

Team S4DA celebrates International Women's Day

On Monday the 8th of March, to celebrate International Women's Day, many members of the Sport for Development in Africa (S4DA) team took part in a brunch where we discussed certain challenges with regards to gender equality. Four questions were discussed in break-out groups and afterwards the results were shared with the entire team.

The first question that was discussed was: "*What messages were you given about what it means to be a man/woman? Where did you get these ideas from? Has your understanding changed since?*" The group highlighted that in the past gender roles were more traditional and that there has been a change in culture. Culture shapes people's understanding of what it means to be a man/woman and therefore there is hope for change, but it will also take different generations to show further progress in breaking traditional gender roles. However, the good news is that it appears that women are already getting many more opportunities today and we are making progress.

The second question was: "*What are the obstacles in your organization to achieving greater gender equality?*" Here the group discussed obstacles that were observed from our work at GIZ with regards to gender equality. A big topic was that often there is a lack of participation of males in gender-related events. A cause of this could be that these events are often organized by women and there is thus a lack of communication to find out what would interest the men to participate. Despite our management board consisting of two women and a man, it appears that in the layers below, band 5 and 6, the majority is still male. Furthermore, there is still a pay-gap, and it is difficult for national female staff to grow within the organization. However, GIZ does show a lot of willingness and flexibility to work on this topic.

In the third question, the group oriented a bit more on solutions to tackle the aforementioned challenges, answering the question: "*What concrete steps can leadership take to reach gender equality in the workplace especially in male-dominant sports organizations?*" An interesting idea from the group was to encourage more co-leadership, where both a man and woman lead together. They also talked about the role of GIZ as a role model for other partner organizations. Often the feedback from partner organizations is that they are inspired by GIZ to encourage more female leadership. Furthermore, they highlighted that team leaders can allow team members to take the lead, step up and take responsibility. With regards to sports, they mentioned that the image of certain sports may influence the gender of leaders that it attracts, it would be interesting to further understand this dynamic.

Finally, in the fourth group they discussed the following question: "*Are quotas useful? How can we move beyond narrow categorizations of women?*" The group agreed that although a quota system has problematic consequences with some women being viewed as 'tokens,' group members believe that a quota system is still necessary. The power of having a female role model, along with the presence of women in an organization could lead to change in itself. A main problem persists though – namely that women still find themselves navigating in male-dominant structures. The question here is, how can women balance being a voice for change, while navigating the male-dominant ecosystem they are a part of? This trade-off between gender advocacy and job security is an ongoing multidimensional issue that needs a lot of work. And this is exactly why we all #ChooseToChallenge not just on International Women's Day, but every day.