

Case Study: Mainstreaming Gender Equality in the Agricultural Institute of Canada

Introduction

The mission of the Agricultural Institute of Canada (AIC) is to broaden society's knowledge and use of science and agriculture. Since its founding in 1920, AIC has witnessed many changes in the professional agricultural sector in Canada. One of the most visible changes has been the increasing presence of women in the profession and their influence on the sector. In 2007, AIC began to examine whether the current gender profile of the profession was correspondingly reflected in its own membership, structures and programs.

This case study explores AIC's awakening to the importance of addressing gender equality across all the facets of its work, the process and methods undertaken to date, the lessons learned along the way, and the steps still needed in the future. Data was drawn from a review of AIC documents and relevant external publications, as well as interviews with key individuals. The case study also includes a number of questions for study and discussion, both for those involved with AIC and for other organisations who wish to learn from AIC's experiences.

What's in this case study?

- Objectives of AIC gender equality work
- Process and methods undertaken to date
- Lessons learned
- Future direction and next steps
- Questions for study and discussion

History and evolution of gender equality mainstreaming in AIC

First steps: Clarifying objectives, establishing a task force

Over the past two decades, AIC's [International Twinning Partnership Program \(ITPP\)](#) included an objective that reflected the role of women in its initiatives. This was based, in part, on the [Canadian International Development Agency's \(CIDA\)](#) policies on gender equality which guide the programming of implementing agencies.

In preparing its current five-year program, AIC and its partner organizations proactively sought to define and achieve one of the five ITPP objectives, "to advance the representation and voice of women as participants and beneficiaries of agricultural endeavours." The objective supported the global [Millennium Development Goals](#) and CIDA's goals for gender equality at both the institutional and programming levels. As part of this objective, and to lead by example, AIC committed to work on gender equality in its own governance, administration, programs, and activities. AIC circulated an invitation to project partners in Canada and elsewhere to sit on a Gender Equality Task Team (GETT) and confirmed five women and three men, half the group from Canada and half from partner countries, plus two staff and two board members.

Quick facts

- Prior to 1995, as a federation of provincial institutes of agrology and scientific societies, AIC membership numbered several thousand, but there is no available information on the breakdown of membership along gender lines for that period. In 2009, no longer a federation, AIC had 354 individual members of whom 66 were women (18%).
- Between 1920 and 2009, three out of 84 Presidents, and one Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer, were women.
- Of the 400 AIC Fellowship Awards granted since 1921, four were received by women (1%). Of the 12 AIC Young Agrologist Awards since 1995, five recognized women (42%).

Source: Agricultural Institute of Canada. An Introduction to Gender Equality Mainstreaming (GEM) within the Agricultural Institute of Canada, October 2009.

Assessing the situation: Undertaking an institutional assessment of AIC

The GETT supported AIC in undertaking an institutional analysis to understand and strengthen its own approaches to addressing gender awareness within its structures, personnel, and policy frameworks. The assessment was designed and facilitated by two consultants with strong backgrounds in gender equality and agriculture. The Institutional Assessment (IA)¹ was undertaken in 2007 and included a review of existing AIC documentation, findings from interviews with staff, board members, AIC members, and partners in Canada and abroad. Seven recommendations were proposed (see sidebar). In putting forth the recommendations, the consultants highlighted the importance of undertaking gender mainstreaming as a long-term commitment. They proposed that AIC review each recommendation with a view to reflecting on implications and the feasibility of each both in the short- and long-term.

AIC' s shared learning processes: From GETT-togethers to AIC' s Gender Equality Roundtable and beyond

Using the facilitation of the two consultants, the GETT met in September 2007 to share their ideas and experiences on gender equality and to discuss the findings and recommendations and a way forward into the Roundtable and beyond. Specific interest was noted in relation to better understanding and formulating gender-sensitive indicators (GSIs) in relation to results-based management and monitoring progress in the area of gender equality.

Following on the recommendations and needs also identified earlier by the GETT, AIC organized a Gender Equality Roundtable² in conjunction with AIC's Annual Conference and International Partners' Meeting in late 2007. The Roundtable brought together AIC members, board members, staff, and international program participants. It provided a forum to learn from and share experiences, ideas, and insights with each other as well as with invited outside experts on gender equality and participants from other development and agricultural organizations.

Recommendations from the Institutional Assessment

1. Develop a shared understanding of gender equality, particularly as it applies to AIC's mandate and work.
2. Define a scope for addressing gender equality in AIC's work and organizational structure.
3. Undertake a survey to better identify the membership (and non-membership) base along lines of gender (including age, experience, educational background, work focus, regional background, needs, priorities, and constraints).
4. In line with Recommendation 3, it would be useful to undertake a survey on academic and workforce trends disaggregated along gender (including age, regional background, educational background, ethnicity, etc.) and other relevant lines.
5. As part of the process towards the development of an organizational strategy on gender equality, it is important to raise the awareness of, and develop the capacity to mainstream, gender equality – in terms of both the institutional and programming aspects of AIC's work.
6. In line with Recommendation 5 is the need to address the aspect of the development of gender-sensitive indicators and data collection, both at the institutional and development levels.
7. Explore the possibility of an internship program to promote the talents and skills of young agrologists (men and women) both in Canada and overseas.

¹ The IA is intended for an internal audience (i.e. AIC and its partners). More information about the IA can be requested from iadp@aic.ca

² For more details on the Roundtable, contact iadp@aic.ca

Institutionalizing gender equality in AIC: Gender Equality Policy

At the Gender Equality Roundtable, three key IA recommendations were selected for further (and more immediate) work of the GETT:

- Produce a common definition of gender equality relevant to AIC;
- Determine the scope of activities and programs that AIC is involved in and what it can influence; and
- Define indicators to measure the results of what it can influence.

The GETT undertook the first two steps which helped in the process of writing a draft Gender Equality Policy for AIC. In April 2008, a Board of Directors Gender Equality Committee (GEC) was formed consisting of the AIC board members who also sit on the GETT. The GEC agreed to work with AIC staff on initial policy limitations³ and to examine the implications to AIC's governance system. They started by developing a Gender Equality Vision for AIC (see textbox). In August, 2008, the AIC Gender Equality Policy was presented to AIC's Board of Directors. The board developed and passed an Executive Limitations policy in December 2008. The Gender Equality Policy⁴ became an Operational Policy when approved by the CEO in May 2009, setting a strong foundation for institutionalizing gender equality throughout AIC.

AIC's Gender Equality Vision: A practical definition of gender equality for AIC that is founded on a human rights approach

When developing the Gender Equality Policy, the GETT began with the following vision and what gender equality means in practical terms:

Males and females have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential to contribute to the development of the organization and its programs, and to benefit from the results. AIC is recognized more broadly (i.e. beyond board, staff, committees) as a leader in Gender Equality. In practical terms, this means gender equality is clearly reflected in the structures, budgets, and policies of AIC. Program choices and decisions of board, staff, and committees are guided by AIC's vision for gender equality as outlined in the gender policy and will act as evidence of its implementation. AIC ensures Gender Equality is considered in partnership decisions. Gender Equality is an integral part of partnership choices.

Translating policy into action: Mainstreaming gender equality in AIC

The GETT transitioned into the Gender Equality Mainstreaming (GEM) working group and efforts were made to recruit members from AIC's broader membership base. The GEM was given new Terms of Reference to address the task of mainstreaming gender equality across all areas of AIC. As a first step, a review of AIC's policies and by-laws was undertaken to explore their strengths and weaknesses and highlight specific areas for discussion and revision. In support of more effectively translating AIC's gender policy and its overall policies into more gender-responsive programming, terms and structures, GEM members came together in early 2009 to acquaint (or reacquaint) themselves with the objectives of gender equality in AIC and to work on the details of a two year gender mainstreaming plan.

³ The board follows a Policy Governance model which sets out results they want to see achieved by the organization (called Ends) and broad parameters around what the Chief Executive Officer *cannot* do to achieve these (called Limitations).

⁴ AIC's Gender Equality Policy can be viewed on-line at <http://www.aic.ca/gender/policy.cfm>.

Results/Lessons learned

Fostering leadership: AIC's Board and CEO take up the challenge

Staying the course by maintaining gender equality as an organizational priority: The gender equality mainstreaming process has been undertaken during a time of organizational change in AIC and the Canadian agriculture sector more broadly. During this period, AIC has maintained gender equality as a key organizational priority.

Ownership and responsibility: AIC has taken some key steps to ensure that responsibility for meeting gender equality objectives rests at the highest governance level in the organization. AIC's Board of Directors has a gender equality committee and a board member sits on the GEM. The board follows a Policy Governance model which sets out results they want to see achieved (called Ends) and broad parameters around what the Chief Executive Officer *cannot* do to achieve these (called Limitations). To date, the board has passed a Limitations Policy (see sidebar) and has placed the responsibility for reporting achieving gender equality objectives in the hands of the CEO.

1.13 Limitations Policy Title: Gender Equality

The CEO shall not fail to take into consideration gender equality, in the context of the executive limitations as a whole, while carrying out his or her responsibilities to the board, to the membership and to the staff

Approved May 2009

In conjunction with establishing board responsibility, the CEO approved an operational policy in May 2009 which outlines the objectives and strategy for mainstreaming gender equality in AIC. In practice, a decision was taken in mid-2009 to integrate the gender equality process into the new organizational Strategic Planning Framework as a key strategy for institutionalizing gender equality objectives. The CEO has delegated the task to the international program staff who in turn work with the GEM to lead and undertake the activities.

Organizational: Institutionalizing gender equality in AIC

Grassroots support: The gender equality mainstreaming process in AIC depended on an ability to constitute and maintain a strong group of dedicated members and international partners who volunteered their time and energy to moving this issue forward. This is a clear demonstration of the value placed on the relationships developed through the ITPP and the value that AIC's members who participate in the ITPP place on those relationships and the issue of gender equality. One case study interviewee in particular felt that including both men and women on the GETT contributed to a richer and more diverse discussion.

Team building: The GETT spent considerable volunteer and staff effort on developing a tailor-made definition of gender equality. Interviews revealed that this was a very important team building activity for the group, creating the space for reflection on what gender equality meant for them and helping them to understand the perspectives of others on the GETT. The mutual trust, respect and knowledge developed through this consensual process provided a strong basis for moving forward.

Defining where and what to influence: The GETT developed a scope of influence chart to help AIC better understand the areas where they have high, medium and low scope of influence in relation to gender equality as a basis to develop a range of appropriate strategies for facilitating change in these different areas.

Programming

Strengthening programming outcomes: The GETT developed outcomes, outlined in a draft AIC Results-Based Management (RBM) planning sheet, as follows:

- Gender equality is clearly reflected in the structures, budgets, and policies of AIC.
- Program choices and decisions of board, staff, committees are guided by AIC's vision for gender equality as outlined in the gender policy and will act as evidence of its implementation.
- AIC ensures gender equality is considered in partnership decisions. Gender equality is an integral part of partnership choices.

Due to the focus of AIC's board and CEO on developing a new strategic plan for the organization, there has not yet been an opportunity to present the planning sheet to the board for review and approval.

Strengthening gender-sensitive indicators: As part of the mainstreaming effort, the GETT (now GEM) undertook a serious initiative to better understand the need for developing GSIs against which to monitor change. The International Partners Meeting (2007) conducted a session with members of different projects as well as the GETT and AIC staff to develop GSIs in the context of their work. An on-line workshop also helped support those involved in programming to strengthen GSI-related skills. Most recently, these skills have been applied to other areas of AIC's work through transference of knowledge and peer support to the Honours and Awards Committee.

Investing in capacity building: In the process of mainstreaming, AIC initiated workshops to support different committees to strengthen their gender equality work. To date, the Honours and Awards Committee has participated; other committees are planned for future workshops (e.g. Journals). Not only did the Honours and Awards Committee members increase their awareness about gender equality in the context of their work, they also gained a more critical eye in terms of revitalizing honours and awards selection processes. To date, they have developed criteria and revised the nominating forms for the Fellowship and International Recognition awards and a new Sustainable Futures award. They also developed a rubric for assessing nominations.

Strengthening international programs: As noted on AIC's website, under the International Twinning Partnership Program, all projects share a common objective for gender equality, which is: "Women are active participants and beneficiaries of agricultural endeavours."

For example, in the Integrated Crop and Livestock project in Ghana, the influence of women in community development and decision-making has grown and continues to grow through their increased roles as income earners and production managers. The project provides financial and technical support and mentoring to female students in tertiary institutions with the intent of reducing gender disparity in the animal science profession.

Elsewhere, focused efforts in AIC's land management project in Vietnam has led to increased participation of village women in community and project activities from 25 to 40%. Local women's associations are supported by the project to establish and manage credit funds.

Improving AIC's communications on gender equality: Since beginning the process of gender equality mainstreaming, AIC has added a section on gender equality to its website. Each monthly newsletter includes an article or item on gender equality to inform the broader member base and others. A discussion group on gender equality has also started up on Ning (an online social network), but is relatively underutilized. In December 2009, the *GEM of the Month* newsletter was inaugurated, containing information and articles on gender equality mainstreaming within organizations, gender and climate change, and gender equality and agricultural/rural development.

In May 2009, the GEM also developed a set of indicators to support the mainstreaming of gender equality into AIC's publications. These indicators are:

- Use of language
- Criteria for call for articles or for identifying contributors
- Criteria for identifying topics for articles
- Criteria for selecting authors of articles
- Use of images, visual communication

Unexpected results

Lessons learned from the process transferred into other areas of work: Interviewees indicated a very interesting and unintended consequence of the gender equality process in that participants have been able to use new information and experiences in their professional and volunteer activities outside of AIC.

Focusing on transparency: In 2009, the Honours and Awards Committee held a workshop to look at gender equality in the context of the Committee's work. The workshop led to discussions about transparency (fairness) of AIC's decision-making processes in general. It was felt that making selection processes more clear would open up the processes and benefit everyone involved in AIC and beyond.

Future Directions/Next Steps for AIC (and sources of next steps)

Need to build a strong business case for gender equality in AIC: AIC is in the process of major organizational change and, as with many smaller membership organizations, financial viability is a consideration. With this in mind, the challenge for the GEM is to provide a convincing case on the value of committing resources to gender equality. There are financial resources available from the existing CIDA-funded ITPP, but there are personnel resources required from other areas of AIC to achieve an overall organizational mainstreaming strategy. While senior management (including the board) of the organization is preoccupied with ensuring the financial future of the organization as a whole, the contributions gender equality can make to AIC's long-term future must be clearly articulated.

Perceptions about gender equality in AIC: Interviews with key individuals revealed a perception that the gender equality mainstreaming process is still largely confined to the ITPP. In part this is due to the fact that the process of gender equality is still seen as predominantly driven by (and financed by) CIDA. Moreover, GEM members still are drawn primarily from participants in the ITPP. A continuing challenge for the GEM will be to continue its efforts to make the issue relevant for other areas of AIC's programming and to make the linkages between different areas of programming more clear. One way of doing this would be to try and draw a broader base of people from across AIC's membership into the GEM.

Integrating gender equality objectives into the strategic plan: The recent decision to integrate gender equality objectives into the organizational strategic plan is a welcome development in the mainstreaming process. This provides a much stronger grounding for gender equality to be integrated into the life of the organization. Once key objectives are agreed upon, the GEM should endeavour to develop a comprehensive time-limited operational strategy which links to a monitoring and evaluation framework with a set of limited, clear, and measurable indicators to assess progress. The operational strategy will assist the GEM in setting overall directions for gender equality activities and help ensure that the numerous gender equality action plans (ITPP, Honours and Awards, Communications, etc) are linked into a single coherent strategy. Decisions about what to include in annual workplans should be clearly linked to their contribution to the longer term strategy. The board should clearly articulate the vision they wish to see and measurements on how to assess progress toward the vision. The CEO is tasked by the board with developing the strategic plan which shows how the parts of the organization will accomplish the vision. The CEO may call upon individuals from specific areas of the organization to develop the strategic plan for their area.

Understanding equality in practical terms: Setting clear measures for change (indicators) will also help to address a persistent question: what does equality mean in practical terms? Interviews undertaken for the case study revealed that while people intuitively understand gender equality as more than merely counting the number of women and men in a room, there is much divergence on understanding about equality of access, opportunity and choice, and there is still a lack of clarity on what this means in practice. While the gender equality definition and vision provide overall guidance on what AIC hopes to achieve, there is still an urgent need for the organization to translate its definition and vision into a clear, doable operational strategy with an accompanying monitoring and evaluation framework (with indicators).

Operationalizing commitments: While there has been substantial progress in institutionalizing gender equality in AIC, there needs to be more attention paid to operationalizing stated commitments. Some recent evidence: The October 2009 convened the AIC Unifying Voice Advisory Council to help establish a unifying voice for science and agriculture in Canada has only one woman member. Also, at the AIC Workshop on Food and Fuel from Agri-Resources held on December 4, 2009, only one of five presenters was a woman.

Drawing on a wider membership base for the GEM: The volunteer base was and continues to be drawn primarily from participants in the International Program. In moving forward on gender equality mainstreaming, AIC should seek to recruit GEM members from a broader base of the organization's membership.

Conclusion

AIC has made significant inroads into defining a gender mainstreaming strategy for itself and initiating some key activities to move the process forward. By using an innovative multi-disciplinary mechanism to guide its process (the GETT which then evolved into the GEM), consulting with and involving its key decision making body (the board) and opening up its ideas and thoughts to scrutiny by a wide range of stakeholders, AIC has demonstrated a deep commitment to achieving its objectives of integrating gender equality in a meaningful and transparent way.

Study Questions

The following questions are intended to support AIC, its partners, and other interested organizations reflect on, learn from, and take action in their own organizational cultures and processes in relation to gender equality. While the questions under Part A are directed specifically at those involved with AIC and Part B with those who are involved with other organizations, the use of the questions should be flexible and adapted to the needs of the particular audience.

Part A: AIC

1 Gender equality: Business case and human rights

- 1.1 Discuss the benefits and challenges to putting forward a business case for addressing gender equality in AIC.
- 1.2 Discuss whether a business case is congruent with a human rights case for addressing gender equality in AIC, and if so, what makes it so. If not, why?

2 Board engagement

In what ways has AIC's board been engaged in the organization's work on gender equality? Discuss (if necessary, make a list first). What could AIC's board be doing better and what needs to happen to strengthen its engagement on gender equality?

3 Capacity

Reflect on the different areas and different ways in which AIC has worked to strengthen its capacity to address gender equality as outlined by the case study. Look at both formal and informal approaches and processes. Discuss the benefits and constraints to strengthening gender equality capacity in AIC in these different ways.

4 Broadening ownership of gender equality

The case study notes that, to date, the GETT and GEM have drawn mostly from those members and partners involved in initiatives under the International Twinning Partnership program. Discuss ways in which AIC might appeal to other members to become involved in the GEM and the gender equality work of the organization.

Part B: For other organizations

The following questions can be used by AIC's partners or other organizations to further reflect on the case study and lessons learned.

1 Case for addressing gender equality

- 1.1 Reflect on your own organizational culture (including policies, programming, structure, etc.) and the case it makes (or wants to make) to address gender equality issues (e.g. more effective programming, broader range of candidates for positions, promoting your business more effectively). Does this support a human rights approach? A business case approach? Both? Other? Discuss.
- 1.2 What efforts has your own organization taken to address gender equality? What are the motivating factor(s)?

2 Board engagement

Look back at how AIC's board has been engaged in addressing gender equality in the organization. Reflect on your own organization's board and how it engages on issues of gender equality in the organization. What is your organization's board doing? What could your board be doing better and what needs to happen to strengthen its engagement on gender equality?

3 Capacity

- 3.1 Reflect on your own organization's approaches to (or desires to approach) gender equality capacity strengthening. What lessons can your organization take from AIC's capacity strengthening approaches? How might you address these in your own organization?
- 3.2 Many organizations, including perhaps your own, are further advanced in gender equality capacity strengthening. What lessons learned by your organization could assist AIC in strengthening its capacity?

Note: Consider both formal and informal capacity strengthening approaches and processes.

4 Broadening ownership of gender equality

The case study notes that, to date, the GETT and GEM have drawn (rather narrowly) from those members and partners involved in initiatives under the ITPP. Reflect on your own organization's culture, structure, staff (and if relevant, membership). What are ways in which you might, or do, engage people from different areas of the organization to become interested in, and actively engaged in, supporting efforts of the organization to work towards gender equality?