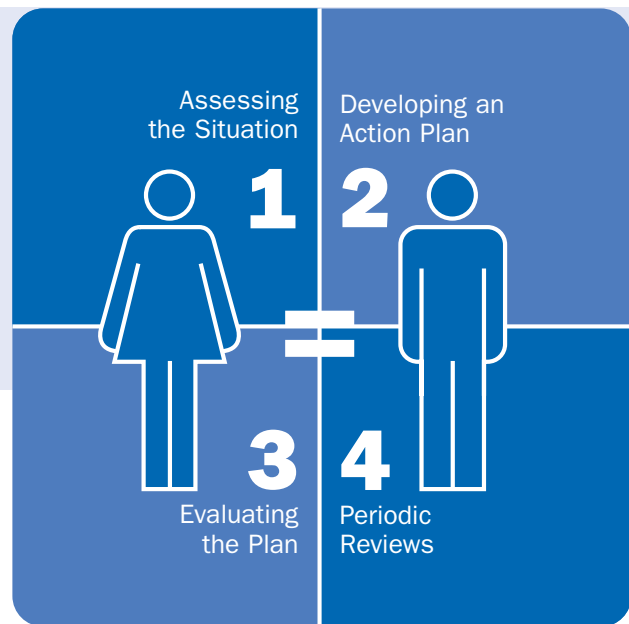


Four Steps to Better Understanding and More Effective Action

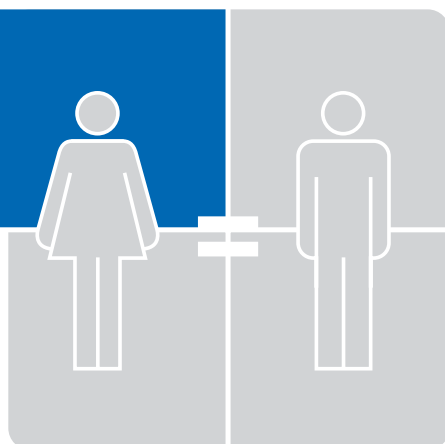
- What are the *specific needs of women and men in various areas of activity* ?
- *How many women and men head single-parent families within the boundaries of the municipality?*
- *How many women own houses, rent apartments or live in subsidized housing?*
- *What percentage of men and women use municipal services (such as public transit and recreational activities)?*
- *What proportion of women and men feel unsafe?*

Gender-based analysis helps to answer such questions. It provides municipal governments with a more precise picture of the situation. Municipal governments must take the time to ask the right questions. A simple four-step method has been devised to guide the process.



Step 1

Assessing the Situation



To carry out effective work, a clear picture of the situation is required. It should be possible to make an evaluation by sorting quantitative and qualitative data by gender. This method of gathering and analyzing information can reveal the gaps between men and women for a given situation.

The municipality must first determine whether relevant studies or surveys are available, or whether new information should be gathered. In other words, the most efficient means of collecting relevant information must be assessed in each case. If nothing is available, the municipal government can gather information in various ways, including requests for data from statistics agencies, research, task forces, public consultation and interviews.

In some cases, it might also consider using internal tools, for example, enquiring about the number of men and women who participate in recreational activities. Whether the data is to be gathered or already exists, one thing should be kept in mind: the information must cover all aspects of the issue.

Municipal governments must have specific information that sets out the different realities of men and women, since this is the only way of tailoring programs and measures to the specific needs of each group. The use of gender-disaggregated data ensures, among other things, that inaccurate interpretations are avoided. When taken out of context, figures can be misleading. For example, an equal number of women and men may work in a particular sector; but if the women are restricted to low-level positions then they have minor roles in decision-making and cannot fully engage in genuine leadership. For this reason, the assessment should go beyond the simply quantitative and examine the place of women in leadership and decision-making positions.

When gathering the facts, the municipal government may involve partners, such as the research sector, community groups or the police service, as these partnerships may prove useful in obtaining a more complete picture of the situation. However, there is one partnership that is absolutely essential. Municipalities must ensure that the main participants concerned are involved; women themselves. Their various responsibilities provide them with an excellent ground level understanding of all dimensions of the city (environmental, functional, economic and social.) Women must be involved from the outset. Effective and smooth-running consultation mechanisms, as well as an alliance with women's groups and local organizations, will allow municipal governments to reach the greatest possible number of women. This new way of putting women's expertise to work may require some adjustments, but is well worth the effort!

Once the municipal government has an accurate picture of the situation, it can interpret the data to understand the causes underlying the gaps and move to remedy them. However, solutions do not always lie within municipal jurisdiction. In such cases, the relevant authority must be identified and urged to implement strategies that improve the living conditions of women in the city. For example, while the effects of poverty are visible at the neighbourhood level, solutions must emanate from all orders of government and from public policies in effect.

The gender perspective dispels a number of myths and prejudices about women and men and may run counter to the opinions of those collecting the data. The main prejudice, which might become a major obstacle, lies in thinking that services are equitable and accessible to women because they are delivered to all citizens without distinction. This assumption masks the reality of systemic discrimination against women.

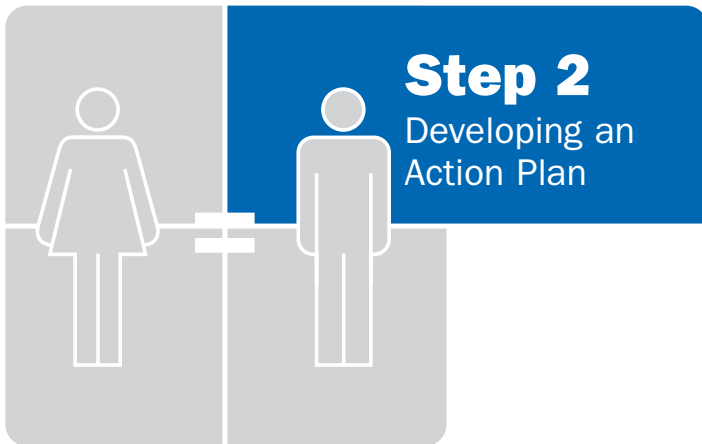
Training and awareness-raising programs are needed so that municipal employees support the approach and use it as a management tool to improve the quality of services delivered to the population. Ongoing consultation with partners (including women in various roles such as citizens, employees or elected representatives) and women's groups is an asset in raising the awareness of city employees, both women and men, and in analyzing the causes of gender gaps.

Summary

- *Obtain gender-disaggregated data*
- *Using the information obtained, prepare an assessment of the situation as it applies to men and women*
- *Identify the gaps between men and women*
- *Pinpoint the causes of these gaps to be able to remedy them*

Who should be consulted?

Women, women's groups, community and institutional partners (such as central government departments and agencies, universities)



Once properly informed, municipal authorities set broad objectives that are then broken down into more specific goals. At this stage, it is important to identify any positive or negative factors that may affect the exercise.

For example, a municipal government decides to encourage women's access to non-traditional jobs by hiring them in its Public Works department. The municipality can readily identify sexual harassment as an element that may undermine the success of the operation. Not only can sexual harassment affect women in their job, it can also drive them out of a given employment sector and back into one that causes less commotion in their life. If the municipal government does not take adequate measures from the start to prevent sexual harassment, the entire operation could be jeopardized. In other words, the sooner any positive and negative influences on the process are identified, the better.

The desired results and the indicators needed to measure them must also be defined as accurately as possible at this stage. Authorities then plan the concrete steps that need to be taken in consultation with women and the different partners involved. The action will be tailored to the target clientele and takes into consideration not only gender specificity but also the specific needs of the various subgroups (including seniors, the disabled and women from ethnic minorities). If needed, indicators that are specific to gender and subgroup membership may be used.

The financial and human resources required to complete the project must also be allocated and responsibilities and degrees of accountability assigned to each participant (e.g., municipal services and support networks). The municipal government must also establish a timetable, ensure that the action plan is implemented within its scope, and coordinate actions to be taken with its partners.

Remember: putting together an action plan requires the full and complete participation of women and groups representing them. Municipal governments have everything to gain by working with women. It will help them properly understand women's life situations, expectations and needs, and consequently better target their actions.

Summary

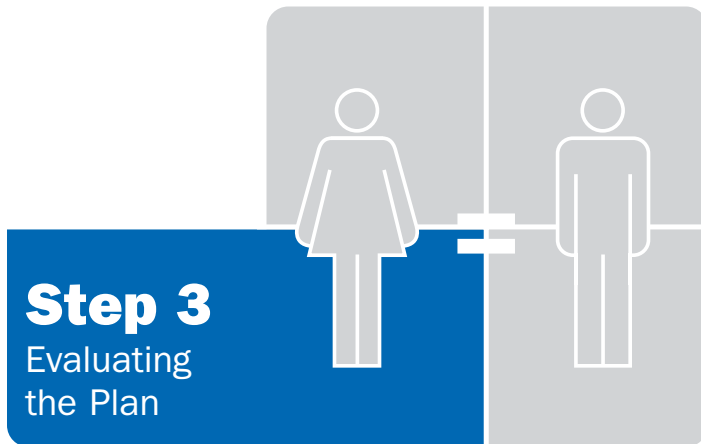
- *Formulate an overall objective to achieve gender equality*
- *Identify specific goals*
- *Specify the results expected*
- *Define the indicators for measuring results*
- *List the actions to be taken*
- *Determine human and financial resources*
- *Assign responsibilities to each intervening party*
- *Agree on a timetable*
- *Ensure the coordination of activities*

Who should be consulted?

Women, women's groups, institutional partners (e.g., central government departments and agencies, universities, etc.), community partners, national and local Women in the City networks



Photo : Anne Michaud



How did the process unfold? Were the objectives met? At this stage, the city and its partners assess the results and analyze why some steps were not completed. This evaluation must be as precise as possible, both in qualitative and quantitative terms. It will help determine whether to maintain, slightly modify or completely overhaul future objectives and actions in order to reach the overall objective.

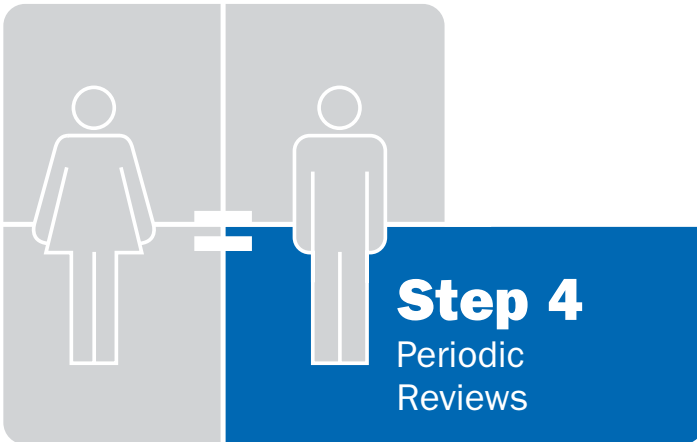
Consultation with women and various partners remains very important at the evaluation stage; everyone provides a different perspective and this will help guide the municipal government towards more effective decision-making.

Summary:

- *Analyze the progress of actions taken and follow up on the timetable*
- *List the steps completed in relation to the specific objectives, using indicators*
- *Assess any modifications that were made along the way*
- *Maintain or re-evaluate specific objectives in accordance with the overall assessment*

Who should be consulted?

All partners involved at the planning stage



The municipal government re-evaluates the operation at predetermined intervals to ensure it is still on track, recognizing that in some cases it might take years to bring about the desired changes and tangible results.

Summary

- *Periodically reassess the situation by using gender-disaggregated data*
- *Periodically review specific goals and actions to ensure they still correspond to the original needs and overall objective, (i.e., gender equality within municipal boundaries)*

Who should be consulted?

Women, women's groups, and other partners as needed