

*A Gender
Programme
Analysis of Progressio.*

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Executive Summary

Background and Context:

Progressio can boast a long standing and impressive history with advancing gender equity across its programmes; working in solidarity with women's organisations and strategically supporting the advancement of women's interests in communities, municipalities, at a national and regional level. Progressio's strategic and cutting edge gender work attracted the attention of many gender specialists who sought out roles with Progressio as country representatives and development workers as a means to work in solidarity with and contribute to the advancing of women's equal rights.

In 2005 decisions were taken by Progressio to cross cut gender across its three institutional core themes: Participation and Effective Governance (EGP); Sustainable Environment (SE) and HIV and AIDS (HIV). This provided a new challenge to Progressio, in terms of how to retain the quality and impact of their work, but it also presented them with a new opportunity, to introduce gender to thematic areas which had not previously had any gender focus such as sustainable environment. Subsequently, frameworks were designed and processes put in place to guarantee that gender remained on the agenda of the three core themes with the aim of ensuring that gender awareness and sensitivity remained core to Progressio's development programming.

Most recently, this gender analysis was commissioned to better understand the depth and extent of Progressio's contribution in addressing gender issues in EGP, SE and HIV and AIDS. To this end this report aims to bring together the advances, challenges and opportunities of the gender work across the programmes, identifying examples of good practice and producing a set of findings, recommendations.

Overall Findings:

It has been a challenging process for Progressio to adapt to the gender changes institutionally, transitioning from having a specific gender theme to cross cutting gender, despite this Progressio have effectively succeeded in advancing their goals on strategic transformative gender work with programmes and partners. Some of Progressio's success in this area of gender can be attributed to the institutions long and impressive history of supporting excellent and innovative gender strategies, giving them insight into what good strategic and transformative gender work looks like both in theory and practice. Another factor that contributes to their success can be attributed to the commitment sustained internally to keep gender on the agenda, taking into account the potential pitfalls of mainstreaming gender so that policies and processes did not just result in mere tokenism of "doing" gender. The central success of Progressio's gender work however can be attributed to the institutions commitment to continuing to work with gender experts in all regions, strategically placing country representatives and development workers who bring to the table a strong background of experience and skill set in the area of gender. There are concrete examples to support this and significant advances in gender equity can be demonstrated within each of the three core institutional themes, from contributing to policies that lead to increased participation and representation of women in parliament in Yemen and Somaliland, to increasing the socio economic empowerment of women in Honduras and Zimbabwe, to the Hispaniola's programmes successful collaboration with UN Women and the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) to produce and

publish two gender methodological guides on gender auditing for seven municipal programmes in DR.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Although there is ample evidence of successful and concrete country programme gender advances, the extent and depth of the gender work that is happening on the ground is not being effectively captured institutionally. This however, is not surprising since the project planning, evaluation and impact of gender work is for the large part spread across three themes, there is no one specific gender objective that all these thematic gender advances feed into which would assist in making it clearer to the organisation to what extent they are advancing in their gender work.

To this end the organisation would benefit from increasing the organisational priority of gender which would allow for the changes to be put in place that allow for a more strategic, concrete and in-depth approach to gender. In the big picture such changes might look like: investing in gender training internally, strengthening the gender work of programmes by contributing to more effective and accurate ways of evaluating and monitoring and provide supporting evidence for potential and current donors on impact. Progressio should aim to understand gender as one of their central success areas of work institutionally and invest in raising their gender profile amongst donors and stakeholders and care has to be taken that gender does not slip through the institutional net, reducing the impact and visibility of Progressio's transformative gender work.

Over the years and to this day gender has proved to be a very good fit with Progressio's vision and mission, Progressio would do well to continue to strategically advance in its transformative work in this smart gender niche it has carved out for itself.

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1. Introduction :

This report sets out to analyse Progressio's gender work over eight country programme offices: Somaliand, Timor Leste, Yemen, Zimbabwe and Malawi, Honduras and Nicaragua, El Salvador, Haita and Dominican Republic; across three strategic objectives: Effective Governance and Participation (EGP), Sustainable Environment (SE) and HIV and aids (HIV). In doing so, this report will first consider key experiences of the institution and programmes, reflecting briefly on the history of their gender work and uncovering key moments of change in their gender strategy. Secondly, we will review the extent of the gender work in the regions of Latin and Central America (LAC) and Africa, Middle East and Asia (AMEA) and Dominican Republic and Haiti (Hispaniola), reporting on experiences of cross cutting gender in programmes and highlighting central challenges. Next considering the gender advances across the three themes: EGP, SE and HIV, reporting on some examples of good practice and innovative strategies. The final section of the document outlines the central findings and recommendations of the report concluding with a series of opportunities for the future to consider.

2. Methodology:

The research for this document was based on interviews with country representatives and institutional staff members². In addition, key institutional documents were reviewed such as; strategic plan, annual reports, gender policy, external evaluations, project plans (PPS), Regular Impact and Capacity Assessment plans (RICA) and development worker (DW) reports. The aim of this methodological approach is to bring, as far as is possible, a participative approach and analysis to the gender work of Progressio UK, looking at, but also beyond, frameworks and indicators to stories of gendered experiences of programmes, projects and people.

3. Progressio approach to gender & key moments of change:

Since the 1980s Progressio have engaged in strong partnerships with women's organisations, committed to promoting and engaging in projects centred on gender equity and advancing women's rights. Progressio's success in gender was particularly notable in Latin and Central American region where women's movements were strong and civil societies active. Progressio's approach to gender was bold enough to engage in some of the more radical approaches to gender work, for example their work on masculinities in the Latin American region, at a time when the concept was still very new and challenged from many within the women's movement. Progressio continued to support such cutting edge strategic gender work and it was these experiences and relationships built up over time that helped structure the thinking around institutional planning and programming. Gender emerged as a strong component of success in Progressio's overall work and Progressio's profile for supporting effective and strategic gender projects attracted the attention of many gender specialists.

² I would like to thank all the country representatives for their valuable input and time in interviews and also to all institutional staff whose contribution and support has been much appreciated.

Cross cutting Gender – key moments of change:

Prior to 2005 Progressio operated around eight core themes, gender being one. This, in practice meant that gender was a standalone core theme of Progressio's programme work and all gender projects were evaluated in line with contributing to the advancing of the institutional gender objective. To this end all gender projects encapsulated a gender analysis at all stages of project cycle. However with increasing demand from core donors such as DFID to demonstrate specific impact in all eight core themes, the model of eight core themes became unworkable and the institution decided to revise its strategy. At the same time the situation of HIV and particularly the rapid rate of infection of those most vulnerable, women, was top of the development agenda. Donors such as DFID advocated strongly for integrating gender or "mainstreaming" gender into the HIV agenda. These external and internal factors all contributed to the institution's decision in 2005 to "mainstream" gender, a shift that many NGOs at the time implemented. Their approach to mainstreaming was to "cross cutting" the theme of gender in all projects, in practice meaning to incorporate a gender analysis to all projects. From 2005 onwards the once standalone objective of gender became a cross cutting theme in their three core areas of work: Effective Governance and Participation (EGP), Sustainable Environment (SE) and HIV and AIDS (HIV). That said Progressio would continue to have specific gender projects in the core areas of work where there was a specific interest and it was needed.

The impact of their gender work was from this moment on to be spread across themes of HIV and aids and Sustainable Environment, while the core theme within which to channel their gender work was identified as Participation and Good Governance working closely with civil society organisations on the ground. Although the decision was contested from some within the organisation, concerned that Progressio would lose their "core gender work" that had been so influential in the direction and the success of their strategic work on gender, it was also acknowledged that cross cutting gender would open up new ways of working with gender. This effectively meant that the organisation now had to start thinking of ways to incorporate a gender analysis to themes such as SE that had not previously made much impact in the gender agenda.

The organisation maintained that it was committed to being vigilant in cross cutting gender and would take every effort to continue to be effective in their gender work as an organisation. In response to this the organisation formed a gender group, consisting of one gender representative from each programme institutionally, in order to be vigilant in keeping the gender dimension alive. To date the gender group have advanced in achieving their goals and produced a gender training handbook for the induction of staff and development workers, a gender policy for the organisation, which including developing a cross cutting gender policy, the result of which meant that a specific question was integrated into the Project Plan methodology for all three core themes, to ensure that a gender analysis of all projects designed was incorporated. In addition to these institutional efforts gender became a strong issue in the selection process of country representatives and DWS to ensure that the strength of their gender work was diffused through the themes and country representatives had to begin experimenting with new ways of working with gendered specific themes. However, it still remained to be seen if by cross cutting gender Progressio could keep gender on the agenda as before.

4. Country Programme Gender Profiles:

This next section considers each country programme individually in the AMEA region and LAC region, delivering an overview of the extent and successes of the programmes gender work, concluding with a summary of common challenges faced by programmes in mainstreaming gender.

4.1 Somaliland:

Cross cutting gender overview and successes: The programme of Somaliland adds to a significant contribution to the success of Progressio's gender work. The programme is committed to advancing gender equity, incorporating gender sensitive responsive strategies and indicators to all projects and reporting gender disaggregated data. Internally the programme excels at incorporating gender into projects; this is maybe not surprising since the country representative and DWs have strong backgrounds and experiences. They are currently operating three projects one across each theme, gender disaggregated data is available for all project plans.

The central success of their gender work is in EGP and attributed to their excellent work with NAGAAD, national network of women's organisations and SONYO, youth umbrella organisation, with the aim of reversing legislation and policy that is discriminatory of women and perpetuates inequality. NAGAAD, for example, have been campaigning on women's issues since 1997 with the aim of empowering women in the political arena and advocating gender affirmative action since 2005 when the first women candidates competed in the parliamentary elections, currently only 3 women occupy seats out of 164 parliamentary seats. The strategies put in place have provided Non State Actors with an avenue for those most marginalised groups like women and young people to participate in public life and have their voices heard in decision making processes and actions.

4.2 Timor Leste:

Cross cutting gender overview and successes: The programme of East Timor has displayed a strong and consistent quality in its work around gender; gender is well analysed and well incorporated in expected results. However the country representative expressed concern that there is a lack of knowledge over all in the programme of how to incorporate gender in their daily plans, although they are good at dissecting impact on a technical level the representative reflected their interest in gender is not ambitious and that sufficient time nor space allocated to reflecting on, problematizing and applying a critical lense to their gender strategies. Gender disaggregated data is collated only in EGP.

The programme is currently operating three projects in EGP and one in HIV and has a strong background in advancing the economic and political rights of women in the region. Currently the main focus of their gender works is reflected in the project "Raising Women's Voices" with partners Rede Feto under the EGP theme. They have made concrete advances in their gender equity work with Rede Feto, the national umbrella organisation for women's rights in Timor Leste, supporting Timor Leste women to gain greater influence in setting and implementing gender responsive regulations, policies and national plans to protect women and empower them socio – economically.

The country representative attributes their success in this area for the large part to the high quality work and commitment of two of their DWs and the institutional support from Progressio that has supported their transformational work around gender over time.

4.3 Yemen:

Cross cutting gender overview and successes: Like the Somaliland programme Yemen can report excellence in advancing their work around gender. This indicates that the programme is highly committed to gender, conducting a gender analysis and incorporating gender focus at all stages from project planning, design, operation and evaluation and supporting DWs to ensure that they maintain a gender focus in the plans and workshops. These efforts are reflected in their strong capacity to produce and report gender strong results across all three themes.

The programme are currently running three projects across the three themes, all with a specific gender focus, however gender disaggregated data was only available for HIV theme. Their core gender work is concentrated in EGP, contributing significantly to increasing women's political participation of women and enhancing civil society organisations' to support civic activism and advocate for effective local governance. They have also been successful in addressing gender in SE and in HIV have succeeded in their work with other NGOs in the region around influencing the law on the right of PLHIV. Their successes in EGP are concrete and notable examples of good practice in advancing women's political participation as highlighted in the following section.

4.4: Zimbabwe and Malawi:

Cross cutting gender overview and successes: Although there is a strong commitment from the programme to work with gender, there is, however, some inconsistency in the quality of the gender work, the analysis of how gender impacts projects is stronger in some PPs than others and some indicate that the gender component of the plan has not been thought through adequately. There is a need for a more strategic and systematic approach to their gender work and this challenge is acknowledged recognised by the country representative and an interest expressed to improve its work around with gender for example to have lessons shared from other programmes on best practice of integrating gender and particularly have training and support around masculinities which is considered by the country rep to be needed.

The Zimbabwe and Malawi programme are supporting six projects across the three themes, five of which represent a commitment to integrating gender objectives. The programme has succeeded in holding the local level governance accountable to further integrating and improving gendered sensitive and responsive budgeting and training local authorities on how to develop gender sensitive budgets for the municipality. Core to the aforementioned successes is securing the participation of women in decision making processes with the aim of increasing allocation of budget to women's services, health and child care. The Zimbabwe programme reported gender disaggregated data across all three themes in the PPs, although none was available for Malawi.

4.5 Honduras and Nicaragua:

Cross cutting gender overview and successes: Both offices of Nicaragua and Honduras have placed gender at the core of their work with Progressio particularly since the late 1980s and have produced a very high standard of progressive and cutting edge gender work in the region. The programmes expertise in gender has attracted many gender experts, ranging from practitioners, activists to academics. The high impact the region has had over the years in terms of impact is attributed to a strong commitment from regional managers and the institution to strengthen gender work, in the selection of DWs that are strong on gender and on design, planning and evaluation processes that incorporate a gender analysis at all stages. Not surprisingly, due to the strong gender work of the region over the years there were no reported difficulties in cross cutting gender. The central challenge of the region is directly connected to the reduction in funding to the region. This has resulted in a reduction of DWs and the need to wind down work with some of their partners which has brought about a reduction of coverage and impact in their work in gender in the area.

Honduras currently has one project in EGP and two in SE; Nicaragua one project in EGP and one in HIV, all projects have integrated gender objectives successfully in their work. Gender disaggregated data was only available for the SE PP in Honduras. Currently their work is particularly strong in the area of masculinities and social communications in Nicaragua, which is discussed in more detail in the good practice section and strengthening civil society and reconstruction of democracy in Honduras post-coup 2009.

4.6: El Salvador

Cross cutting Gender Overview and successes: Like the Honduras and Nicaragua programmes, the El Salvador programme has a long standing history with Progressio around delivering innovative, effective and at times radical approaches to gender work in the region. The programme is not surprisingly an excellent hub of successful work on gender but does not stop there as it continues to strive to improve on its work with forwarding thinking innovative new projects, for example their current work around economic social care and economic violence. As a result of their expertise in gender the programme has not experienced any real challenges in mainstreaming gender and felt that they could report constructively on the institutional evaluation and monitoring frameworks such as RICA and project plan.

The programme is currently running three projects across the three core themes and gender disaggregated data available across all themes. El Salvador applies a gender analysis to all projects and is committed to advancing gender equity in the region. Their project "Gender strategies for HIV prevention" with partners Flor de Piedra to name one, shows strong advanced in the area of HIV, particularly focusing on promoting rights of those most vulnerable to HIV such as sex workers, which is discussed in more detail in the good practice section. The programme has a high profile for gender quality work, strategy and research in the area, supporting and producing innovative and dedicated research on women's issues around areas such as economic violence benefitting from strong networks and good strategic alliances. All of the projects operating in El Salvador have an

explicit gender focus to their work and gender disaggregated data available for all themes, with the core of its beneficiaries in HIV.

4.7 Hispaniola: Haiti and Dominican Republic

Cross cutting gender Overview and successes: The DR and Haiti programmes have significantly advanced in achieving their gender goals and their programme reflects a strong commitment to gender. Their work on gender is creative and strategic, with many examples of good practice particularly in the area of gendered budgets which is discussed in more detail in the good practice section. They make sustained effort to integrate gender with partners in the projects plans; this is done by incorporating a gender focus at all stages of the project cycle with partners and constructing specific gender indicators so they can measure how and to what extent they are advancing. Reporting on gender is well documented and not considered a challenge for the programme however, they noted that the monitoring and evaluation on gender could be improved, placing more emphasis on specific gender objectives and indicators. This also demonstrates the programme critically reflects on the gender aspect of their work.

They are currently operating three projects; two in EGP and one in SE and gender disaggregated data is presented in all Project Plans. There is well documented success in strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) in political advocacy and communications (EGP), increasing CSO's ability to effectively negotiate with the State, the political parties and government representatives and contributing to reforms at national level in order to reduce poverty and improve gender equality. Their success in these areas has led to collaboration with UN Women and the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) to produce and publish two gender methodological guides on gender auditing for municipal programmes in DR, which have been widely disseminated and subsequently raised Progressio's profile in the region as a valuable gender reference.

4.8 Common programme challenges in cross cutting gender:

The central challenges faced by many of the programmes such as Somaliland and Yemen programme in advancing gender goals and or cross cutting gender with partners are for the most part connected with external factors such as the religious, cultural and societal norms that largely define women's role in society and obstruct or prohibit in some contexts the participation of women in decision making spaces and processes. This is further compounded by the experience in some countries that gender is understood as a foreign concept one which does not apply to the situated cultural context. This manifests itself in ways that makes it challenging to incorporate women in spaces of participation be it political or other. One country representative noted that one of their current central challenges in advancing the participation of women in decision making spaces was how to reach the most marginalised women such as rural women, where participation of women in workshops or activities is particularly low.

The East Timor and Hispaniola programme also reported some difficulties around integrating gender into the agenda with partners, in a context where the culture of machismo is strong, this in practice can mean – change wording - that in multi partner meetings gender is not a dedicated section of the agenda but considered an add on at the end of the meeting or in one country reps words “a

hindsight". This also makes it difficult to ensure that part of the project budget is allocated to promoting gender equity in the project. As with the experience in Yemen and Somaliland gender is also largely understood as a foreign concept in DR and Haiti and there is not a lot of commitment to gender on a national level, however on a local level the commitment to gender equity is taken more seriously.

5: Advances and stories of good practice:

In terms of the transformative nature of Progressio's gender work in reference to poverty, economic inequity and empowerment, it is clear that there is an integrated vision of the programmes as to how these three variables are all interconnected. The transformative nature of the work comes from this multifaceted approach to any given problem, for example combining their work in EGP and HIV with empowerment strategies such as working on self-esteem and self-efficacy, building on resources such as knowledge and capacities, which in turn can then bring about the conditions for actions around advancing political, economic and social equity. This approach to transformative change, strengthening the capacities of women individually and collectively to become organised, can be identified in all the gender strong programmes activities. In response to this, the next section briefly considers the overall outcomes in advancing the empowerment of women socially, economically and politically brought about by the gender work of Progressio, focusing on experiences that reflect good practice and innovative actions.

5.1: EGP - Advances and good practice in Effective Governance and Participation.

"...you cannot empower women politically without some start to empower women economically and until you empower politically and economically you cannot empower women to take decisions in the home. For example, women from rural areas have no access to the land; they work their brother's land and work all day on the land for free. To address these challenges we need to increase women in local councils and in positions of decision making in NGOs, in the general assembly, get women involved in new elections, it is a women's right to be a candidate, women working with local councils, establish women in departments, integrate women in development plans effectively" (Country Representative: Somaliland)

Progressio has continued to build the capacity of civil society to bring about pro-poor policy change, particularly in fragile states such as Yemen, Somaliland, East Timor and Haiti and Democratic Republic by constructing strategies that promote participative analyses on lived realities, articulating the voices of poor and marginalised communities in order to promote democratic participation. There are currently eight projects working towards advancing the goals of EGP in the LAC and AMEA region. All projects explicitly mention gender equity as a core goal in their plans. Their overall work around EGP focuses largely on increasing the participation of women in spaces where decisions around policies are made, articulating the concerns, needs and interests of women and pressing for those interests to be reflected in local and national policies – as this next reflection highlights:

"Our Citizen Participation programme started in Jan 2009 with the aim of advocating the rights of women and men in local councils in partnership with two women's NGOs, having gender as the main issue, integrating gender issues in all areas of the plans, budget, local councils, and governance. Last year our DW worked successfully on a gender sensitive and responsive local council plan in a

community which was then submitted to the national council and taken into consideration in the national plan which resulted in money being allocated for gender issues. The government now integrate women's policies and there is now a complete plan of women's participation, economic and political, this is amazing considering ten years ago no one could talk openly about gender". (Interview with Yemen Country rep – reflections on advancing women's participation in EGP)

The advances made are based on solid experiences of increasing women's political, social and economic rights and in the example of Yemen look like the following:

- Development of gender policies at the national (ministry of Local Administration) and local authority levels aimed at making government programmes more inclusive.
- Developed Gender equality indicators and indexes at the national (Ministry of Local Authority), Regional (Governorate) and Local (District Local Authority) levels to monitor the project progress such as beneficiaries.
- Promoted affirmative action which includes women in decision making process in Government and CSOs policy and programmes.
- Developed tools and methods to analyse gender gaps in policy and programmes, gender based planning and resource allocations.
- Promoted women leadership in policy advocacy and lobbying for political participation and effective governance.

In Somaliland for example since 2005, they have been advancing women's political participation in parliament, in East Timor the project raising women's voices with local partners Rede Feto has seen significant advances in socio economic empowerment of women, in DR and Zimbabwe they successfully managed to integrate gender sensitive budgets resulting in increased allocation of budget to policies around health and education, in the LAC region in Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua there are sustained efforts to influence gender responsiveness of policies, increase government transparency, strengthening local governance to safe guard women's rights.

The success of these projects can be attributed in part to identifying gender equality as a central approach to their projects, working with civil society organisations, local authorities, community and religious leaders on gender issues, all part of a gender strategy to empower women and advocate for equal participation of men and women. The expertise of the programmes in gender is demonstrated by their process and approaches to increase women's participation, engaging with some of the most marginalised women on empowerment processes such as building self-esteem and self-confidence, increasing participation of marginalised women in organised spaces, leading to an increased capacity on how to act on defending and exercising rights in any given region. This demonstrates the in-depth knowledge, experience and expertise of those designing the gender projects by taking into account the lived reality of women and the cultural, social and economic barriers they have to overcome in order to participate in any given space. The projects use all platforms available such as Mosques, Political parties, government offices and community leader to mobilise support for gender equity in participation. The country representatives' strategic and innovative approaches to overcoming cultural, religious and traditional barriers, or doing as what one country rep called "smart gender", are all impressive examples of alliance building in a setting where often the interests of a gender project can cause tensions and conflict with the views of religious or political parties.

When evaluating the work in the programmes on increased participation of women it is also worth considering the perspective of how some of Progressio's donors understand and evaluate our work. This excerpt from the EC, who provides core funds to support Progressio's collaboration with Rede Feto project, gives an insight into how they value the project advances:

"This project, through patient, on-going capacity building targeted at key women decision-makers and activists is empowering people who can make a difference through their considerably enhanced knowledge and skills, to the life chances of women, and by extension, their families and women as a group, in Timor-Leste". (Evaluation, EC Interim Narrative Report, 2010)

The report further goes on to reflect on the type of relationship between partner and Progressio, describing it as one of warmth and mutual respect.

This last excerpt is a reflection from the Hispaniola programme on their advances in the area of EGP, specifically in its work around implementing gender sensitive and responsive budgets, increasing women's participation in local governance using popular education methods and collaborating with some of the key gender responsive stakeholders such as UN Women and the Ministry of Women and is an excellent example of good practice:

Progressio Hispaniola has been working since 2008 and with the support and coordination of UN Women, the Ministry of women and the Foundation Demuca on a gender auditing program. This project, which lasted two years, aimed at mainstreaming gender in the formulation, management and evaluation of municipalities, including the application of the Law 176-07 relating to gender and the successful application of the National Plan for Gender Equality and was implemented by Progressio in 7 municipalities. This program increased the political participation of women in the implementation process of the law 176 07 and the National Plan for Equity, in all seven municipalities. It also set up 7 women departments at the local government level with budgets that included the 4% destined for education, health and gender. Another result of this project was the design and publication of the MAG guide (Programma Municipal de Auditoria de Genero / A gender audit guide for the Municipalities of DR), a joint effort by UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), UN WOMEN, Ministry of Woman and Progressio, that was launch in March 2011 in Santo Domingo. This guide is the official reference framework for mainstreaming and auditing gender at the local government level.

Progressio Hispaniola also carried out a second project that aimed at mainstreaming gender and raising awareness about gender equality at the local level in six provinces of the country with the support of the World Bank and in collaboration with our partner FEDOMU (Federacion Dominicana de Municipios) during 2011 and finishing in January 2012. We produced a guide and a video clip to raise awareness and to engage citizens at the municipalities' level, this time in a more simple and "popular" way in order to attract citizens, not always with an education or informed about the 176-07 law, about the institutional spaces and ways in which they can participate in the governance of their communities, especially in the promotion of gender equality. For instance; participatory budget planning, 4% allocated to gender, education and health, the women department units, citizen auditing and so forth.

5.2: Advances and good practice in Sustainable Environment: gender sensitive methodologies and income generating projects with a masculinities approach:

Sustainable environment (SE) is the one core theme that does not specifically incorporate gender or explicitly mention “women” in its goals, objectives and indicators. This has meant that the integration of a gender analysis of SE projects was encouraged but not required. That said, the majority of the country SE project plans revised all included a gender analysis to their work with projects contributing to formulating strategies to make visible women’s roles and contributions in SE, challenging women’s roles as unpaid workers in agriculture (Honduras, Zimbabwe, Somaliland) increasing women’s economic empowerment by implementing income generating projects for women, (Honduras, El Salvador, Yemen) influencing local and national policies to include a gender analysis of experiences in SE and implement gender sensitive targets in processes and activities to contribute to the emancipation of women in community development.

Country programmes have been creative and strategic on how best to introduce gender sensitive strategies in the area of SE, for example, the results of the Project Plans of Honduras and El Salvador confirm they have implemented excellent methodological approaches to assist in identifying and analysing the specific gender relations and roles in rural communities, designing and using diagnostic tools that differentiate between the experiences of men and women in SE, which in turn helps to construct and contribute to evidence of the negative impact that non gender sensitive projects, plans and policies have on women in the rural communities.

Another strong core of success of advancing gender equity in SE is country programmes commitment to designing and implementing strategies to create income generating projects for women that would assist in reducing the extent of socio economic dependency that women have on men in the rural areas as a result of lack of access or control to land or economic resources. The case study of Zimbabwe’s project “Environment Africa” provides an interesting example of this:

The overall aim of the project is to improve the quality of life of women through strategies which aim to empower women to gain more equitable access and control of natural resources through income generating projects in order to reduce their socio economic dependency on men. The need to incorporate gendered strategies in SE was a direct result of the wide spread evidence that the many rural women are farmers who engage in a heavy work load but are not receiving any remuneration for their hard work and have no access and control over natural resources or land. It is anticipated that income generating projects for women would enhance their economic productive capacity, thereby reducing their socio-economic dependency which has been identified as a central factor that increases women’s susceptibility to abuse and even HIV&AIDS in Zimbabwe. Through the implementation of this Project they also found the need to work alongside men in helping them understand the labour intensiveness of women’s work and acknowledge that the input of women’s labour into process that produce resources of economic value. To this end they carried out a workshop with the men and husbands in the area with the aim of targeting the gender bias in women’s roles in agriculture with particular reference to their contribution in terms of labour which is non-remunerated. The workshop was well received by the men and they reported a greater understanding of women’s labour intensive experiences of farming and the importance of men not abusing the income that comes out of this work. It followed that men began to take more care in

maintaining the upkeep and security of the plot but did not engage in helping out with the farming roles traditionally associated with women. Shifting attitudes and behaviours takes time and sustained strategies, as most masculinities projects can demonstrate, therefore this can be cited by the Empowerment Africa as a positive advance in their masculinities work.

5.3. Advances and good practice in HIV and Aids: feminisation of poverty, masculinities, social communications and faith leaders:

There are currently six country programmes contributing to the advancement of Progressio's goal on HIV and aids. Countries such as El Salvador, Somaliland and Yemen, have constructed projects around the specific experiences of women and HIV, linking the increased number of women forced into the sex trade as a direct result of poverty and therefore increasing their risk to HIV. These innovative projects not only support women on a practical level with health care and emotional support but also strategically on creating income generating projects for women with the overall aim of constructing a sustainable future for women living with HIV and giving them hope for a future beyond HIV. El Salvador has also contributed to innovative research on the economic rights of women, putting the feminisation of poverty - one of the most significant factors that result in women becoming sex workers and subsequently more at risk to HIV - firmly on the agenda.

The Latin American region has a strong history in its conceptual, strategic and practical work in Masculinities. Progressio began supporting this new stream of gender work as far back as 1995, when the concept of Masculinities work was relatively unheard of in other regions and presented a big shift in the way to do "gender" in Latin America. The impact of the work around masculinities in Nicaragua, with particular reference to reducing the incidence of violence against women, was significant. With these positive results the decision was taken to take the masculinities workshops to neighbouring countries in Central America and incorporate masculinities work in Progressio's programme work around gender. The programmes in turn then adopted and integrated a masculinities approach to their work with partners in the region, increasing the impact of their work around masculinities in the region.

In Nicaragua, for example they have a strong history of integrating masculinities work into their social communications work around HIV and Aids, through community and national radio work with partner CISAS but also through social soap operas with their then partner Puntos De Encuentro. Social communications strategies have proved fundamental, particularly with young people, in deconstructing stereotypes faced by, for example, those living with HIV. The combination of a masculinities approach adopted in gendered messages through widespread social media and communications mediums such as radio and soap operas in Nicaragua has had a vast impact on reaching young members in urban and rural in the communities. This communications strategy work is then strengthened by the launching of campaigns that reinforce these messages, such as the 2010 campaign "Halt to violence, machismo and HIV. Women and men working together for a future free of violence, machismo and HIV" and the 2009 campaign "Because you love me and I love you, we always use condoms" that the partner CISAS and their DWs contributed to

To date, the LA region succeeds in successfully integrating masculinities work into their gender agendas and has a long history of experience and success in this area. In El Salvador, for example, they work with four partners in their projects around HIV, with their masculinities work being core to

the successes in changes in attitudes and behaviours around HIV stigma, discrimination and safe practice for those affected or vulnerable to HIV. More recently, the programmes of DR and Haiti, Somaliland and Zimbabwe have been advancing steadily by incorporating a Masculinities approach to their work around HIV, working with partners on gender and the impact of masculinities on health interfamily violence and economic justice.

Another area of excellence of Progressio's work in HIV is their impressive work with faith leaders on HIV, for example in Zimbabwe they have made steady inroads in building the capacity of the National Faith Based Council of Zimbabwe and church leadership across all Christian churches in dealing with sexual and gender-based violence and reducing stigma and discrimination and raising awareness on HIV within the context of the Christian faith. Since 2007 the Yemen programme has been successfully working with religious leaders in shifting attitudes and behaviours of communities towards PLHIV. In Yemen the work of Progressio and partners to sensitise faith based leaders around HIV and Aids has been considered a very significant success. In an interview with the country representative of Yemen she attributed one of the factors that contributed to the success of their work was having long term placement development workers. Initially the main challenge they faced in working with religious leaders was the resistance to work around HIV but over a long term process of DWs building relationships with the religious leaders they began to see the importance of it and the potential positive impacts for the communities. To this end they worked with female and male religious leaders to successfully integrate messages into their Friday speeches around the harmfulness of stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV, particularly women living with HIV who face proportionately more discrimination than men.

6: Central Findings and Recommendations:

6.1 Institution:

Experience of cross cutting gender and advancing gender on the agenda:

It has been a challenging process for Progressio to adapt to the gender changes institutionally, transitioning from having a specific gender theme to cross cutting gender, despite this Progressio have effectively succeeded in advancing their goals on strategic transformative gender work with programmes and partners. Some of Progressio's success in this area of gender can be attributed to the institutions long and impressive history of supporting excellent and innovative gender strategies, giving them insight into what good strategic and transformative gender work looks like both in theory and practice. Another factor that contributes to their success can be attributed to the commitment sustained internally to keep gender on the agenda, taking on board the criticisms and potential pitfalls of mainstreaming gender so that policies and processes did not just result in mere tokenism of "adding" gender on at the end. The central success of Progressio's gender work however can be attributed to the institutions commitment to continuing to work with gender experts in all regions, strategically placing country representatives and development workers who bring to the table a strong background of experience and skill set in the area of gender. There are ample references to support this as we have seen in the country profiles' experiences of cross cutting gender as the examples of DR, El Salvador, Yemen and Somaliland indicate. This in practice has meant that cross cutting gender and designing gender specific projects could be contextualised, supported, well designed and executed from a Programme level, putting the responsibility of gender

quality work with the expert in this field. That said it is not mandatory that all CRs have a strong gender background and in such cases, an effort is made to place DWS with a strong gender background in the programme that could feed into decision making processes around gender projects.

However, it is clear from this gender analysis that more funding needs to be allocated for gender training internally so that programmes can strategize more effectively around gender goals and objectives. Successes are strong and but more work needs to be done particularly in the programmes that felt they were lacking some of the conceptual and practical tools in gender mainstreaming.

Progressio's gender history with programmes is strong and this has resulted in strong relationships around advancing gender interests. This partnerships and the combined commitment of the institution and programmes has resulted in a successful result in keeping gender on the agenda. Progressio should now aim to raise its gender profile and further carve a niche out for itself in the NGO sector as an example of an organisation that effectively advances gender core work producing transformative gender work.

Recommendation:

Gender is a driving force contributing to much success and innovation in Progressio's work, to this end the organisation would benefit from increasing the organisational priority of gender which would allow for the changes to be put in place that allow for a more strategic, concrete and in-depth approach to gender. In the big picture such changes might look like: investing in gender training internally, strengthening the gender work of programmes by contributing to more effective and accurate ways of evaluating and monitoring and provide supporting evidence for potential and current donors on impact. Progressio should aim to understand gender as one of their central success areas of work institutionally and invest in raising their gender profile amongst donors and stakeholders.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

On revising monitoring and evaluation documentation it is clear that gender has a defined place in monitoring and evaluation reporting, including a specific gender related question that allows for and encourages a gender analysis of project to be reported on bi annually. However, this could be improved on as it was clear from this gender analysis that the extent and depth of the gender work of programmes is not being accurately captured and hence some of the transformative quality and impact of Progressio's gender work is slipping through the monitoring and evaluation the net. For example, from this report I am still unclear as to why the institution decided to exclude gender sensitive objectives and indicators in SE.

Capturing gender disaggregated data also poses a challenge for the organisation with efforts from programmes to report on gender disaggregated data being inconsistent and patchy and as a result it was not possible to get an accurate reading of the percentage of women beneficiaries in comparison to men that are targeted overall as gender disaggregated data gathering is inconsistent. That said there is a strong willingness internally for this information to be recorded, the difficulty in recording

the information comes from the programme level where some programmes have fewer skills in designing projects that effectively cross cut gender and identify gender specific indicators.

It is clear from the findings there is a substantial commitment and efforts made to advance the gender strategic objectives as outlined in the RICA and report on gender advances in the Project Plans by all departments. However what is perhaps missing is an overall organisational gender specific objective that brings together the experiences and results of cross cutting gender in all three themes, constructing a central point that bring all these efforts together to increase effectiveness of gender work. The wealth of programme work on the ground goes beyond frameworks and the number of women beneficiaries, which the institution and the programmes are well aware of, however gender needs more priority in the institution to allow for the processes to be created to strategically advance and capture such transformative and cutting edge gender work.

Recommendation:

The introduction of an organisational gender objective that monitoring and evaluation efforts to capture gender feed into could allow for the following; redesigning of specific gender objectives and indicators cutting through all themes, including SE, that respond better to the gender work on the ground and open up more flexibility for more in-depth quality reporting of monitoring and evaluation on gender, both in terms of gender disaggregated data and qualitative information. More emphasis placed on gender sensitive indicators, placing where needed specific attention on the identity of women targeted for example: rural women, sex workers, young women, ethnic women, validating the need to work with the most marginalised groups of women and overall to respond to and demonstrate in practice Progressio's commitment to advancing gender equity.

6.2 Programmes:

Experiences of cross cutting gender:

On the whole the experiences of programmes cross cutting gender internally were successful although some programme are struggling in terms of skills and capacities in relation to cross cutting gender and some felt that they are not adequately trained on "mainstreaming" gender, for example what are the main issues are in mainstreaming gender and how best to overcome them in practice. In practice this has made it difficult at times to ensure that gender is always on the agenda with partners however, for the most part in these situations the country reps have been able to rely on their DWs with a gender background to secure the strength and impact of their work around gender the consistency of gender work, impact, evaluating it is largely dependent on DWs capacity in gender, being specific about it.

Recommendation:

Commitment and support from the institution to ensure gender is a criteria in quality of work for programmes. Training on gender concepts and good practice of how best to incorporate gender in

all stages of project cycle from design, planning, executing and monitoring. Training on concepts should incorporate best practice experiences from the ground work with programmes.

External challenges in cross cutting gender:

The external challenges faced by programmes as highlighted in the programme profile are often tied up with the cultural, religious and societal norms of a given context that regards gender as a foreign concept and as a result this often makes it difficult to secure funding for gender projects or to convince partners to allocate some of the project budget to mainstreaming gender. In this sense donors may maintain they have an interest in mainstreaming gender but in practice do not allocate a sufficient budget to work on more gendered focused aspects of the projects. Another approach to “doing gender” with non-gender sensitive partners or donors often translates to donors setting indicators to include an equal number of women participants as men in for example workshops and then when the appropriate number of women attend, the gender box is ticked, not taking into account to what extent can women participate in these spaces, for example if their voices are heard and their needs and interests responded to. Progressio’s challenges in this area are not unique as this approach to “doing” gender is a well-documented pit fall of mainstreaming gender and unsurprisingly does not contribute to advancing strategic gender goals.

Recommendation:

Incorporate a section into Project Plans and DW reports to extract best practice on how to overcome contextual or common challenges where cross cutting gender with partners is concerned and extract lessons learned that respond to common and specific external and internal challenges to share with CRs and DWs, that are experiencing similar problems but maybe in different contexts.

Masculinities work:

Progressio can boast a successful track record in masculinities work and it continues to emerge as a core element of Progressio’s progressive gender work. However, all programmes in the AMEA and Hispaniola area expressed the interest and need to advance their work around masculinities. Some programmes, Zimbabwe and Hispaniola for example, are more recent advocates of integrating a masculinities approach to their gender work compared to the LAC region and are going through an interesting learning curve in implementing masculinities work and report on both the positive and negative results of their work (see good practice section of SE, Environment Africa), highlighting the need for improvement in this area of work. Both Somaliland and Yemen programmes expressed the need to strengthen their current gender work by integrating masculinities approach to their gender work to further advance the impact of advancing gender equity in the region. The experience of the LAC region in masculinities is held in high regard from the all other programmes and there is a strong push from the programmes of AMEA and Hispaniola to learn from these experiences.

Recommendation:

Training in masculinities both conceptually and in practice, applying lessons learned from the LAC region on how best to incorporate a masculinities approach to gender strategies in order to strengthen the overall impact of gender projects.

Progressio's Gender Profile and Strategic Alliances:

Progressio's gender work is well respected amongst partners, counterparts and stakeholders in all the programme regions. Their strategic and innovative work around gender has meant they have earned a reputable gender profile, with many cases of DWs or CRs being solicited for advice on gender strategies or as with the experience of the Hispaniola region to collaborate with stakeholders such as UN Women in order to introduce gender sensitive methodological approaches to policies and programmes in the Dominican municipalities.

Recommendation:

Actively promote Progressio's work around strategic alliance building, document the successes of Progressio's gender work amongst peers and donors and communicate this as one of our core strengths in contributing to the advancement of women's rights.

Targeting the most vulnerable women:

"Our target for the future still remains the women of the rural communities and villages; they are the hardest to reach. Young women have been very active in terms of our advocacy and campaigns work with rural women. Increased numbers of women in parliament bring with it the hope that they can address issues and provide solutions around violence against women, control of land, land ownership – some of them main violations of women's rights that they face".

It is clear from the findings of interviews with programme country representatives that there is a need to be more specific and focused in strategy about the groups of women targeted, for example in the theme of HIV the need to further target sex workers and those vulnerable to becoming sex workers, those living in abject poverty, in EGP and SE – young and rural women are less likely to participate in projects often due to low self-esteem and self-confidence – programmes are responding to this gap in participation by building strategies for those women most marginalised to build self-esteem and confidence, as processes necessary to transform individual agency to collective actions that lead to the economic or political empowerment of women.

Recommendation:

Be more specific about groups of "women" that are being targeted and why this is important i.e. those most marginalised: rural women, young women and sex workers. Adapt indicators to allow for a focus on these groups of women and means of verification to capture the experiences of these groups to add evidence to the "why" it is essential to invest in these groups of women – this evidence will also be beneficial to support proposals for funding.

More focus on gender strategies that concentrate of varying stages of empowerment and focus on increasing the agency of those women most marginalised and hence often excluded from decision making processes and spaces of participation.

Building Alliances for transformative change:

The Latin American region has vast experience and knowledge on advancing the rights of women and increasing gender equity through its innovative and strategic work on gender. The current advances made in new democratic states like Yemen and Somaliland in relation to increasing women's participation have been impressive; however, a lot of work still needs to be done on the ground to reach the more marginalised women and strategies of how to exercise rights in practice needs to be put in place. To this end the experiences of Latin America have much to offer in terms of sharing strategies on how to make change effective and sustainable in terms of advancing gender equity goals and advancing and exercising the rights of women. This also applies to the work of masculinities in Zimbabwe, DR, Haiti and the AMEA region, where all programmes are either currently working with masculinities approach to gender equity or require support to integrate it to their gender strategy.

Recommendation:

A commitment to invest in sharing of valuable lessons learned across regions.

6.3 Advocacy and policy work.

It is clear from this gender analysis that Progressio has successfully and significantly contributed to influencing national policies and legislations around advancing women's rights. A recent evaluation of policy work also documented that Progressio had exceeded target indicators in influencing policy development and change and furthermore that Progressio brings "high quality research and a depth of knowledge and analysis to its policy work" (PPA Evaluation, 2011, p5).

That said, institutionally there was little awareness as to how far they have advanced in reaching their gender sensitive policy goals. This however is not surprising since neither of the two organisational goals nor the associated indicators for policy and advocacy are gender sensitive, hence the measuring of gender success in these areas would prove very difficult, which could also account for the lack of clarity on where they stand in their gender work in these areas. In the RICA framework, there is a specific gender indicator that corresponds with the policy objective although it refers to quantitative evidence as opposed to qualitative. Although the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) assessment related to policy includes a category to identify if gender has been specifically addressed I am unsure if there is a consistency in terms of ensuring these assessments are gender sensitive. The project plans again have a space to address gender where there is a specific question about how gender is addressed in the project cycle, and difficult to write about if you are unsure as to the gender sensitive goals of the project.

Recommendation:

There is a need to revise the significance of gender in the overall work of policy and advocacy. If there is a firm commitment to being accountable for gender on the agenda in policy they need to work out how to do that, for example: looking at practical tools and methodological approaches that when integrated in project plans and designs can be used to bring a gender analysis to their work.

Such efforts would contribute significantly to gaining more clarity around the contribution that are making to advancing gender goals and also help steer their gender more strategically.

6.4. Communications:

There are no gender goals or indicators in place for the communications work and or no official process in place to account for gender reporting quality and frequency making it difficult to measure their advances in this area. However there is a commitment in the team to ensure that their communications work has a balanced interest in gender stories. Care has to be taken in publications, as with communications, that a space is created to capture the transformative experiences of women and not presented as an add on or appendix.

Recommendation:

The incidence of reporting on gender in communications is good however more attention could be paid to reporting on the broader impact of this work in terms of advancing and contributing to the rights of women in the regions, developing some more challenging gender stories and raising questions, not just reporting on gender successes and human interest stories. That said I am unclear as to whose responsibility this would lie with as it would require a good level of knowledge and understanding of gender.

7. Future ways forwards for gender work, key opportunities:

- Masculinities work - draw on long history and in-depth experience in masculinities from the LAC region, invest in hiring masculinities expert to do training, raise Progressio masculinities profile
- Social Communications work –raise profile of strategic gender work, sharing lessons learned of good practice between regions to advance impact of gender work with specific relation to changing attitudes and behaviours
- Economic rights – raise our profile of our strategic work in this area, for example research in El Salvador, and build alliances with women networks, movements and universities to advance gender work in this area
- Increased target of most marginalised women, for example young women which is rapidly emerging as a new niche area in gender interest and funding
- More in-depth work on empowerment –construct, capture strategies and indicators that reflect accurately on the differing stages of empowerment and agency, this will also lend to gender credibility in terms of work around empowerment
- Create spaces for strategic alliance building around gender

Appendix 1: Brief history of Progressio's gender story

Since the 1980s Progressio have engaged in strong partnerships with women's organisations, committed to promoting and engaging in projects centred on gender equity and advancing women's rights, particularly in Latin and Central American region where women's movements were strong and civil society active. The context in the region at this time was post revolution, a time that saw promises to advance women's interests post revolution unfulfilled as the below quote suggests:

"...in reference to the context around this time, which is similar to the experience in Nicaragua, where women had a high level of participation and involvement in the revolution...there was the consensus amongst all that, first we win the war then we deal with women's issues, however in practice post the revolution women's issues were not incorporated in the agenda and many women felt disillusioned and had to continue in their struggle for autonomy". (Interview, Country representative, El Salvador)

This resulted in the need for alternative spaces in which women could organise and advance their rights and NGOs, such as Progressio, could provide spaces for women to organise, responding to the needs and interests of women in the region. It was no surprise then that woman who took up positions of decision making in such spaces, brought with them a strong conviction to implement gender programmes and build up wide strategies to deal with education, health, violence.. The following reflection demonstrates how in practice Progressio supported such attempts to support and strengthen the women's movement at that time:

"From the beginning we in the El Salvador office established ourselves as an organisation that supports women's organisations and made huge efforts to strengthen the capacity of women's organisations. The organisation was also a support for the women's movement, with organised women from various departments coming together with the challenge of combining their many interests into some central core issues. These interests which, back then were: women's political participation - which was very weak, eradicate violence against women, access to economic resources, access to health and promote responsible fatherhood, were incorporated into what became our political framework of the women's movement. From these efforts we built up a platform which was called Mujeres'94, we secured funding from the EU for 3 years to support the strengthening of women's institutions in El Salvador; and to support this strategy Progressio recruited and placed eleven development workers to advance the programme work on gender equity with women's organisations. Within these first 11 DWs they recruited a gender methodologist specialist from Spain. This had a big impact in bringing a gender analysis to our projects and work as she also gave courses to the women's groups and organisations on how to use research tool with a gender approach –how to collect data from a gender perspective, how to prepare projects and how to present. This had a big impact on how they designed, analysed and evaluated these gender projects from there on in, hence increasing the span of their work on gender in the area. They also supported women's organisations on how to communicate effectively in public about what they were doing and held training courses for journalists on gender issues so that they could effectively communicate with the media around gender issues"

The projects designed reflected the prioritisation of women's issues that were being discussed and debated in the women's movement of Central America at this time, and such strategies, put in place

to improve the wellbeing and lives of women in the region, had a significant impact in the shaping of the institutional gender agenda at that time:

“The fact that the gender agenda was key in Latin America meant it had a great effect and impact on our organisation. Partners expressed this by the high number of DWs requested in the field in women’s organisations, most of which were involved in the feminist movement and actively and personally involved in the women’s movement. The work of our programmes in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Peru and Dominican Republic was of a radical nature, the work was unique and controversial, our programmes and partners were involved in cutting edge gender work – for example our work around masculinities”. (Interview, programme director).

As this quote suggests, Progressio was not only strongly committed to supporting the efforts of the women’s movement in advancing their goals towards gender equity but also were bold enough to engage in some of the more radical approaches to gender work, for example their work on masculinities in the Latin American region at a time when the concept was still very new and challenged from many within the women’s movement. However, their boldness succeeded in producing significant results in the reduction of violence amongst women in the region and equally importantly brought about a new alliance of men and women working together to reducing the incidence of violence against women in the region, increasing the impact and extensiveness of their gender work. Progressio continued to support such cutting edge strategic gender work and it was these experiences and relationships built up over time that helped structure the thinking around institutional planning and programming. Gender emerged as a strong component of Progressio’s overall work in Latin America and Progressio’s profile for supporting effective and strategic gender projects, attracted the attention of many gender specialists who sought out roles as development workers as a way of working in solidarity with grassroots programmes with the aim of supporting and contributing to advancing the rights of women in the region.

The experiences and lessons learned from strategically advancing gender equity in Latin America has also been instrumental in the institutional capacities to supporting gender equity in other regions of Progressio’s work such as AMEA, a context which does not have the same historical experience of strong social movements and where women’s organisations and movements are in their infancy. Progressio was equipped with the institutional and programme experience needed to strengthen women’s organisational capacity and support them in their first steps towards establishing a legitimate presence.

“Our Citizen Participation programme started in Jan 2009 with the aim of advocating the rights of women and men in local councils and good governance, in partnership with two women’s NGO’s, having gender as the main issue, integrating gender issues in all areas of the plans, budget, local councils, and governance. Last year our DW worked successfully on a gender sensitive local council plan in a community which was then submitted to the national council and taken into consideration in the national plan which resulted in money being allocated for gender issues. The government now integrates women’s policies there is a complete plan of women’s participation, economic and political, this is amazing considering 10 years ago no one could talk openly about gender. For example in 2001, women could not speak out in communities about gender, it was forbidden, it was seen by religious leaders and communities as a foreign concept, an influence from the outside, one that would influence our communities and change our culture. Over all it was seen as something

bad. It was therefore hard for us activists to talk openly about our gender work in conferences and our work as gender activists was a real challenge. Over time with NGOs such as Progressio, we were able to raise awareness and work with religious leaders who now talk openly now about gender. This has had a huge impact in the development of our gender work, for example we have now contributed to integrating gender into the national budget, in government policies, donor institutions and programme strategies. And now in our country for the first time we have a masters on gender and international development, this is amazing considering where we were 10 years ago". (Interview with Country representative, Yemen).

As this quote reflects the region of AMEA has had to overcome cultural, religious and traditional barriers, in order to advance the political, economic and social rights of women, and have had to engage in what for one of the programme director calls "smart" gender work, finding ways to work around the cultural and religious barriers in order to advance their strategic work on gender. The support provided by Progressio in terms of organisational support and through providing development workers with a rich wealth of experience in gender, has resulted in the strengthening of organisational capacities of organisations, which in turn has led to more strategic work around advocacy, planning, actions and evaluations in advancing women's issues in these regions, as the country representative of Somaliland reflects:

"...now for example, in Somaliland, women's organisations are becoming the strongest societal organisations in the country".