Although the staff has lost direct control over the production of the journal, the move led to an increase in readership. Agenda is also partnering with a local school of journalism where students help to market Agenda’s community radio program stories to various community radio stations.

Agenda’s own reflections on the change process – which they characterize as non-linear and unpredictable -- provide a fascinating summary of what they describe as the “feminist organizational learnings.” The phases of organizational growth identified by the Barefoot Collective (see Annex 4 of the Toolkit) were used to help understand the organization’s development over two decades, particularly the challenges associated with the shift from a “pioneering” phase to a “differentiated” phase, following legal registration as a non-profit company. The new phase introduced a level of hierarchy into decision-making and accountability structures that sat uneasily with the feminist principles upon which Agenda was founded. “For the past ten years Agenda has grappled with how to practice the feminist principle of ‘power with’ in this differentiated phase of its development. It seems inevitable that in this second phase of organizational development there is a tendency to use ‘power over’.”

Some of the obstacles to getting the organization on a strong footing during this period can be attributed to this structural tension during this “differentiated” phase. By 2010, with the change process behind it, Agenda had crossed the threshold into a more “integrated, networked” phase, with new governance roles grounded in the idea of “power with” that was more aligned with feminist principles. One of the feminist principles the Board identified that supported their change process was that of relationships. Specifically, beyond focusing on getting a decision made, the Board members felt they had tried to be aware of how they were each relating with others around decisions. This led them to identify another feminist principle, namely that the process is paramount: “In the face of threatening external and weakened internal circumstances which created an intense pressure to force a resolution of the tension, the Board held out for the ‘how’ of making the decision, rather than pushing to a quick climax of decision-making”. The change process was also, in their view, characterized by thoughtfulness and caring, including the relationships with Agenda donors: “As such, the governance through the change period had the quality of feminist ethics of care, rather than conflict and competition”.

Sources: For a full account see: Catherine Collingwood, Agenda’s Organizational Transformational Process: Authoring Herstory, 7 December 2010.
STRATEGIC GENDER-JUSTICE RELATIONS AND LINKAGES

This domain in our model focuses on building or supporting organizational capacities to foster alliances, networks, and movement building. We have included policy advocacy and campaigning under the Transformative Gender Justice Programming and Advocacy domain (below), though we recognize there is significant overlap. Building organizational capacity to forge and sustain strategic relations and linkages is consistent with our theory of how societal change happens, which emphasizes the importance of collective action through organizations and social movements. Indeed, the kind of structural and institutional change we believe needs to happen to realize gender justice requires collective efforts and mobilization of citizens through CSOs in order to bring about and sustain societal change. In fact, Oxfam sees itself as part of a global movement for change, working in solidarity to empower individuals, communities and organizations to build a future free from the injustice of poverty, where the rights of women and girls are promoted and respected.

From a systems perspective, the extent to which an organization can influence, collaborate with or learn from other organizations is integral to its ability to be effective as a social change agent. From a feminist perspective, we know that a key factor in promoting internal change as well as achieving success in its external work, is the extent to which an organization is able to nurture positive, reciprocal and authentic relationships with like-minded organizations. Such relationships sustain internal advocates and build the organization’s credibility with external stakeholders. Box 10 outlines some of the reasons why collaboration is important to women’s organizations; many of the factors are also valid for other types of organizations working to support Gender Justice.
Questions such as: Why an alliance? Why ally? and How to ally? are fundamental to a commitment to working in collaboration with other organizations. Women and women’s organizations collaborate in networks, alliances or coalitions for many reasons:

- They achieve greater political clout, greater social force, greater impact and greater reach;
- It is imperative given the global paradigm of unequal power relations between men and women;
- Knowledge exchange with others has tangible and visible results in the fight for women’s rights;
- Women’s organizations that participate acquire greater visibility for their work and more knowledge; and
- The diversity of identities in these spaces presents an opportunity to broaden women’s demands.

Working in these collective spaces means greater social impact for transforming the vastly unequal power relations between men and women. Some of the social impacts are: greater political advocacy, more knowledge generation, and increased mobilizing capacity.

Social impacts of collaboration

At the same time, these social impacts facilitate the strengthening of individual women as well as organizations from the women’s and feminist movements, as they involve individual and collective empowerment processes. In this context, empowerment is understood as the process of deconstructing internalized patriarchy and other systems of exclusion and discrimination, and constructing women as political subjects. That is, consciousness of being a woman, of participating actively in decision-making, and in the creation of political proposals and approaches in order to transform unequal and unjust relations of social, political, cultural and economic power that half of the population experiences, in both public and private spheres.

There is no one definition of movement building, or one tried and tested way of building movements for gender equality. For this reason it is important to promote spaces for reflection, debate and discussion of what partners understand by movement building and how it is evolving in different contexts (local, national, regional, global) and on different issues of importance to them. Similarly, it is important to learn and understand more about how building stronger organizations can strengthen movements and, related to this, the role that organizations play in the larger process of building collective power we believe is needed to achieve social change. One strategy to further this learning is to facilitate the creation of spaces for partner organizations to engage in collective reflection on these issues. Research, particularly in-depth case studies, is another strategy. Box 11 shares some of the findings of AWID’s research on movement building, to which Oxfam contributed, while Box 12 describes a participatory research project on strengthening women’s networks in Central America.

Many Oxfam Canada partners value opportunities for exchanges with other organizations, including other Oxfam partners — in fact, learning exchanges and forums have been a key component of Oxfam Canada’s capacity-building work in recent years.

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44 These points are made in Building Women’s Organizations and Movements. op.cit., Introduction.
45 This is validated in the Keystone partner survey, cited above, pages 20–21: “Oxfam Canada receives high ratings for ‘Learning and sharing good practice’ as well as for its capacity of ‘Communicating & publicizing respondents’ work and introducing them to other organizations/people/networks’.”
years. Learning events, such as the GAL processes in the Horn and East Africa and in Southern Africa, described above, have supported partners to explore together gender issues in innovative ways, and to learn and understand each others’ programs and strategies and to generate new knowledge. Similarly, events and processes such the Feminist Tech Exchange in South Africa described in Box 13 provide spaces for linking and learning. Oxfam Canada also organized a two-day Gender Justice Summit in June 2010 in Toronto, in the lead up to the G8/G20 meetings that took place there a week later. The Gender Justice Summit facilitated sharing, learning and connecting for the hundreds of people who participated, including a number of Oxfam Canada partner organizations from the Americas, Ethiopia and Southern Africa.\(^{46}\) Exchanging and strategizing with others on what does and does not work is critical in relation to the kinds of issues partner organizations are working on – issues that are challenging, likely to provoke resistance or backlash, and where positive change is often hard to see in the short term. Such spaces energize and sustain members from these organizations as they work towards long-term social change.

This domain also highlights capacities related to communicating and sharing experiences, strategies and results. Oxfam has supported other partner organizations to strengthen their communication skills, both written and oral. For example, Oxfam Canada jointly supported a learning process to consolidate good practice in relation to gender and culture in the context of HIV/AIDS which resulted in several publications and a toolkit.\(^{47}\) Through such processes, partner organizations are contributing to the generation of valuable knowledge and learning regarding women’s rights.

Depending on the organization and context, strategic linkages with government and other institutions from local to regional to global may also play a role in promoting gender equality and women’s rights. As we know, gender mainstreaming efforts have led to the creation of ‘gender machineries’ in many government departments. These have a potentially important role to play in supporting gender equality and women’s rights objectives and ensuring state accountability, particularly at the public policy level, yet their effectiveness may be limited unless they are connected to and have support from strong external constituencies pushing for change.\(^{48}\) Where appropriate, Oxfam works to create spaces that foster such linkages.

\(^{46}\) As part of the Summit, Oxfam partners spent a day reflection on the following question: “When we learn and share about what gender equality looks like, how can we ‘walk the talk’ within our own organizations?” See The Ultimate Empowering Methodology is Listening, Highlights from the Partner Learning Event Oxfam Canada Gender Justice Summit, June 2010.

\(^{47}\) For example, the Changing the River’s Flow series, SAfAIDS, Zimbabwe, 2009 included the following publications: Zimbabwean Stories of Best Practice in mitigating the HIV crisis through a cultural and gender perspective; Mainstreaming HIV. AIDS and Gender into Culture: Parts 1 & 2; Training Handbook on the Interlinkages between Culture, Gender Based Violence, HIV and AIDs and Women’s Rights.

The Power of Gender-Just Organizations: A Conceptual Framework

Strategic Gender-Justice Relations and Linkages

Building Feminist Movements and Organizations

Oxfam is continually learning about how best to contribute to Gender justice. We know that women’s rights and feminist movements play a central role in transformative social change. As such, Oxfam was among the supporters of the AWID research initiative, Building Feminist Movements and Organizations, to advance understanding of feminist movements and to apply that understanding to strengthening the capacity of women’s organizations to better catalyze, support, and sustain movement building. One aim of the initiative, which included ten regional case studies, was to create a new conceptual framework that explicitly links organizational strengthening processes to movement building, from a feminist perspective. This was a compelling initiative for Oxfam given our efforts to achieve greater clarity around appropriate organizational capacity-building strategies, particularly with women’s and feminist partner organizations. It was also compelling for another reason: the research promised to assess the impact and influence of feminist movements in recent decades, crucial in ongoing efforts to demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of donor investments in this area.

One outcome of that research project was the publication, Changing their world: Concepts and Practices of Women’s Movements, by Srilatha Batawala. In it, the author seeks to answer the question, “Why do Movements Matter?” She argues that the major changes in favour of women and gender equality over the past several decades — such as the CEDAW convention, the Beijing Platform of Action, the recognition of women’s rights as human rights, etc. — could not have been achieved “without building some kind of collective power, whether of individuals, organizations, or a combination of both.” They were “all the result of organized lobbying by women’s organizations / feminist activists and advocates, through their collective action, without the affected constituencies necessarily being directly mobilized or involved in acting for these changes.” She goes on to argue, however, that the reason movements matter is “their capacity to create sustained change at levels that policy change alone cannot reach,” and that are essential to achieving gender-just social transformation. That is, challenging and changing power structures in relation to: access and control over resources; beliefs, attitudes and values; cultural norms and practices; and laws, policies and resource allocation. She concludes that “evidence from around the world suggests that movements can build lasting change in some of these dimensions far more effectively, deeply, and lastingly than other interventions” (grassroots work, policy advocacy, research, etc.).

The case histories also demonstrate that, “The power of movements — and particularly of women’s movements — lies in the fact that their constituents/members have become primary agents of change.” The author contrasts this notion of “primary agents of change” with the popular rhetoric of “agency”, noting that while “an effective feminist NGO will enable women to use their agency, they may not, consciously or unconsciously, actively move women of their constituency into primary leadership.” This is an important observation and one that Oxfam will certainly consider more closely in the conceptualization and design of programming in support of women’s agency and Active Citizenship. The author also makes an interesting distinction between “building feminist movements” and “feminist movement building” of particular relevance for INGOs such as Oxfam and the organizations with whom we work. Building feminist movements is described as a process “that mobilizes women (and their allies or supporters) for struggles whose goals are specific to gender equality outcomes — for instance, for eradicating practices like female genital mutilation, bride-burning and female foeticide, or violence against women....” Feminist movement building, on the other hand, is defined as “the attempt to bring feminist analysis and gender-equality perspectives into other movements — classic examples are the efforts of many feminists to engender the analyses, goals and strategies of the environment, peace, human rights, and peasant and labour movements around the world.” This analysis provides further weight to Oxfam’s strategy of working with different kinds of organizations and movement in support of gender-justice goals.

STRENGTHENING WOMEN’S NETWORKS, COALITIONS AND ALLIANCES IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Women’s networks, alliances and coalitions in Central America have been key actors in the women’s and feminist movements in the region since the 1990s, contributing significantly to the advancement of women’s rights and their empowerment. A need was identified, however, for greater understanding of these movements and their internal challenges in order to ensure the most appropriate forms of organizational strengthening. In 2008, with the support of Oxfam, a participatory research process was carried out jointly with seven national women’s networks, alliances and coalitions and two regional ones. The national participants were: The Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia in Nicaragua; the Mesa Permanente de Mujeres Rurales, Concertación Feminista Prudencia Ayala, and the Alianza para la Salud Sexual y Reproductiva in El Salvador; the Sector de Mujeres, Red de la No Violencia, and the Alianza de Mujeres Rurales in Guatemala. The regional participants were: the Red Centroamericana de Mujeres en Solidaridad con las Trabajadoras de la Maquila, and the Red Regional Feminista contra la Violencia.

The participatory research facilitated spaces for reflection on the principles and ways of working underpinning these networks, alliances and coalitions, along with the factors that characterize their organizational life cycles. Participants identified a number of elements necessary for strategic alliances to achieve their mission and political agenda. Among them: a strategic agenda or a strategic plan; a clear organizational structure and a balanced distribution of responsibilities; a co-ordinating body; linking the local with the national with the global; information and communication strategies (internal and external); sufficient financial resources to implement and sustain the agenda or strategic plan; and a sense of achieving some short-term successes in their pathway to long-term results. Other, less tangible, success factors include: leadership that facilitates reflection, participation and decision-making; free and unbounded knowledge exchange (without competition, without selfishness); negotiation and dialogue in disagreements; and awareness and recognition of other organizations in their capacities and contributions.

The factors identified are in many ways similar to those other organizational forms. While networks, alliances and coalitions apply many common NGO practices (strategic plans, internal policies, fundraising, monitoring and evaluation systems), they differ in at least one essential way: strategic alliances are organized but not institutionalized. In essence, networks, alliances and coalitions require far greater resources and much more time in order to maintain an inclusive, participatory, horizontal and democratic decision-making structure, and to carry out their joint work and maintain their spaces for reflection and for defining strategies. As such, it is particularly important that the tools and methodologies for organizational strengthening are appropriate for these dynamic entities.

Reflecting on performance and lessons learned, as well as transforming learning into future strategies, were key challenges identified in the research – not least because many of the changes the networks, alliances and coalitions are working towards are long-term social changes. In response to these challenges Oxfam supported a capacity-building workshop in November 2009 including many of the same national and regional participants noted above. The workshop introduced participants to alternative methodologies for planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning more likely to resonate with the specific realities and needs of networks, particularly their focus on long-term results. At the same time, the workshop built capacity among participants on donor terminology and results frameworks, and explored ways of bridging the needs of networks for flexible, innovative methodologies and donor compliance requirements. One recommendation from the workshop was to share the innovative MEL approaches with donors, and encourage a dialogue on the need for some flexibility to experiment and adapt results frameworks as the context demands.

Transformative Gender-Justice Programming and Advocacy

In this domain of our model, we focus on organizational capacity building in relation to transformative programming and advocacy. We use this term to describe programming and advocacy that seeks to challenge and change the systemic causes of poverty, injustice and gender inequality. Alongside direct financial support to partner programming, we have been working with partner organizations to build skills in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs and advocacy work that address and challenge power relations.

We have supported capacity building to undertake gender and power analysis, and in some cases, data collection and research, as a fundamental element of program design, both for development programs and projects as well as for policy advocacy and campaigning. Many partners have been introduced to Gender at Work’s Integral Framework (see the accompanying Toolkit for details) as a tool to help understand the levels and dimensions of change needed to achieve gender equality and to design more integrated programming approaches. An introduction to the Integral Framework has introduced or reaffirmed for partners the importance of working simultaneously for changes at different levels. For example, in the case of work to end gender-based violence, changes are needed in individual attitudes and behaviours about the acceptability of sexual violence as well as in formal policy and informal (customary) laws and processes related to gender-based violence.

Transformative programming and advocacy involves asking women themselves what needs to change, in other words, supporting a ‘bottom-up’ diagnosis of what the specific issues are for specific groups of women in their locally grounded contexts. Participatory and consultative approaches soliciting input from beneficiaries and target communities are important practices that may require skills building. At the same time, there may be a need for ‘technical’ gender training and research that is specific to the program sector, using tools for gender analysis of specific sectoral issues that are increasingly sophisticated. In other cases, the tools needed may be very simple, encouraging program managers to ask the right questions on gender (Who does what? Who owns what? Who decides what?). These help to build a gender lens through which to develop programs. Oxfam Canada, for example, has supported partners to undertake research and mapping exercises using gender and power analysis as an input into the design of gender policy advocacy. Support has also been given for building communications and negotiation skills.

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54 The levels are: individual, organizational, community, national and global. The four dimensions of change are: women’s and men’s consciousness; women’s access to resources; informal cultural norms and exclusionary practices; and formal institutions, laws, policies. See The Oxfam Narrative on Gender Justice: How change happens and how Oxfam contributes to making it happen, Oxfam International, Gender Justice Team, draft, June 2011, which draws on Gender at Work’s approach cited above.

55 This point was made by S. Batliwala, in the online discussion on gender mainstreaming, topic 3, November 2011, carried as part of the Gender and Development Journal Learning Project on gender mainstreaming cited above.
The potential of participatory video as a transformative programming and advocacy tool has also generated momentum over recent years. Training related to participatory video and other social media with partner organizations (as well as with communities) has been a capacity-building strategy used by Oxfam Canada, as described in Box 13 in relation to the Feminist Tech Exchange event in South Africa. Participatory processes, involving as they do constituents of varying levels of formal education, are very time consuming and skills need to be built to carefully manage such processes in the context of deadlines and donor requirements in the aid-funded development world.56

We have also accompanied partners to increase their awareness of specific strategies to address gender power relations that ought to feature in program or project design and strategies, if outcomes related to women’s empowerment are to be achieved. Simply including women in projects does not necessarily ensure that gender equality concerns or power relations will be addressed — though the importance of increasing women’s effective participation as a strategy, as well as an outcome of programming, should not be underestimated. For a transformative approach to gender mainstreaming, it is equally important to ensure that the design of programs targeting women take into consideration issues of gender roles and power relations, as well as the gendered division of labour, and to consider how program interventions will meet objectives that women themselves have set and believe are important for their ability to access and control resources that have meaning and value for them. This may involve designing a mix of program interventions that balance gender mainstreamed programs (with clear gender-related indicators and outcomes) with ‘stand-alone’ programs and projects specifically targeting women. The efforts of HUNDEE, Ethiopia, to design transformative women’s economic empowerment programs is one example, described in Box 14.

And even where the strategies noted above are included in program design, the reality that change towards gender justice does not always happen in a linear way, and is often incremental, means that what may appear as program failure may actually mask program success (e.g. backlash as an indicator of change starting to happen). All this needs to be taken into account in transformative program design and monitoring. Oxfam Canada partners are often doing transformative work in their communities — they know this, and their constituents know this — but they may lack the means to monitor and evaluate this work in a rigorous way, to capture the results and share them more widely. This can involve capacity building in relation to gender-sensitive and feminist program monitoring and evaluation methods. Or skills-building in consolidating program learning and good practice.

Finally, transformative programming takes into consideration the reality that women’s organizing and collective action as active citizens is a critical factor in supporting change towards gender equality and women’s rights. This is evident in successful program practice in relation to local level organizing and collective action in the context of women’s food producer associations to improve women’s food security, as well as women’s collective organizing at national and global levels to promote change around food justice (see Box 6 for an example from FENACOOP, Nicaragua). Identifying ways to build women’s transformative leadership is a key strategy for transformative programming (just as it is for fostering women’s transformative leadership within partner organizations, noted in an earlier section). Capacity-building support may take the form of strengthening design and implementation of women’s leadership programs at the community level as well as strategies to build active citizens with a critical political consciousness and agency. Designing program interventions that foster collective action among constituents as part of programming around active citizenship is also important to transformative programming and advocacy, just as it is at the level of the strategic relations and linkages of partner organizations, noted above — indeed, the two are often interlinked.

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BOX 13

USING VIDEO AS A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMMING: JUSTICE AND WOMEN, SOUTH AFRICA

Oxfam Canada has been supporting partners in skills-building in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for a number of purposes, including using digital story-telling as a tool for transformative program monitoring, communications and advocacy. One such event held in 2009, was a national training event, Feminist Tech Exchange (FTX), led by Women’s Net in South Africa. The purpose of this event was to increase the capacity of participating organizations in using ICTs, while increasing their awareness of the gender dimension of ICT access, use and policy. A feminist practice of technology informed the training methodology: training was participatory and inclusive, created space that is transparent and open but safe, was grounded in women’s realities, and used technology that was appropriate and sustainable. Among the Oxfam partners participating was Justice and Women (JAW), a partner organization from South Africa working on women’s property and socio-economic rights. During the training, Grace, from JAW, made a short movie Double Burden for Pregnant Women in South Africa about her own experience of getting tested for HIV when she was pregnant. Her story highlights the very real experiences of women who attend clinics in rural towns and villages and who are subjected to HIV testing. Grace points out the extreme inequality that forces poor women to be subjected to testing without their full consent, without counselling and without care. She asks: “Why must they choose the most vulnerable time to do this fearful test?” and ends off her movie by asking, “Are women’s rights really human rights?” Many months later, Grace was still positive about her experience at the training, particularly the design which encouraged participants to think about stories as a lobbying tool: “It was a space that was paved for us so we could tell those stories to make change.”

After returning to the office, the Director of JAW, Jenny, reported that Grace was very keen to put her movie on her computer. Jenny said, “I think the ability to tell the story was important for her and her mastery of the technology. She came back to the office and made sure she could put it on the computer and her pride in herself and what she had achieved had enormous benefits in the sense that she could see something very practical that she could show others.” Grace showed her movie to the group of 10 women she had been working with in the community. Jenny says: “For them and for her it was such an enormously important experience...she could a show what she had done and the impact on her at a level...that they could engage with.” Showing her movie to this group of women encouraged them to share their own experiences, and also to think about making their own movies. Significantly, the women said they would make their own movies in Zulu. According to Jenny this was “such an incredibly important thing to have said — what we need to say needs to be heard in our community, it’s not for overseas consumption. We want to use this to change people’s thinking.”

As a result, JAW is planning digital stories by women in this group. “They wanted this and they didn’t mind being seen. For me this was powerful because the stigma is overwhelming, but these women, they could collectively come to this decision.” Grace adds: “We are...aiming at working with those women to pick one story that is important to them and doing a video that will be taken to local clinics and hospitals...” So, the FTX had an impact on Grace, her organization as well as the ten women Grace works within the support group. The work done will support collective action on addressing stigma, advocacy on testing practices and increasing awareness. Grace adds, “It has really opened my eyes to the possibility of cell phone use and other things that women can use and easily have access to, rural women especially.”

HUNDEE, or the Oromo Grassroots Development Initiative, was established as an NGO in 1995 and works on rights-based social and economic development, in particular food security, in order to fight rural poverty and marginalization in Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. Over the years HUNDEE has recognized that rural women face multiple barriers to achieving their rights – including dominant patriarchal values, harmful cultural practices, lack of access to land and credit, lack of government commitment to implement international human rights frameworks – has responded in a number of ways to build in democratic models of participation through creation of collective solidarity groups, emphasizing since 2002 a stronger focus on women empowerment and gender equality. A 2004 gender policy confirmed this commitment. The organization has explored ways of building on earlier economic asset-building initiatives for women in order to strengthen women’s capacities to influence household and community decision-making, for example, by changing women’s and men’s attitudes and practices.

Throughout much of this journey, Oxfam has accompanied HUNDEE to support capacity in designing and implementing transformative gender equality programs that challenge existing power dynamics. Oxfam worked with HUNDEE to develop a capacity-building strategy for several inter-related gender mainstreaming initiatives. These included activities such as a participatory gender audit, and a Gender Action Learning process, jointly with other Oxfam partners, to mainstream gender into the organization’s ways of working (see Box 7) and into programming methodologies, such as asset-based community development (ABCD) and Community Conversations. HUNDEE staff have been introduced to the Integral Framework (see Toolkit Annex 3), which they have found very useful for better understanding the dimensions and levels of change needed to achieve gender equality.

The capacity-building support has enabled HUNDEE to develop locally-grounded and locally-owned gender equality agendas. For example, capacity has been built to facilitate community dialogues in a more gender-sensitive way, nurturing new ways of interacting among women and men that challenge dominant cultural assumptions of the traditional division of labour and power based on age and gender. This approach has demonstrated already quite impressive testimonials of shifts in attitudes and behaviours. Community Conversations among women, men, youth and elders have raised issues such as women’s land and inheritance rights, rights to participate in informal and formal decision-making and rights to be protected from harmful traditional practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

The potential of the ABCD approach to address gender power relations has also been evident. Women have been supported to create their own community economic enterprises, including women’s associations and self-help groups, in order to diversity income sources. These enterprises, have not only improved their access and control over productive assets, but also enhanced their leadership and joint decision-making power at home and in the community. Women and men have noted that husbands have begun to appreciate women’s management skills and are more open to women engaging in activities outside the home. As one community participant observed: “Before ABCD training, only men were making household decision [but] the training we received from HUNDEE taught us to practice sharing our household assets... Now when we want to sell a horse or a cow, we discuss this with our wives and even our older children.” Women have also begun to take a more active role in mixed associations. There is some anecdotal evidence that integrated programming, that is working with ABCD alongside Community Conversations on FGM and women’s rights, has helped to reduce the incidence of FGM and other harmful traditional practices in some communities.

HUNDEE’s programs increasingly reflect an understanding that advancing women’s economic empowerment requires working in an integrated way to address power relations operating at a number of levels. In particular, HUNDEE’s programs work to involve men and elders in recognizing their own roles in perpetuating women’s subordination, combined with women-specific empowerment programs that build on women’s strengthens and assets. Overall the integrated capacity-building activities with HUNDEE staff have supported the organization to design sustainable programs that foster locally-owned, gender-sensitive, community initiatives.


59 The ABCD methodology shifts from a needs-based approach to an approach focusing on community assets with the aim of engaging community members directly in mobilizing their own resources, building on the successes, strengths and talents of individuals and communities to encourage positive change. For more on ABCD see: Gordon Cunningham in From Clients to Citizens: Communities changing the course of their own development, Practical Action Publishing, 2008. Community Conversation methodology is described in footnote 35.
A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE TOOLKIT FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

Drawing on our conceptual framework, particularly the capacity-building model, along with our understanding of the complex nature of organizational change, we have developed a flexible, participatory approach to organizational capacity building for gender justice. We share the participatory methodology in the accompanying document: Toolkit for Transformative Organizational Capacity Building.

The objectives of the toolkit are:

- to outline a comprehensive program management cycle for transformative organizational capacity building on gender justice;
- to provide detailed guidance on how to put into practice a transformative organizational capacity-building program on gender justice.

The Toolkit is designed primarily for practitioners who have responsibility for managing relatively large, multi-year organizational capacity-building programs on gender equality and women’s rights involving a number of diverse partner organizations. The Toolkit is also likely to be of relevance to other organizations interested in taking a more systematic approach to organizational capacity building on gender equality and women rights. Indeed, many of our partners have picked up and started to use some of the tools for their own needs and processes.

The Toolkit is divided into four sections, each corresponding to part of the cycle of program management for an organizational capacity-building program on gender justice. A section on the capacity assessment tool (CAT) outlines the steps to support a participatory assessment of a partner organization’s capacity for gender justice work. The completed CAT templates provide a baseline for

What Partners think of Oxfam’s contribution to CSO capacity building

“...They [Oxfam Canada] have a very clear sense about what civil society needs and I believe their assessment is very accurate. They understand the need to (a) strengthen civil society organizations’ capacity to deliver and (b) strengthen the partnerships and work being done jointly by civil society organizations. They are involved in all of the organizations they work with and emphasize reflection and learning, providing ample space for organizations to come together to do this and also coming up with creative and exciting ways to learn more.”

“...This has been a truly life changing process....Staff, volunteers, managers and Trustees have all blossomed and flourished under this process and the organization has grown enormously. Oxfam really thought hard about what was needed and delivered the funding and the strategy behind it directly to the point where it was most effective and useful.”

Anonymous partner feedback, Keystone Partner Report.
monitoring progress over the life of the program as well as input into the design of a **Capacity-building Strategy**. A section on developing a **Capacity-building Strategy** outlines a process for moving from needs assessment to supporting partners in prioritizing their focus areas for capacity building, responding to real needs they have identified. Several monitoring tools are then proposed to form a capacity-building **Monitoring System** with an emphasis on ongoing self-monitoring by partners and annual reporting as part of the capacity-building program. Multiple methods are used in this system. Suggestions for rolling-up monitoring information from multiple partners are also given. The final section of the Toolkit outlines options for **Evaluation** of an organizational capacity-building program on gender equality and women’s rights, building on feminist assessment methods and taking into account the complex nature of organizational change. Oxfam Canada takes a **learning system approach** to monitoring and evaluating its organizational capacity-building programs. At the centre of the learning system is our theory of change on organizational change. It is an essential framework for assessing our programs and learning what to do better.

We hope that our conceptual framework for transformative organizational capacity building, along with the accompanying Toolkit, will be of value to those working with CSOs to build capacity on gender equality and women’s rights. We invite you to experiment with our Toolkit. We would welcome your comments, adaptations, and suggestions as we will continue to revise our conceptual framework and expand the Toolkit, based on learning from the experience of those who use it.

Finally, we would like to thank Oxfam Canada partner organizations for trusting us to work with them in building strong, effective, gender-just organizations.60

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60 If you are interested in hearing representatives of partner organizations speaking about Oxfam’s capacity-building support please watch What is Capacity Building? at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-TrLflTNO.
## Annex 1

Summary comparison of the previous and current models of organizational capacity-building domains

This chart has been included to help those who have used the three domain model to understand the what and why of the new five domain model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Version</th>
<th>Current Version</th>
<th>Why These Changes?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Transformation (OT)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transformative Women’s Leadership</strong></td>
<td>The findings of the Engendering Change Mid-Term Learning Review (MTLR), along with feedback on the CAT from Oxfam Canada staff, highlighted the need to clarify components of this domain — especially as the other two domains were also important to the overall goal of organizational transformation. Previously women’s leadership, gender sensitive structures and processes, and external relationships were included as elements within the OT domain which failed to do justice to the importance of each element in its own right. Findings of the MTLR suggested the importance of transformative leadership as a central factor in promoting gender-just organizational change as well as the importance of building women’s leadership as a subset. The Review also brought to the fore the importance among partners of strategic external relationships in their visions of Gender-just Organizations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Capacity to commit and engage on GE/WR  
- Capacity to manage for gender and diversity  
- Capacity to ‘live the values’ of GE/WR  
- Capacity to relate and network on GE/WR | - Capacity for leadership on gender and diversity  
- Capacity to nurture women’s confidence and leadership capacity | |
| **Strategic Gender Justice Relations and Linkages** | **Resilience and Sustainability** | The previous articulation of this domain was perceived as too all-encompassing, given that all capacity building could be included under the umbrella ‘Organizational Development’. In the new version, we highlight key areas related to organizational resilience and sustainability that have emerged thus far from capacity building related to GJO. |
| - Capacity to relate and network  
- Capacity communicate and share learning and knowledge | - Capacity to undertake strategic planning  
- Capacity to mobilize and manage resources  
- Capacity for gender-sensitive monitoring, evaluation, learning and accountability | |
| **Gender-Just Structures and Processes** | **Transformative Gender Justice Programming and Advocacy** | Changes here reflect the need to bring to the fore the more transformational dimensions of capacity building in relation to programs and advocacy. While capacity building often involves ‘technical’ skills building on gender equality and women’s rights, the underlying approach of the capacity building is one that seeks to support transformative programming. The new formulation also highlights the importance of building capacity to identify when women-specific projects are appropriate and necessary versus mainstreaming into regular programs, and the skills to design and implement these projects. |
| - Capacity to ‘live the values’ of gender equality and women’s rights  
- Capacity for collaborative management and decision-making | - Capacity to design and implement gender-sensitive programs or projects  
- Capacity to design and implement women-specific programs or projects  
- Capacity to undertake gender equality and women’s rights focused advocacy and campaigning work | |
| **Technical and Project Management (TC)** | **Capacity to design and implement gender-sensitive development programs and advocacy** | |
| - Capacity to design and implement gender-sensitive development programs and advocacy  
- Capacity to design and implement gender sensitive and GE/WR advocacy and campaigns  
- Capacity to consolidate and share learning on GE/WR | |
THE POWER OF GENDER-JUST ORGANIZATIONS
A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

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