

It needs capacitated Gender Focal Persons to deliver!

When I took over my new position as a national Gender Advisor at national level in January 2021, I was very excited to work with a group of 14 gender focal persons and looked forward to that challenging experience to coordinate and accompany 14 colleagues of different projects. However, within the first months I sensed that something was missing. Why were the focal persons not contributing during meetings? Why would others skip meetings without informing ahead? Where was the joint spirit of exchanging about gender-related topics?

I took up the challenge and made some investigations around this situation. I thus organized one-to-one consultations with the focal persons. Three crucial aspects came to light: firstly, most of the GFP did not volunteer in that position but were appointed by their supervisors; secondly most of the focal persons did not have a gender background and hence had limited knowledge in such; and thirdly there were not enough guidance of what would be their tasks and responsibilities. In addition to that missing orientation there was ruling a certain feeling to take over a work-load in addition to the day-to-day work.

Armed with such revelations, I worked together with the group of focal persons to lobby management on define ToRs as well as to allocate a certain percentage of time to the GFP to allow to work on gender and diversity related issues. The ToRs were developed and approved by the Management Team.

Next crucial step was a series of capacity building measures on topics including LGBTQI, gender identities and gender orientation, diversity in the work place and sexual harassment among others conducted with the focal persons as well as GIZ staff at large. Capacity building extended to participating in peer to peer sessions organized by HQ and participating in gender transformative approaches (GTAs) sessions and diversity discussions organised by the Rainbow Network among others.



Country Director gives remarks during a gender and diversity capacity building session

The dice had been set! Tables were turning fast...soon the focal persons were organizing gender discussions and awareness sessions in their projects! While other focal persons moderated international sessions during the diversity week. Employment in Rural Areas with focus on Youths (EYA) after a gender capacity building workshop by the GFPs had all staff re-dedicate their commitment to safeguard against sexual harassment. Led by their Team leader,

at the end of the workshop, all staff signed a declaration form against the malpractice. Apart from activities coordinated at the Country Office, gender focal persons have conducted gender awareness activities in various respective projects and the processes are ongoing.

It can be said, that meanwhile the gender focal persons group had become a network and a learning community. The joint energy just recently cumulated in organizing of a gender fair to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence on 30th November 2021.

This was an exceptional event that saw partners from various departments come together and exchange about ending GBV. Although with little time for preparation, almost all the projects as well as various organizations displayed actions and measures aiming to end GBV and activities undertaken in empowering women - a key to overcome GBV!



Dr Lindemann addresses participants during the event

Celebrated under the local theme: Orange Malawi: End Violence against Women and Girls, Act Now!, the event was graced by Ombudsman who was the guest of honor as well as the Chargé d’Affaires, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr Sabine Lindemann and with over 110 participants. *“Through this event, we want to demonstrate GIZ’s solidarity with the 16 Days Campaign as well as the organization’s commitment towards addressing GBV as a vice that is not only counterproductive but also an infringement of human rights,” Dr Lindemann said.*



GIZ Country Director (kneeling) interacts with artist and GBV survivor, NyaGo (in long dress and headgear) as well as Chargé d’Affaires, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr Sabine Lindemann, Ombudsman Grace Malera, during the event

The event was organized and realized with the support of the whole Gender Focal Group. The process was accompanied by lots of drive, engagement and enthusiasm. I dare to say that would not have been possible without that straightforward process of gaining orientation and being capacitated and finally growing together as a group that is following a joint goal.



Participants at EnDEV stand. EnDEV displayed the technologies promoted by the project and their contribution towards gender equality.



Participants at GIZ partner's stand