**After Action Review of the Gender session at the Special Operations workshop in UNV HQ in Bonn, October 2009**

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1. **What did we set out to do?**

* The learning objective for the Programme Managers for this session was to exchange experiences on how gender relates to the work of UNV volunteers, in the following specific areas of discussion:

1. Work of UNV volunteers that targets explicitly gender equality;
2. Work of UNV volunteers in other areas rather than gender that nonetheless has a (measurable) impact on gender relations;
3. Volunteer work of UNV volunteers and yourself outside the professional assignments that impacts gender relations.

* The ultimate goal of the session was to allow participants to know what is happening in other countries in the area of gender and volunteerism, and to identify opportunities for future collaboration with each other and/or among UNV volunteers that the Programme Managers supervise. With regard to the level of experience of the participants and the amount of frontal presentation during the workshop, we decided to start an interactive session right away without providing a refresher in the form of a presentation.
* A subordinate goal was for UNV HQ to receive information about gender related projects in the field and to identify areas in which UNV volunteers and Programme Managers need further HQ support.

[Several weeks before the session, a Concept Note on Gender and Volunteerism was sent to the Programme Managers with selected chapters that we highlighted as recommended reading. Furthermore, we asked the Programme Managers to prepare an overview of projects related to the areas mentioned above under a), b) and c).]

1. **How did we do it?**
2. Introduction: background to the gender and volunteerism activities in UNV (GAT, Concept Note), and instructions on the exercise.
3. Round Robin discussions, starting with participants divided into two groups with the following themes: i) experiences in gender and volunteerism; ii) challenges and needs related to gender and volunteerism.

1st round (10 minutes): in each group, participants brainstorm their experiences and challenges/needs with gender and volunteerism, write them on cards and post the cards to a pin-board. Each of the facilitators stays with one group, for clarifications, but will interfere as little as possible.

2nd round (10 minutes): groups swap, facilitators stay. The new group reads what the previous group has prepared, and adds information to the clusters of experiences and challenges/ needs.

3rd round (5 minutes): groups swap back, look at the final product and name the clusters of cards (suggested cluster names were provided, based on the Gender and Volunteerism Concept Note).

1. Final discussion – areas for collaboration (10 minutes)

Based on what they have learned about others’ experiences, challenges and needs, participants identify potential areas for collaboration and people in the room that they would like to continue discussing and working with in the future. The facilitators mention the plan to launch virtual Communities-of-Practice for UNV on UNDP’s social network site Teamworks in the near future. This tool could host e-discussions on gender and volunteerism as well as on other relevant thematic areas related to UNV’s work.

1. **What happened?**

* After the facilitators explained the methodology and the objectives of the session, the participants gathered in groups and started writing silently on cards. Approximately 80% of the time was spent with writing, only little discussion and interaction took place. The facilitators tried repeatedly to encourage participants to discuss and to comment the cards they were putting up at the pin board, with very limited success.
* Overall, the experience of clustering worked differently among the two groups. It seemed to work better for the participants that discussed experiences, compared to the ones who discussed challenges. In the latter group, the participants were reluctant to cluster the cards on the pin board. Instead some cards were singled out and participants started to comment the element on the respective card in length. Discussion among all participants of the group did not take place, only a few group members engaged in discussions.
* In the third round, participants who discussed challenges seemed to be unsure what to do with the pre-written cards that included elements from the Gender & Volunteerism Concept Note, which were meant to facilitate the clustering. Most participants read the content of the cards without using them as headlines. The pre-written cards seemed to make more sense to the group that discussed experiences.
* After the third round, only a couple of minutes were left and the facilitators had to wrap up the session without being able to comment the various cards and the (limited) discussions in the small groups.
* As part of the group feedback, criticism came up on the fact that the objectives of the session were not clear, that there was no final conclusion and that the allocated session time was too short.

1. **What would we do differently next time?**

* In the design phase of the session, we had several assumptions on the participants regarding the subject gender & volunteerism. For instance, we were convinced that the participants were experienced development professionals with a very good knowledge of gender issues and who would be prepared to engage immediately in a discussion on the subject. So what did we learn? Test your assumptions about the motivation and knowledge of the concerned thematic area of the participants and plan your methodology accordingly.
* Interactive designs work best if the participants have a certain degree of passion for the subject. If this is not the case, the facilitator needs to guide and lead the process. Methodologies such as Round Robin build upon the assumption that groups work best when they are able to steer the process themselves (given the participants are sufficiently motivated and knowledgeable).
* Do a test-run with colleagues when testing out new facilitation techniques, or at least test the introduction and the explanation of the methodology and the objectives. During the session, test whether participants have understood the objectives before starting the exercise.
* Provide an initial stimuli / presentation on the subject matter (especially if participants are not highly motivated and / or knowledgeable in the respective area). Among other options, one alternative would be to receive inputs from the participants beforehand, and organize the information in a way that would provide a map for the participants to build their discussions upon. Without this initial stimuli participants are very likely to spend a lot of time organizing their ideas first, without entering the discussion immediately.
* Allocate sufficient time. The results of the session probably could have been more meaningful if a final discussion had taken place. One hour is the minimum for a session on a topic as demanding as gender.