

I. Quality training in equity conditions:

gender and competency approaches

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1. The notion of gender. Gender as a social construction

What are we talking about when we talk about gender?

The gender concept is present in the formulation and implementation of FORMUJER. It is incorporated in the expression of its objectives and as the core of an approach that aspires to run through all actions: to incorporate the *gender perspective* into vocational training, to improve the quality of training in terms of contributing to *gender equity*.

FORMUJER intends to revise institutional training practices to contribute to eliminate *gender marks* that fetter access of *women* –particularly low income women– to different job opportunities and vocational careers. The strategy adopted to achieve this objective conceives the inclusion of *men and women* as beneficiaries of training proposals that promote (do not limit) “free” elections on the part of individuals. To include the *gender perspective* means –for FORMUJER– to generate an encouraging environment, made up of men and women (instructors, students), that facilitates **the conversion of relations of power between the genders into relations among peers**. This proposal considers the different points of departure of individuals, but does not condition their decisions by involving limited visions that assign to one and the other sex set roles they must play.

Man, woman, sex, gender, are concepts that it would be relevant to review in order to come to an agreement and establish a common image on the basis of which to work. From this perspective different categories of analysis may be used.

- **biological** or material
- **socio-cultural**, tied to identity characteristics, roles or specific attributes
- **relational**, that shows what makes it impossible to define one term without resorting to the other, either:
 - ➔ explicitly (“*man-woman are components of the human species, two sides of the same coin, it is difficult to separate them to conceptualise them; human beings with complementary biological functions*”)

- *or implicitly* (“the definition of woman involves economic dependence, woman is associated to domestic power, man harkens back to economic power”)¹

While the concept of sex refers to biology, **the concept of gender is based on social factors, it is a social/ historical/ cultural construction.** And this relationship between classification of birth and assignment of roles, ways of being, attributes, skills and expected attitudes, is what constructs the gender identity and “produces” belonging or membership to a social group.

Many people claim that in this sex/gender relationship the biological core is what determines identities, i.e., that *biological functions would define being a mother or a worker.*

From this point of view there is a “natural” correlate between being born a woman and being a mother, with all the attributes assigned to this function in terms of strictly reproductive factors, and that conditions her social being. In this sense, there is a **naturalisation** of the roles of women and men. This naturalisation of gender attributes is also a social construction, is part of the social imaginary.

Gender as a social construction supposes a set of tacit or explicit agreements worked out by a certain community at a certain historical point in time and that includes teaching and learning processes.

Gender construction is an active and subtle, more tacit than explicit, process, that is worked out on a daily basis. It is a relationship that leads to everyone

¹ Texts in italics between inverted commas correspond to participants in the Training Workshop on Competency and Gender developed by the FORMUJER Programme/Argentina, Buenos Aires, 22 and 23 March, 2001.

doing what is expected of them and, when this does not occur, it places belonging to the group, membership and identity itself at risk.

Gender relations form an order characterised by its rigidity: they are expressed through daily acts and practices with objective and subjective components that are so rooted that changing them would seem to be a very arduous task. Although role changes do occur (e.g., women employed as workers and men as butlers), **changes in gender order are slower.**

Nonetheless, it must be pointed out that although there are socially determined and constructed spaces of power, there are also spaces of power in all individuals and in the community to revert that which would seem to be taken *to be a natural fact*.

Gender construction may also be addressed as a reflexive process that can be controlled, and therefore modified, and all persons, women and men, take part in it with different degrees of power.

All individuals are immersed in a gender order, in a system where gender social relations occur and are reproduced. In the gender order a certain distribution of power operates, that is asymmetric and brings with it inequalities.

Different protagonists take part in these relations: the players of the world of work, the political world, the women themselves. Gender relations are built both in the public area and the private area. **Public and private** spaces are spaces where relations between individuals, social relations, are put at stake. These spaces are permeated by political and economic power factors that structure and define an order and some gender social relations. In a similar manner, other social relations of race and social class are structured.²

² To enlarge on this concept see, for example, Scott, Joan, "El Género: una categoría útil para el análisis histórico"; in *Género: la construcción cultural de la diferencia sexual*, compiled by Marta Lamas; Universidad Autónoma de México, Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género, Mexico D.F., 1996, pp. 265-302.

What is being referred to when speaking of public space and private space? What is the sense of analysing gender relations in these spaces within the framework of institutional interventions?

There are different areas of interaction among individuals. The lines which separate them are not partitions that prevent communication: they are not separate areas or spaces. The rules and regulations that originate or predominate in one of them can influence the constitution of the others. Nonetheless, as we shall see further on, there are “rule producing” spaces and spaces that are rather “re-productive” of the rules.³

<p>Public space Community Civil Society</p>	<p>Public space Political State Law/Power</p>
<p>Private space Enterprises Market Money/Power</p>	<p>Private space Home/Family Couple/Intimacy/Sexuality Maternity</p>

There is a **political/state public** area where laws and rules that regulate society are defined, and a **community public space, of the civil society**, which is less powerful but that influences or *may influence* the building up and dynamism of the political structure. The former is a strong space and the latter is a weaker and more invisible space.

In formal terms, if we look at the political public space, the “photograph” we see is that of a predominantly male sphere, basically occupied by men who are in charge of the decision-making positions. The exclusion of women from this public space has been related to restrictions to their power.

³ To enlarge see Fraser, Nancy, “¿Qué tiene de crítica la teoría crítica? Habermas y la cuestión del género”, in S. Benhabid and D. Cornell, eds., *Teoría Feminista y Teoría Crítica*, Edicions Alfons el Magnanim, Valencia, 1990.

Places for women have been opening up in the public space of the civil society, but their power is relatively limited, although they are able to influence and process changes at the political level.

There is also a two-sided **private space**. One strong side, that has power, in this case economic power, that refers to the world of enterprises and of the market. On the basis of this economic power an order is constructed and resources are distributed that are at the base of socio-economic relations and levels. Within these asymmetrical relations and at all socio-economic levels a classification by *sex is also made*, gender relations are reproduced.

This is a strong **private space** that defends its *power over money*, protecting itself from public interventions. The political public power –coming from the State– can influence the transformation of the relations that are built up in this sphere, with equity criteria in resource distribution.

It has been and continues to be quite difficult for women to enter the sphere of power represented by enterprises and the market, and even more to hold powerful or decision-making positions.

Finally, there is a **domestic private sphere** where a gender order is *reproduced* that is defined by political power, by the standards institutionalised by law or by customs. It is an area in which women formally occupy power and is composed basically by women, children, the elderly, but in which real power is not necessarily feminised. It is a space of conditioned decisions, a sphere of power “by elimination.”

It will be important to take into account variations regarding gender relations –especially in the sectors most affected by poverty and unemployment– where the presence of women in charge of their households becomes more durable and the periods of male unemployment become longer. What are the implications of these formal changes for modifying the gender order and, therefore, for assigning roles and power in the private or domestic sphere?

Public matters are regulated and this regulation influences private matters. The State, through its policies and laws, *intervenes* in private matters: in role organisation and distribution within the domestic sphere, family intimacy, the couple.

Polarisation between public and private can make one expect that private matters –in either of their two “sides” (intimacy, marriage, labour relations, etc.)–

are not regulated from outside, but rather are also regulated privately. It would thus seem that “private” means not regulated by the State. But the order defined by standards influences private matters; in this case it reproduces gender and power.⁴

On the other hand, the separation between public and private has left out of the responsibilities of State regulation the establishment and application of rights⁵ that should be guaranteed by the State: the right to intimacy does not include the right to violence, torture, rape or mistreatment.

The private/domestic sphere is a place of intimacy, feelings, but also of conflict, struggle, and of submission **subtly defined and decided from a space of masculinised power.**

To progress in the change of this gender order that crosses different areas, implies working in all those directions. Any strategy that proposes to remove barriers to establish more equitable social relations will have to consider that gender relations occur and are reproduced in all these spheres and that intervention in one of them will mobilise reactions or find limitations in the others.

FORMUJER, an intervention in the field of training for work, intends to act on those different spheres, through actions that review and question their gender and power practices.

Which ones?

- ➔ Those of the **public power of the State** (the rules and regulations, policies and practices of the State, training institutions, other organisations and social programmes linked to training and employment policies).

⁴ Think, without going any further, of the profound debates and incidences that are unleashed by laws on family planning or reproductive health, or on parental authority.

⁵ Also of other groups subordinated in power relations, such as children, for instance. See how, in terms of public policy, women are located together with minors, the disabled and other disadvantaged groups.

- Those of the **private enterprise and market sphere** (through analysis of their behaviour as regards training and gender, in dialogue spaces and in the construction of strategies aimed at employer sector referents).
- Those of the **domestic private sphere** (when women and men review gender conditioning in their history and their project).
- Those of **civil society** (acknowledgement of gender relations in the community context; revision of practices in institutions with a history in attending the target population).

2. The gender perspective

What is it and what is it used for?

It is an instrument designed to get a close look at reality, calling into question **the relations of power that are established between the genders and in social relations in general.**

Denaturalising the perception of being a man or a woman and attributing to their roles and attributes a socially constructed nature, enables a deconstruction and a different view of their place in society.

From this perspective one can also see that **gender differences are the basis for ascriptions of unequally distributed power.** This unequal distribution of power is at the base of the segregation of men and women on spaces, tasks and occupations; some “protections” on the basis of their sex, that limit opportunities for women; and serious legal vacuums that leave them vulnerable when faced with abuse or mistreatment.

There is a gender order that regulates asymmetrical relations to the detriment of women in the public sphere and conditions their choices and decisions in the domestic sphere.

The gender perspective allows the social construction of gender to become visible. However, while making these socially constructed “naturalisations” visible, this **methodology** may help to interpret other mechanisms of social exclusion or discrimination that reinforce gender mechanisms (poverty, racism, mortality, violence) and **to analyse or deconstruct other social relations of political, social or economic power**. This **category of analysis also allows other inequalities** to be identified and visualised.

In short, the **gender perspective is, simultaneously, a conceptual framework, a methodology of interpretation and an instrument to look at reality.**

3. Gender and labour market structure

What does “a gender perspective” mean?

How are gender relations expressed in the world of work? What places do men and women occupy in that sphere? What features are identified in the labour market structure when the latter is analysed from a gender perspective?

Information available on the labour market must be analysed from this approach because the gender perspective helps to interpret existing data and create new indicators.

The analysis of information describing percentages of men and women grouped in such and such category is not gender analysis. It is a first dimension of the analysis, although it is not enough. To simply count the number of unemployed or employed men and women who earn up to such a level of income or who have reached a certain level of formal education is not to incorporate the gender perspective in socio-labour information analysis. One “looks” from a gender perspective when asking why, when those data are questioned and an **interpretation** is sought regarding what behaviour(s) or social practice(s) are behind them.

It is necessary to open the research on aspects that are not explicit, that are more qualitative, referred to effects or impacts that are generated as a consequence of being in one or another social, economic or labour situation (unemployment, precarious employment, income received, etc.).

The construction of gender indicators to look at the job market implies, in the first place, to broaden or extend the concept of work to unpaid work in order to be able to measure the real and differential load of responsibilities by gender. It also means that a different methodology must be used to obtain and build-up information: to place a value on the recovery of personal, collective histories, using qualitative research techniques, among other controls.

Methodological notes for constructing indicators and information with a gender perspective⁶

To introduce a gender perspective in the construction of a system of information implies:

- To review research procedures
- To contextualise information
- To develop participative practices in the construction of a system of information
- To ensure the participation of the population involved
- To ensure a multidisciplinary viewpoint

Procedure:

1. Defining a problem on which intervention is needed with the participation of the players involved.
2. Gathering existing information that may contribute to explain the problem.

⁶ Notes taken during participation in the INET/GTZ Workshop co-ordinated by Braig, Marianne, Argentina, October 1999.

3. **Reviewing it and analysing it with a gender approach:**
 - 3.1. When reading available data: a) making differences between men and women visible, and b) measuring the differences.
 - 3.2. Identifying effects and causes on men and women, of the situation identified by the data.
 - 3.3. Identifying advantages and disadvantages for men and women arising from that relationship or position.
 - 3.4. Identifying the players who are part of the problem and of the information in place: considering that there are interests, sectors not represented, and that the view of the “experts” prevails and not that of the population “affected” by the problem. Considering that there are no integrating or multidisciplinary approaches in the definition of problems and information.
 - 3.5. Defining the limits of available information.
4. **Defining the kind of information needed (variables, indicators).**
5. **Defining the way to obtain it (research methodology and construction of a system of information).**
6. **Reconstructing the information and the problem.**

Considering that the data implicitly or explicitly include the construction of a “problem” and that this view may be sexist and not gender-based.

4. Gender and vocational training

Why “vocational training with a gender perspective”?

Why “focus on the individual”?

The changes manifested in the economic structure and in the organisation of production and labour have questioned the place of education and technical-vocational training. New needs and challenges of the labour market have led to a crisis in those systems so that their previous *modus operandi* did not provide sufficient responses to prepare people for insertion in the labour market. This occurred partly because of this same labour market crisis –the formal sector in particular– and partly because strategies have to be reconsidered to respond to a scenario in permanent transformation.

The growth of the service sector, the industrial crisis, as well as technological and organisational changes, also question the place of technical-vocational training, traditionally oriented towards training in trades linked to industrial production. The concept of vocation or trade is devalued when faced with an expectation of more polyvalent performance, linked to bringing technical wisdom integrated with knowledge, skills and more general attitudes shared by different work processes. Traditional educational “credentials” (technical degrees) thus lose their value and simultaneously demands appear for more “certifications” that describe the competencies developed.

Due to these changes, there is an area in which the players of the training field must begin to make inroads to provide more adequate tools. This area refers to **labour competencies**. What is suitable training in this context? Which are the competencies that are needed and that are valued in the world of work? This is a search that must be shared by institutions and players of the world of work alike: entrepreneurs and workers, both male and female.

Some expressions of the changes occurring in the economy and labour (the growth of informality, unemployment) have also questioned the modes of participation of men and women in the occupational public sphere and in the domestic sphere. Many women have entered the job market (the rate of female participation is growing) to insert themselves in precarious and unstable jobs, competing with men for increasingly scarce spaces. Men and women begin to occupy places that are significantly different from those traditionally assigned to the social and sexual division of labour. These changes question the “natural” quality of the transmitted and assumed roles and proves, once again, the constructed nature of same.

Faced with these changes and questions, it becomes inevitable to ask oneself about the place and space of vocational training to improve the situation of men and women in this scenario, promoting equity relations, and about how that training should be like. These are, at least, the central questions asked by FORMUJER.⁷

What is the scope of action of training institutions?

Vocational training cannot provide a response to everything; there are also other tools and instruments of public policy or sector action that can have a bearing on improving the insertion possibilities of men and women. Training, however, has a space and area of responsibility of its own in the scenario described above; it is the meeting point between the needs and possibilities of the productive system and of they who produce, men and women.

From their particular area of responsibility, vocational training institutions relate to male and female employed and unemployed workers who seek to improve their employment status; to private enterprises to which they provide services; to local organisations that are reference points of the social, political and labour contexts.

Vocational training institutions, through their action, are able to generate strategies towards those diverse insertion spaces of these players. And it is that comprehensive and strategic vision which shall enable them to better fulfil their function: to prepare individuals to act in a certain economic, social and labour context. Thus the institutions can become “hinge” instances between the different areas and intervene in different directions.

If the place of training in the construction and transmission of knowledge is acknowledged, its potential for change can be properly valued. To do this it must, *inter alia*:

⁷ To enlarge, see FORMUJER, “Incorporación de la perspectiva de género en la formación profesional -. Materiales Didácticos,” Cinterfor/ILO; Montevideo, 2001.

- Review in educational practice the explicit and hidden messages of curriculum planning that in some cases strengthen but in others limit the real potential of individuals.
- Pay attention to the signals of the context to adapt and make more relevant and valuable their supply.

What should training be like? What aspects of its intervention can the institutions revise to promote change in several directions?

As has been seen, changes in the organisation and in the work process and the crisis itself of the labour market (unemployment, precariousness, informality) question the concept of profession or occupation and establish a broader and more dynamic conception of the contents of the work itself, as well as new requirements for workers.

If technical contents quickly lose their currency due to the dynamic nature of the innovations in the work process, and skills and general competencies related to management, teamwork, tolerance of uncertainty, among others, become relevant in labour performance, it will no longer be sufficient to centre training exclusively on those technical contents.

Training centred on contents does not identify the individual who is to be worked with, nor the context. It is far from the individual although the contents may be properly addressed technically.

If the objective of training is to contribute to improve the individual's conditions of performance, the **focus must then be displaced towards the individual** who learns, and competencies that transcend and cross various performances during the whole of life and in different occupational fields must be recovered in the individual's job histories and in his/her experiences. From this perspective, **institutional learning must be combined and assess the learning of individuals.**

The incorporation of the gender perspective into training reinforces this approach because it helps to understand that a person is much more than

his/her technical knowledge: he/she is an individual, of a certain age, gender, family status, history, located within a community and from that situation he/she must construct his/her training, employment and labour project.

In institutional practice there are aspects that may be reviewed in the light of these approaches. For example:

- ➔ Updating and sensitising technical teams, executives and teachers on the basis of a critical analysis of their approaches and knowledge brought to bear in training.
- ➔ Revising the contents and methods of the curriculum.
- ➔ Certifying profiles and competencies or validating the supply by acknowledging different players.
- ➔ Finding mechanisms to update the curriculum. Integrating and combining disciplines to build up the supply, co-operate among different technical and occupational fields, paying attention to the cross-cutting nature of many of the competencies valued in job performance.
- ➔ Revising the framework of players who intervene in the local labour context and towards whom interventions will have to be articulated. Identifying new players (Will those we know traditionally be enough?).
- ➔ Paying attention to the levels of participation of women and men in the courses and also to the conditions in which they do so. Observe “*how they do it*”. Consider the different modes of participation in the processes, to design the supply, leaving stereotypes aside.

The inclusion of the gender perspective should, therefore, run through the definition of contents, methodologies, global construction of the training supply and institutional practice itself. A perspective is a conceptual and methodological frame of reference. It is not a content, a module or an isolated activity. It cannot be other than a cross-sectional approach that addresses the training *modus operandi* in its entirety, in the different specific fields and in institutional work.

5. The competency approach in training for work

What are competencies and how do they contribute to training?

Changes in the world of work are progressively leading, more or less quickly according to sectors and enterprises, to profound changes in job content, qualifications required and the demand for knowledge.

The success of enterprises traditionally depended on the relevance of the decisions taken by management. Responsibility for their viability fell exclusively to the highest hierarchical levels, and workers, both male and female, had to carry out the tasks assigned to them by those senior levels. Rapid change, more intense competition, and new forms of work organisation have led, in the present context, to many workers, both male and female, taking on a share of significantly greater responsibility, because they must face multi-dimensional situations in work that are less routine, where external control is less possible and that, therefore, require greater autonomy, decision-making and creativity. To be competent in the new contexts implies to be capable of learning and solving unforeseen situations as well as, complementarily, to develop a reflexive attitude towards work.

This context poses new challenges to education in general and, especially, to training for work, which must improve the quality and relevance of training supply. It is in that line that scientific and technical players and communities linked to vocational training and, more broadly, to the relations between education and work, as well as to human resources and labour relations, have been resorting to the labour competency approach to describe, explain and design suitable strategies and systems of intervention in the face of the intense transformations in the labour world. Although traditionally vocational training was defined on the basis of supply, i.e., on the basis of the knowledge available in the institutions, today it is indispensable to gauge the productive context to identify training needs, and only on this basis can the form it shall take be defined. In this sense, the incorporation of the competency approach to training is a response to this demand, i.e., it contributes to relevance.

Origins and approaches

Among the different currents that address the subject of labour competencies, two trends may be identified. One places the stress on visible performance,

the other on the abilities (knowledge, skills) of the individual. The former, proceeding from behaviourism, attaches priority to clarity and objectivity in the definition of results to be achieved in terms of **observable behaviour**. The latter, rather, is more concerned with the **cognitive processes** (although, in general, in terms of conceptual knowledge) of the individual that would be at the base of their behaviour, but are not to be observed directly.

A holistic view⁸ allows observable performances to be integrated with more complex cognitive capacities, overcoming that dichotomy, since it takes into account, not only the results to be achieved (performances) but also the necessary processes to achieve them (thinking strategies).

From this point of view “**vocational competency**” is defined as a **set of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes** that an individual **combines and uses** to solve problems related to his/her vocational performance, in accordance to criteria or **standards** from the professional field.

This notion of **vocational or occupational competency** defines three dimensions that are important for quality, relevance and, as will be enlarged upon in the next section, gender equity in training:

- ☞ **Individual potential.** This refers to the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that constitute a **package of learning** belonging to the individual.⁹
 - ➔ It is not a case of specific knowledge proceeding from a single field of disciplines (academic knowledge), but rather a *combination of “learning” of different kinds and origins*, that the individual brings to bear in concrete situations, to solve the problems he/she encounters in their professional practice. That is to say, the combination is an action *undertaken and decided by the individual*, and is not something given.

⁸ Gonczi, Andrew, “Enfoques de la educación basada en competencias: la experiencia de Australia.” *La Academia*, September-October 1997 – Hemeroteca Virtual ANUIES, UNAM, <http://www.hemerodigital.Unam.mx/ANUIES>

⁹ Likewise, some authors (including Gonczi who has already been quoted herein) consider that competencies are “attributes” or “qualities” of individuals.

*“...the notions of **combination** and **context** are essential. Competency is not the simple sum of particular knowledge and/or skills. Competency constantly articulates, composes, doses and weights these various resources and is the result of their integration.”¹⁰*

- It also means that the abilities, knowledge, skills and attitudes must be in some way “available” when the individual needs them, i.e., when his/her vocational performance puts them face to face with the need to solve situations and problems, whether or not foreseen.
 - Finally, it recognises other fields, besides the academic field or that of systematic education, as a source of learning production: labour, social, community and domestic practices confer knowledge that is integrated into that which is acquired in academic environments.
- ⊖ **Performance**, that is a situation of **activity** on the part of the individual that involves certain features: it is a necessary activity for the achievement of the results demanded by the vocational environment, and presumes various degrees of complexity and of demands as regards learning and skills to be brought to bear.
- It is necessary to clarify that competencies are not only manifested but are constructed on the basis of performance. Indeed, the competency acquisition process cannot be conceived as a phase of conceptual acquisition, followed by a phase of “practical” application. Rather **in practice itself** competencies are also built and learning and concepts are developed. The result of the existence of gender marks in “socially acceptable” performances for women and men, would be an unequal development of competencies that are constructed in occupational, community and family practices.
 - The determination of **competent performance** presumes an identification and definition of training components on the basis of the relationship between players who intervene to decide what it is, through a **social dialogue centred on training**. Employers, workers and experts, both male and female, trainers, users; they all define from different places the acquisition of learning, the “learnings” that must be brought to bear.

¹⁰Le Boterf, Guy, «Cómo gestionar la calidad de la formación,” Edipe, Barcelona, 1993.

- ➔ **Social recognition** raises the point that competencies are **creditable**, i.e., they are eligible for “credit” or recognition from a social point of view. Stated otherwise, competencies are validated according to criteria from the productive and professional field, acknowledged and valued socially, expressed as **standards**.¹¹
- ➔ These standards, in turn, operate as a guide for competency evaluation and also for the design of training supplies, whereby they become **training quality criteria**.
 - ➔ Because of that, it is necessary to take into account knowledge arising from the roles traditionally assigned to women, which is not usually acknowledged and, therefore, it is not credited as occupational competencies or in the construction of standards or rules. In particular, it is necessary to **make visible and place a value on learning linked to a gender position** and that is the result of different roles traditionally assigned and assumed by men and women in the public and the domestic sphere.

The incorporation of the competency approach in education for work makes possible the improvement of the quality of the learning processes and their results, considering their value in terms of employability, when learning is identified and developed that is transferable to different situations. This means we must establish –from the training field– fluid relations with demand and also with the target population. Thanks to the former we will be able to keep the supply updated, while the latter will allow training to be defined in terms of the points of departure, expectations, learning and skills of the beneficiaries. The reference to the point of departure of the individuals allows the introduction of specificities, regarding the position of these individuals in social relations (gender, class, etc.). The adoption of a competency approach that is not centred on individuals affects the quality of training, since it does not identify as competencies with a value for performance in the labour market, learning, skills, attitudes acquired as a result of gender that, in general, are naturalised and invisible.

¹¹They are also often called “professional standards”, a term that includes quality requirements in productive performance.

6. The Intersection of gender and competency approaches

How do competencies relate to gender?

The adoption of the labour competency approach does not necessarily imply the inclusion of a gender approach. Furthermore, when attention is paid to the requirements of the world of work and to consensus surrounding comparable standards, it is often more difficult to identify competencies acquired in family and social life. These competencies, if they are not systematised, are not acknowledged in the professional field and appear as “naturalised”, and thus are not taken into account in training areas as valid learning in the development of vocational careers.

The last decades have been marked by the massive incorporation of women to public spheres and, particularly, to the labour market. However, employment of women has been found to be concentrated in a small and specific number of sectors and occupations considered to be typically female. This occupational segregation has negative effects at different levels: it limits vocational options and the development of careers; it is excessively demanding in terms of qualifications and dedication; there is no access to dynamic sectors and “lead” enterprises; wage discrimination; persistence of poverty. In that sense, some authors point out that, mainly in the industrial sector, the juxtaposition between Taylorism and flexible models can be matched in many cases to feminised and masculinised sectors, respectively.

So, and as has been pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the constant assignment of some functions and activities to women and men, according to supposedly natural “conditions”, in fact provides them different opportunities both at the employment level and at that of the development of their competencies through performance.

The gender perspective shows how human groups, on the basis of biological differences, construct the concepts of masculinity and femininity and symbolically attribute different characteristics, possibilities of action and valuation to women and men, producing non-equitable social systems in most societies. A process that

does not take into account and analyse underlying models, that is considered “neutral”, may possibly be building on situations of discrimination, exclusion and devaluation. It is necessary to integrate into this approach the principles of equality of opportunities and of treatment on the job, in which learning, histories, different ways of doing things are identified and are recognised as such, without pitting themselves against or weakening each other.

In the case of competency identification, players (entrepreneurs, workers, State representatives, trainers, both male and female) often define the different forms of learning by implicitly assigning to them a gender connotation. The assignment of gender to that kind of learning is also a social construction arising from the view the players have of what men and women know, can and want to do.

The attributes assigned to men and women are “crystallized” as male and female competencies, as male and female tasks or professions. This attribution of gender conditions competencies and can be evidenced when we observe people of the same sex undertaking different competencies, according to how they learned to do so in their community of reference or their social situation.

Knowledge is a cultural construction. There is no determining relationship between a person’s sex and their capacity (power and will) to undertake a task.

For example, physical strength, conceived basically as a feature of the male gender, is associated with certain activities. With technological change, this physical strength requirement for some tasks ceases to exist. Therefore, there would be no impediment, even if differences in physical capacity were valid, to women entering traditionally male professions. There is, however, a history of the professions and functions that links men to performance that requires “physical strength” and that continues to be thus considered even when the requirement in the case of that occupation disappears.

Both men and women are conditioned to develop certain competencies. In the world of work, sex seems to be a competitive advantage or disadvantage in itself. As it does belonging to certain social groups.

Social perception makes a gender attribute to be considered a competency.

How does the intersection of competency and gender contribute to training?

It is on those grounds and with that conviction that the FORMUJER Programme promotes the incorporation in training policies of the competency approach, enriched and strengthened by the gender approach.

The “intersection” of the labour competency approach with the gender perspective in training makes it possible:

- to respond to the challenge of paying attention, simultaneously and in a coordinated manner, to the needs and potentialities of individuals and employment. By including both pillars of training it is being assumed that training is a tool to promote inclusive and equitable social and economic development;
- to apply one of the most **important criteria of training quality: its employability value**, i.e., to what extent does training qualify women and men to perform professional functions, in a variety of contexts, and allow them to develop the ability to “find, create, preserve, enrich their jobs and change from one to another, obtaining thereby personal, financial, social and vocational satisfaction”;¹²
- to increase the opportunities of individuals, taking advantage of capacities and resources in enterprises and in training processes;
- to denaturalise and later question the *invariable* assignment of a certain identity to men and women and to introduce this perspective to training, removing the barriers that impede to *acquire knowledge and skills* that have traditionally been banned to men or women.

¹²Ducci, María Angélica, “La formación al servicio de la empleabilidad,” *Boletín Técnico Interamericano de Formación Profesional*, No. 142, Cinterfor/ILO, Montevideo, 1998.

Both approaches:

- **centre attention on an individual located within a social reality** that conditions him/her but who is able to transform it on the basis of personal and collective strategies and learning;
- **promote the consideration and valuation of diversity** as an attribute of individuals and of reality that enriches and increases the dynamism of social relations, while making possible and favouring sharing and learning. They acknowledge and take advantage of different spaces for learning and the production of knowledge. They facilitate the construction of personal histories suitable for diverse interests and also varied reference environments;
- **start from the comprehensive acknowledgement of an individual** who uses capacities and life experience, knowledge, feelings and values that nourish both his/her physical and intellectual and social dimensions.

How and where is it applied ?

It seems evident, because of all this that has been stated herein, that the adoption of this dual approach should occur in the entire *modus operandi* of the vocational training institutions. That *modus operandi* is manifested by means of institutional goals, objectives and curricula. Stated otherwise, in institutional strategic planning (in which principles and goals under which activities shall be carried out are made explicit) and in curriculum planning (going from the design to the organisational and administrative implementation of the curriculum).¹³

Besides their visible elements and contents, both planning exercises express institutional practices, i.e., representations about the meanings of standards and behaviours, expectations, prejudices and coding systems imbued by institutional culture and interpreted on the basis of the particular experiences of

13 During this entire work the terms programme of studies, curriculum and training programme shall be used as synonyms.

the individuals involved. These manifestations and representations configure what has been called the “**hidden curriculum**”,¹⁴ i.e., the system of standards and signals that implicitly indicate which forms, attitudes and behaviours are sanctioned by institutional culture and turn out to be legitimate or not according to those cultural patterns. And they act as a frame of reference that guides the definition of goals and objectives, the organisation of activities, the choice of materials, the images used in the educational process, orients the language and attitudes brought to bear in teaching practice, learning stimulation and evaluation criteria, etc.

Therefore, the adoption of a **conceptual and methodological framework centred on relevance with regard to the beneficiary population and the context**, that focuses on the person located in a specific economic and occupational reality and recognises and interprets this hidden curriculum, sources and is expressed both in policy definitions and in methodologies, tools and strategies that are brought to bear to make them a reality.

In the series of publications that is being developed by the FORMUJER Programme to share its proposals and systematise its results and concrete experiences, different aspects and components are addressed and analysed that, to its belief, must be taken into account for the implementation of a vocational training policy that is meant to improve the employability of individuals, especially poor women, and gender equity in the labour market.

This publication focuses on **curriculum development and planning** and, more specifically, on the assessment and design phases in which the intersection of competency and gender approaches is decisive in relation to conceptual, methodological and instrumental aspects. The intention of the following pages is to cooperate with the task of those who are interested in applying both approaches in curriculum development, sharing some reflections on what has been done from the vantage point of FORMUJER and providing examples of achievements that, doubtlessly, are in the manner of a “first draft” to be improved and enriched by whomever believe they can be of use.

¹⁴To go into further depth regarding this concept see FORMUJER, “Incorporación de la perspectiva...,” op.cit.

Working materials

- A. Key questions for including the gender and competency approaches in curriculum planning
- B. Checklists for incorporating the gender and relevance approaches in curriculum development phases

A. Key questions for including the gender and competency approaches in curriculum planning

For purposes of this document, curriculum planning means the process that organises training supply. It begins with the identification, definition and drafting of the curriculum and ends with the evaluation of its results.

A curriculum development that incorporates gender and competency approaches should at least provide an answer to the following key questions:

- Who is receiving training?
- What kind of training are they receiving?
- What for?
- With whom?
- How?
- When?

In order to support this incorporation, a model is provided below in which the main “gender risks” to which attention should be paid are examined and some recommendations are set forth to guide the construction or modification of the curriculum.

Who is being trained?

- **The “target group” must first be defined.** A course designed for men or women should not be planned in a neutral manner, without taking into account differences in points of departure, ways of learning, expectations. What entry point competencies do men and women have? Do they start from the same point? Do they have to learn the same things? It will be necessary to consider differentiated socialisation

processes as regards the disciplines and professional fields in which work is carried out.¹⁵ If the proposal is homogeneous or neutral and does not take into account previous differences, it may increase their depth and turn them into discrimination.

- **Find out what knowledge and skills training beneficiaries already have.** Considering knowledge previously acquired in other training and on-the-job experiences (paid or unpaid) makes it possible to guide the design of the supply by contrasting them with performance requirements (updating contents, posing levelling scenarios and differentiated learning modalities).

What kind of training are they receiving?

- **Dynamically define the contents of training present in profiles and in competencies.** If training is defined as a reciprocal relationship with a changing and dynamic labour market, the curriculum must foresee the incorporation of these changes.
- **Consider the complexity of the processes** and identify the different stages where there are several operations. For example, for process automation (PLC) certain basic competencies must be mastered, the person must be introduced to a new technology, learn to think with new logical attitudes, the binary system, programming, combinations, regulation, control, comprehensive knowledge, teamwork.
- **Determine the profile, defining more and new competencies,** especially those referring to relational and personal capacities, attitudes, etc.
- **Incorporate information proceeding from follow-up of individuals,** as guidance to up-date the supply.
- **Work on citizens' rights** in the curriculum to strengthen the position of training beneficiaries.

¹⁵The difficulties women experience with mathematics is a well-known myth that leads to all kinds of arguments.

What for?

- **Focus on individuals.** This implies to preserve spaces of autonomy and critical reflection in relation to the requirements and demands of the market, and to be coherent with the main commitment of training which is to individuals and their potential, conditionings and expectations, which must be included in training plans.
- **Promote change of the situations of inequality existing in the labour market by means of an analysis of the relations of power and inequity.** This becomes a strategic objective of the training plan.

With whom?

- **Promote the intervention of players from different origins** (for example, enterprises of the same sector but of different characteristics, labour exchanges, users) in the different stages of the process (definition of profiles, design of materials, evaluation).
- **Step up the diversification of learning spaces and areas,** generating labour networks and articulating interventions.

How?

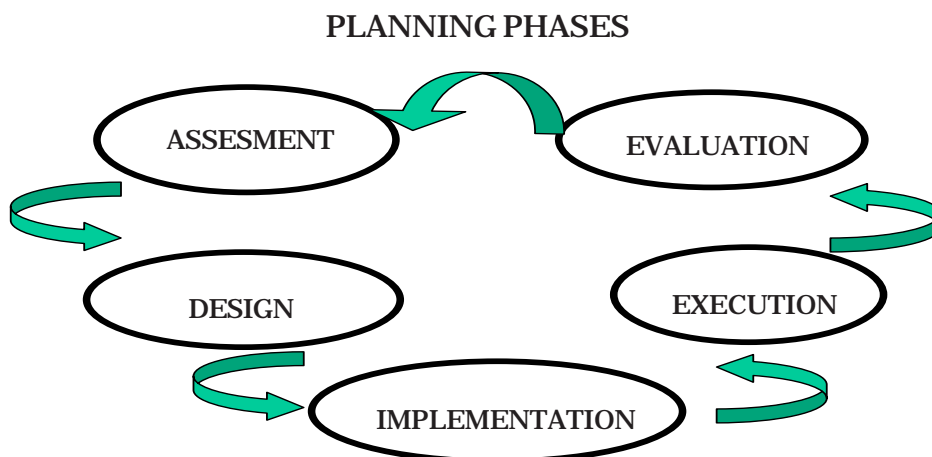
- **Critically review the history of tasks and professions when building up a vocational profile.** The labour market was structured as predominantly male, the entry of women has occurred later and the profiles were assembled on the basis of the features assigned to males.
- **Make gender differences visible** throughout history and at present, in the labour market and in institutional practices, work on them from the design and teaching practice stages, to avoid or neutralise them.
- **Adjust the supply taking into account the different learning modalities and requirements of men and women,** considering:
 - ✓ Areas and places where activities are carried out (distances to be covered, sanitary infrastructure endowment).

- ✓ Devoting or assigning time to learning activities to compensate the familiarity of males and females with certain techniques, instruments or contents.
 - ✓ Teaching resources suited to learning modalities or processes that are differentiated according to gender, reference group.
 - ✓ Qualifying different modes to access information (in the summons, in the learning situation).
- **Consider theoretical work phases and also practice phases, in order to develop competencies through performance.**
- **Organise supply into modules and integrate it into a logic of projects:**
- ✓ Integrate into each module the vision of the entire training process.
 - ✓ Certify partial histories with employability value.

When?

- **Adjust schedules and the length of training actions to needs, related to the social situation, age, and the life cycle of women and men.**

As is true of all planning, the curriculum planning has different phases for which these questions contribute important inputs. The phases are neither linear nor consecutive but rather are elements of the cycle of a process and of constant feedback where some moments exist that are identifiable and the emphasis of which (research, execution, etc.) leads to their name. This process can clearly be seen in the following chart:



- **Assesment:** an analysis of context is performed in which training programmes and target population programmes will be developed. It is reseach time. **Who is receiving training? What kind of training are they receiving? What for? With whom?** and, in the competence-based training methodology, it involves the identification of **competencies and the working out of a Vocational Profile.**
- **Design:** proposals are developed in response to detected needs and situations. Titling, duration, contents, structure, teaching and learning methodologies and strategies, teacher training requirements, evaluation strategies are determined and curriculum materials are developed. It is the stage at which the answers collected in the assesment phase are made operational and the curriculum is developed.
- **Implementation:** steps are taken to procure the various elements needed to put the curriculum proposal into practice. The delivery modalities, time schedules, and location of the courses are revised and adjusted, teachers are selected or trained to attain suitable profiles, means and resources are made available, the supply is disseminated, the beneficiary population is convened and selected, if applicable, practical learning is instrumented, etc. In this phase the inputs of the questions With whom?, How?, When?, are basic.
- **Execution:** the courses and their administration are put into practice, internships or the practical phase are undertaken, information is systematised and the evaluation process is begun, especially the evaluation of training, processes and learning. Labour intermediation in all its aspects also belongs to this stage (training for job searching, conclusion of the occupational project, labour exchanges, insertion monitoring, articulating with local and sector agents, etc.).
- **Evaluation:** Although evaluative research is in place at different moments of the process, it is more intense at the end of the process because the information collected feeds back to and reorients actions. At this time an evaluation of impact is undertaken to validate, extract lessons and information that can source future interventions.

B. Checklists for incorporating the gender and relevance approaches in curriculum development phases

In order to simplify the task of the persons involved or who are responsible for the different curriculum development phases, the considerations and reflections posed so far are provided below as checklists. They can be used as an instrument/ guide before beginning the activity or for purposes of evaluation (their own or that of third parties) of its actual consideration and of the relative importance assigned by each executing team to the item, in accordance with the circumstances and peculiarities of the institution or programme.

a. Gender approach in the analysis of curriculum development phases

1. Assessment

- 1.1. Persons carrying out labour market studies, occupational analyses and materials, sensitised and informed about gender.
- 1.2. The studies consider the specific situation of men and women
 - 1.2.1. Data by sex is available: how many men and women, what each one does, in which sector, etc., both in their training and in their occupational field.
 - 1.2.2. Advantages and disadvantages for men and women are identified, arising from their position in that occupational field or in that training field.
 - 1.2.3. Problems arising from their insertion in this training or occupational area, as manifested by men and women, are identified.
- 1.3. Competencies arising from family and community experience are incorporated into occupational analyses, making them visible and placing a value on them.

2. Curriculum design

- 2.1. The individuals drafting the programmes have some training or sensitivity regarding gender.
- 2.2. Curriculum design is expressed in inclusive language.
- 2.3. The formulation of competencies and the vocational profile makes visible and places a value on all activities undertaken by women and men, whether they seem “naturalised” or not.
- 2.4. Objectives, contents, resources and activities expressly consider the participation of men and women with a non-sexist or discriminatory criterion.
- 2.5. The persons producing the materials, disseminating them and promoting the courses, and choosing the beneficiaries, are sensitised and have some training in the gender approach.

3. Implementation

- 3.1. Teaching support materials and resources (texts, illustrations, slides, etc.) consider men and women with an equity perspective, in images, language and contents.
- 3.2. Promotion activities for enrolment of women and men for training consider their needs and problems both in images, in texts, and in the strategy used.
- 3.3. Institutional or extra-institutional articulations or spaces are planned to compensate for or attend to family and other problems that may have an impact on the training process of the participants, both male and female.

4. The actual training process

- 4.1. The instructor and teaching staff is sensitised and/or have some training in gender.
- 4.2. The instructor and teaching staff considers and reviews its practices (hidden curriculum) with regard to the “official” curriculum from an equity perspective.

- 4.3. Teaching methodologies and practices consider the interaction of both sexes and make sure they identify (to promote equality) gender stereotypes in the distribution of tasks and activities in the classroom/workshop/learning space.
 - 4.4. Gender marks that appear in learning environment practices are made explicit.
 - 4.5. Gender marks that appear in all institutional practices are also made explicit: division of duties among teaching staff, access to lead positions, decision-making opportunities among the staff of the institution, etc.
 - 4.6. Differentiated actions are envisaged that favour a change in patterns imposed by the culture that prevent “learning” of certain skills or contents on the part of women and men (learning schedules, reserving mixed spaces, or for women or men exclusively, to analyse certain topics).
 - 4.7. Support or compensatory strategies are implemented to solve problems alien to the training/ productive environment.
- 5. Evaluation (of learning, of processes and of impact)**
- 5.1. The evaluation of learning processes controls the presence of gender marks in the judgment of the instructors and teachers proceeding both from the productive and the family sphere.
 - 5.2. Performance evaluation incorporates the competencies that become invisible among the results to be achieved.
 - 5.3. Evaluation incorporates modalities that simplify self-evaluation, identification of achievements and reflection on the path travelled by the participants, both male and female.
 - 5.4. Evaluation of impact considers the data on insertion into the productive world broken down by sex, working day, pay, on-the-job satisfaction, occupational category, head of household condition, number of children.
 - 5.5. Statistics discriminate data by sex.

- b. Relevance and quality of interaction with participants, both male and female, and the connection with the target population.

1. Assessment

- 1.1. The target or priority population is made up of women from disadvantaged sectors.
- 1.2. Information is made available and the characteristics of the participants are taken into account: socio-demographic data, expectations, obstacles and advantages for training.

2. Curriculum design

- 2.1. The persons drafting the programmes have experience with the target population.
- 2.2. Programme methodology includes participative and autonomous practices from the start.

3. Implementation

- 3.1. The selection process considers target population characteristics among the socio-cognitive “requirements” and plans to work on key competencies.
- 3.2. The persons who carry out the promotion and selection have experience with the target population.
- 3.3. The materials supporting the guidance and selection process clearly address the target population and they are validated with that population.
- 3.4. The guidance and selection materials are clear, accessible and relevant for the target population.

4. The actual training

- 4.1. The instructor and teaching staff is trained and has experience in relations with the target population.

- 4.2. The methodology involves the use of tools for decision-making and autonomy development from the start.
- 4.3. Practices during the training process involve the participants, both male and female, in working out their occupational project and are developed with an inclusive and relevant language.
- 4.4. An effort is continuously made to revise the “gender marks” of the hidden curriculum in teaching and instructor staff practices and of institutional practices in general, in relation with the male and female participants.
- 4.5. Stereotypes and prejudices coming from the social and cultural origins of the participants are revised continually regarding their attitudes and forms of participation.

5. Evaluation

- 5.1. The evaluation considers the results achieved and the processes carried out.
- 5.2. A variety of strategies and instruments are considered for the evaluation of competencies acquired.
- 5.3. Knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes are considered as well as their capacity to be used in the solution of situations in the labour sphere.

c. Curriculum updating and labour practices

1. Updating devices are provided for in the different stages or instances, especially in profile building and competency formulation.
2. Labour practice instances are provided for and instrumented as part of the training process.
3. Practice instances consider the development of interactive competencies and promote autonomy and problem solving capacity.
4. Labour practice instances supply information to update profiles and designs.

II. Identifying labour competencies with a gender perspective

1. Basic methodological criteria to incorporate a gender perspective
 2. Steps prior to the identification process
 3. The competency identification process
 4. Validating competency profiles
 5. Competency profile presentation format
- **Identification methodologies experiences**
 - A. Workshop on silk screening competencies identification
 - B. Building a vocational profile on vegetable micropropagation

