Gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE) in Africa: Institutional culture shift

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GEWE in foreign aid since Beijing

• Enthusiasm in the late 1990s, quietness in the early 2000s, steadily growing attention and contestation since the late 2000s

• The organisational origin of aid agencies (bank, foundation, diplomacy, etc.) significantly influences how GEWE is taken up

• The challenges of even committed agencies to seriously address GEWE (domestic politics, organisational pressures and priorities at the headquarter level)
Implementation challenges

Challenges at the country level of aid agencies:

- Numerous, changing priorities and overstretched staff
- Limited capacities
- Gender focal points are often junior staff working part-time on GEWE
- Limited room for manoeuvre

→ Attention to GEWE becomes a tick-box exercise
Challenges in African countries

- Government commitment: GEWE in national politics
- Stability, fragility, and post-conflict recovery
- Religious and customary authorities
- Gender relations are power relations and deeply embedded in cultures that change only slowly (like in Europe)
Recommendations (1)

• Prioritise the priorities and recognise the political limitations
• Perceive the institutional culture shift as a 10-years, SDG-like project
• Be realistic – avoid: ‘We were bad in the past, we will be good in the future.’
• Delegate as much as possible to country offices permitting these to carry out pragmatic aid management (flexible, context dependent, politically sensitive, and liberal in relation to EU policies)
Recommendations (2)

- Distinguish between types of African countries:
  - Strong governments committed to GEWE: Budget support and political dialogue
  - Governments not committed to GEWE: Targeted activities
  - Fragile situations: Targeted activities
  - Post-conflict recovery: Targeted activities and political dialogue
Thank you