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Central America Country Management Unit  
Latin America and Caribbean Region  
The World Bank

## Economic Notes

Promoting Institutional Change on Gender in  
Latin America  
The Use of Groupware Technology

Maria Correia  
Curt Simmons

November 1997

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**Economic Notes**

**LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

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The Use of Groupware Technology**

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This series presents the findings of work in progress or background material prepared as inputs to the Central America Country Management Unit's Economic and Sector Work. This Note was prepared by Maria Correia (Lead Specialist Gender, LCSPR) and Curt Simmons (Management Specialist, LCSHD). The Series is edited by Ian Bannon (LCC2C). The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the World Bank Group.

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## Table of Contents

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Preface

Introduction .....	1
Gender is an Important Issue in Development.....	1
Gender is an Organizational Change Issue .....	1
The GINO Programme.....	1
Making Institutional Assessments Participatory in the GINO Programme .....	2
The OptionFinder™ Technology.....	3
Use of the OF Technology in the GINO Programme.....	4
Organization of the OF-Facilitated SOP Workshop.....	4
Participants .....	4
Format of the Workshops.....	5
Conducting the OF-Facilitated SOP Workshops .....	7
Output of the Workshops .....	7
Results of the OF-Facilitated SOP Workshops .....	8
Value of the OF Technology and the Participatory Process .....	8
Lessons Learned from Experience.....	10
Conclusions.....	12

Annex 1:      OptionFinder™ Equipment Set-up

Annex 2:      Sample of Survey Statements Used in the GINO Programme

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## *Preface*

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The World Bank has used OptionFinder™ (OF), a computerized groupware technology, on the Gender and Institutional Innovation in Latin America (GINO) Programme. The GINO Programme is funded by the Government of Switzerland under the Special Studies Trust Fund, which was set up to support innovative development interventions proposed by the World Bank. The GINO Programme—which includes five public sector agencies involved in agricultural extension, land administration and rural municipal development in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Venezuela—aims to develop the capacity of public sector agencies to respond to the differentiated needs of male and female clients. The World Bank is using the OF technology as an integral part of participatory institutional assessments being conducted under the GINO Programme. Using the OF system, each participating organization, with the assistance of the Bank, has conducted a series of workshops to survey staff perceptions on problems related to institutional change on gender.

Thus far use of the OF technology has been a success. The low cost technology has proven effective and easy to operate. Results from OF-facilitated workshops have enabled staff of participating institutions to quickly identify bottlenecks related to organizational change. Through the use of the OF system, staff learned about organizational concepts and the characteristics of their respective organizations, which will help them to operate more effectively in their organizational setting. By emphasizing full and democratic participation and transparency of results, the OF workshops also served to motivate staff who attended the workshops.

# Promoting Institutional Change on Gender in Latin America: The Use of Groupware Technology

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Gender Is an Important Issue in Development*

Lack of attention to gender differences leads to losses in economic efficiency and effectiveness. In the agriculture sector, for example, experience in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Region indicates that both men and women play important roles in farming, but that compared to men, women have more limited access to land and agricultural technology. This situation prevails although the number of families with single mothers has increased dramatically in many rural areas of Latin America, and, relative to men, women farmers tend to produce a greater diversity of crops, which provide a stable source of family income and nutrition year round. Failing to extend agricultural technology to both men and women farmers leads to losses in productivity and efficiency and has important poverty alleviation implications. Gender differences are also relevant to other sectors. For example, poor health affects economic productivity and is a drain on a country's resources. Policy makers, therefore, need to be aware of men's and women's different health risks. In the education sector, policy makers need to carefully monitor the determinants of male and female educational attainment, given that high dropout rates and low education levels affect human capital formulation and economic potential. Similarly, financial institutions need to consider men's and women's different entrepreneurship patterns to increase the viability of their businesses and ensure that credit is affordable to both men and women.

### *Gender is an Organizational Change Issue*

While gender remains an important development issue, little attention has been placed on changing public institutions to enable them to understand and respond to gender differences. Rather, the focus on gender work over the decades has been on advocacy and policy making.<sup>1</sup> Lack of attention to institutional bottlenecks is not surprising given the fragile and unstable nature of many public sector agencies in developing countries. Tackling an issue such as gender requires shifts in attitudes and practices, an adjustment in incentive systems, and operational changes in areas such as information systems, methodologies, and service delivery mechanisms—which would present a challenge to most organizations especially the precarious ones that tend to exist in developing nations.

### *The GINO Programme*

The Gender and Institutional Innovation in Latin America (GINO) Programme is a two year action research initiative funded by the Swiss Government and executed by the

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of simplicity, the terms organization and institution are used interchangeably.

World Bank. The GINO Programme aims to improve institutional capacity to analyze and respond to gender differences. Five World Bank-financed institutions involved in agricultural extension, land administration, and municipal development are participating in the Programme: the National Agriculture Technology Center (CENTA) in El Salvador; the Foundation for Training and Applied Research for Agrarian Reform (CIARA) in Venezuela; the Nicaraguan Institute for Agricultural Technology (INTA); the Nicaraguan Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA); and the Nicaraguan Institute for Municipal Development (INIFOM). The specific objectives of the Programme are:

- (a) to improve the capacity of participating institutions to respond to gender differentiated needs;
- (b) to identify institutional constraints and opportunities related to organizational change on gender and, in light of identified strengths and weaknesses, establish strategies and actions to improve institutional capacity to analyze and respond to gender differences;
- (c) to promote inter- and intra-agency learning and information exchange on institutional development and gender issues; and
- (d) to produce a framework for carrying out participatory institutional assessments with a gender perspective that could be used by participating institutions and other development organizations.

### ***Making Institutional Assessments Participatory in the GINO Programme***

One of the main features of the GINO Programme is its action research methodology. Action research—which involves a continuous cycle of diagnosis, feedback, planning and action—is highly flexible and allows participants to learn by doing and readjust strategies and actions based on lessons learned. Another key feature of the GINO Programme is its focus on participatory methodologies. Typically institutional interventions are managed by external consultants who carry out the initial institutional diagnosis and monitor actions taken by institutions. While having the advantage of objectivity, the use of external consultants limits learning and capacity building on the part of staff of the institutions. Moreover documents produced by external consultants are often only shared with management because they expose sensitive institutional weaknesses. Staff complain that while they are consulted on the problems, they are rarely involved in formulating and deciding on solutions. The GINO Programme, in contrast, uses the OF technology to make institutional assessments participatory. Specifically, GINO designed workshops to carry out Participatory Opinion Surveys (SOPs) as an integral part of the institutional assessment phase of the Programme.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The term SOP comes from the Spanish translation of Participatory Opinion Surveys which is *Sondeo de Opinión Participativo*.

### *The OptionFinder™ Technology*

OptionFinder™ is an electronic polling system which uses a combination of computer software, wireless radio-frequency remote keypads (one for each participant), and a radio-frequency receiver.<sup>3</sup> The equipment required to run an OF-facilitated workshop includes: a laptop computer; a projector or LCD panel to connect to the laptop and project the computer screen; and, the OF system. Annex 1 contains a schematic diagram of the equipment. The system can be used in workshops or other events for groups ranging in size from 5 to 500 people.

In an OF-facilitated workshop, each participant is given an OF keypad. With the OF software, questions or statements are projected onto a screen along with a list of responses from which participants may choose. Each participant pushes a number on their keypad corresponding to their response or choice. After all participants have responded, OF immediately displays results of the polling in bar graph form so that participants can see the aggregate results of their opinions. A facilitated discussion of the results is optional.

The OF system has the following features:

- it is simple to use and requires no prior computer experience, participants simply press the number on a keypad corresponding to their response;
- the exercise is focused around a set of questions or statements thereby saving time and avoiding deflection of the discussion;
- anonymity is guaranteed, thereby reducing the tendency to give guarded responses;
- results are democratic—all participants' responses have an equal weight in the aggregation of results;
- optionally, full participation is required in the polling exercise, in which case all participants must give their response before the group proceeds to the next question or statement;
- feedback is immediate—aggregated responses are immediately projected on the screen after all participants have completed their selections;

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<sup>3</sup> OptionFinder™ is the radio-frequency electronic polling system marketed by Option Technologies in Ogden, UT. Other vendors market groupware systems with similar functionality.

- the optional discussion (following polling) permits a deeper analysis of problems or opportunities identified and allows participants to reflect on problems revealed and propose actions to address these problems;
- results are immediately tabulated by the computer, thereby allowing a quick turnaround time on the production of the report;
- the system is portable—the computer and LCD panel can be carried in one carrying case and the transmitter and keypads fit into another; one person can travel by plane with the equipment as carry-on if he/she has no other carry-on baggage; and
- it is relatively low cost—the OF system with 20 keypads costs under US\$18,000 (not including the cost of the laptop and projector or LCD panel).<sup>4</sup>

## USE OF THE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE GINO PROGRAMME

### *Organization of the OF Facilitated SOP Workshops*

Staff of participating institutions organized the SOP workshops with the assistance of the Bank. Each participating institution carried out one to four SOPs. CENTA in El Salvador, which had greater ease in assembling field staff, held four SOP workshops. CIARA in Venezuela, which is in the initial stages of establishing its extension system in the field, held only one SOP in its central offices.<sup>5</sup> INIFOM, INRA and INTA in Nicaragua each held three workshops.

Workshops in Nicaragua were held in the capital as well as regional centers. Depending on the conditions of field offices, workshops were held in either the institution's meeting rooms, local hotels or training facilities. In El Salvador, all workshops took place outside the capital of San Salvador at CENTA's central offices. The workshop in Venezuela was also held in CIARA's central office in Caracas. SOP workshops took about 4 to 4.5 hours to complete and were held either in the morning or the afternoon.

### *Participants*

Fifteen to twenty staff participated in each SOP. The number was deliberately kept small to allow for a facilitated discussion to follow polling. Attention was paid to the composition of the groups to ensure that participants would feel comfortable participating

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<sup>4</sup> The cost of additional keypads is about US\$270 each. Keypads may also be rented.

<sup>5</sup> Once CIARA's extension nuclei are operational, the GINO Programme will repeat SOP workshops in the field.

in the discussions following polling. Two options were possible: (a) organizing staff by operational unit or region with personnel of varying levels of authority or seniority present; or (b) organizing staff by job or professional category. CENTA in El Salvador, which has a more hierarchical organizational structure, opted for workshops organized by level (extension workers from field offices; researchers; regional management; and central management). In Nicaragua, due to its recent political history, SOP workshops for INTA, INRA and INIFOM were organized by Region with staff from different hierarchical levels represented in each workshop. Strategies on the selection of participants for each workshop was also dependent on the institution's perception of how performance on gender varied in the institution. Nicaraguan institutions were concerned about discrepancies between regions whereas CENTA considered differences by profession to be more problematic in terms of performance on gender.

### ***Format of the Workshops***

The SOP workshops consisted of two types of activities: (a) polling of opinions organized by category of statements; and (b) discussion of results following each category of statements. For the polling, survey statements appeared on the screen as affirmations. Participants were then asked to comment on whether they agreed or disagreed with the affirmations. Options and their corresponding keypad number were as follows:

1. Completely disagree
2. Disagree
3. Don't know
4. Agree
5. Completely agree

The survey instrument had approximately 40 statements organized into eight categories. Staff from the organizations were involved in designing and validating the survey statements. Annex 2 contains a sample of the statements that were used. The categories and types of statements in each category were:

- Organization's Policies: statements dealt with whether the organization's policies reflected the proposed change on gender and if it mattered, that is, if staff had knowledge of the organization's policies;
- Organizational Structure: statements touched on whether the institution's structure facilitated an organizational change on gender;
- Organizational Processes and Service Delivery Mechanisms: statements dealt with whether gender differences had been considered in service delivery mechanisms and organizational processes such as information systems;

- Staff Functions: statements touched on whether gender had been included as a responsibility of staff in their job description and, if it mattered, that is, if staff were familiar with their terms of reference and oriented their work according to their job description;
- Incentives for Performance: statements addressed whether incentives were in place for staff to change their behavior and adopt an organizational change on gender;
- Support for Organizational Change on Gender: statements were constructed to determine if staff had received training or information on gender to enable them to change their work practices;
- Perceptions on the Relevance of Gender: statements dealt with whether gender had been presented in the institution as an efficiency or equity issue and how this affected staff's response to gender; and
- Client Demand: statements were constructed to examine how the institution determined client demand—both male and female—and how client demand affected the institution's delivery of services and their performance on gender.

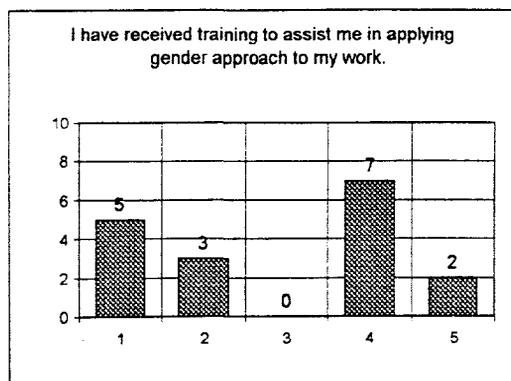
In the final polling exercise, participants evaluated the SOP workshop.

In each workshop, there was a sequence of eight polling and discussion segments (one for each category). In each segment, participants responded to the statements in that category; then, aggregated results of participants' opinions were shown on the screen, with a bar graph for each statement. A facilitated discussion about the results in that category was then conducted.

During the discussion, participants were asked to brainstorm on strategies for improving institutional performance. Specifically, they were asked to reflect upon organizational weaknesses and strengths, and upon proposed actions to address the weaknesses and/or take advantage of the strengths. The discussion was captured in a word processing document and displayed on the screen so that both the participants and the facilitator were certain that the spirit of the discussion was accurately recorded.

Responding to all the statements in each category took approximately five minutes. Discussions for each category ranged from 15 to 20 minutes

### Sample Statement and Discussion



#### Strengths

- Support to apply a gender approach is demonstrated through events like this workshop.

#### Weaknesses

- There are budget constraints to carrying out gender related work.
- We do not have the opportunity to incorporate a gender approach in our daily work because we already have a heavy work load and lack information on how to apply gender to our work.
- Higher level staff in the institution do not consider gender to be important.

#### Solutions

- Once we have received training, it is necessary for each of us to apply a gender approach in practice.

### *Conducting the OF-Facilitated SOP Workshops*

The OF-facilitated SOPs were conducted by two people: a Facilitator to guide the process, assist in interpreting results, and lead the discussion sessions; and a Technology Specialist to operate the software and record comments made by participants during discussions. The Bank provided a three-day training program as well as in-country on-the-job training on how to run an OF-facilitated workshop and produce a corresponding report. The World Bank opted to hire a consultant in public management to facilitate the workshops because of the delicate nature of the institutional problems to be addressed in the workshops.

### *Output of the Workshops*

Each SOP workshop generated a report organized by category with bar graphs of responses on one page and a synthesis of the discussion (strengths, weaknesses and

actions) on the opposite page. The OF technology also produced aggregate results of all the SOP workshops so that the overall situation of the organization could be analyzed in comparison to different pockets of the organization. Within less than a month, each participant received a copy of the report of the SOP that he/she attended. In fact, other applications of OF in the World Bank indicates that it is possible to produce and distribute reports within days.

## RESULTS OF THE OF-FACILITATED SOP WORKSHOPS

### *Value of the OF Technology and the Participatory Process*

The overwhelmingly favorable response from participants on the OF-facilitated SOP workshops as well as the rapid and rich information generated demonstrate both the value of the participatory process and the OF technology. Specifically, the OF-facilitated workshops proved to be quick and cost effective, motivational for staff, an effective capacity building tool, and novel and fun to use. Moreover, the process facilitated discussion on sensitive but important institutional issues, contributed to participant ownership of group decisions, and produced a concrete set of actions for follow-up. In fact, the system has been so popular that the Bank has been unable to respond to the demand generated for more OF-facilitated workshops. A more detailed list of the value of the OF technology and participatory process follows.

- (a) COST EFFECTIVENESS: The OF-technology provided a quick and cost effective mechanism for collecting important baseline data on the organization, and specifically for identifying the opportunities for and problems related to organizational change. In El Salvador, to the astonishment of CENTA's top management, after conducting four half-day workshops gender staff not specialized in institutional development were able to identify the same organizational weaknesses it had taken external international consultants weeks to uncover. Information collected with the OF technology is also quantitative, hence, by repeating the exercise periodically, institutions can effectively monitor their progress.
- (b) PARTICIPATION AND INTEREST IN THE OF TECHNOLOGY. In Venezuela, news of the workshops and the new technology spread quickly within the organization to the point that people who wanted to participate had to be turned away. Gender staff commented that it was the first time a workshop on gender had generated so much interest and curiosity. Fascination for the process and the information generated was not limited to lower level staff. INTA's Vice Minister came to the first workshop apologizing because prior commitments limited his attendance to only a few minutes. After the workshop commenced and he witnessed the process, he stayed for the entire event!
- (c) A FUN TECHNOLOGY. Participants from all countries who attended the workshops commented that the technology was fun to use. The element of

fun is important to emphasize because staff get tired of attending the same type of event, particularly if these are non-productive and/or staff do not see the results of their efforts.

- (d) STAFF MOTIVATION: The OF-facilitated workshops turned out to be an excellent motivational tool. Public institutions tend to be run in a more hierarchical fashion than public agencies from developed nations. Power is concentrated at the top, hence, staff at the bottom levels of the organization have infrequent opportunities to participate in decision making related to the institution. Participants commented that it was the first time they had participated in such an exercise. They also felt that their voices were being heard and their opinions were being taken into account. In particular, participants appreciated that results were transparent. Staff in both El Salvador and Nicaragua, for example, remarked that they had become skeptical of external consultants who used them for consultations but never shared the results of the studies. The democratic nature of the workshops, that is, equal weight for each person's opinion, also made OF well accepted by participants.
- (e) CAPACITY BUILDING: Compared to more conventional pencil and paper survey methods, the OF-facilitated workshops proved to be a powerful capacity building tool. Throughout the workshop, staff learned about important organizational concepts by being "forced" to respond to statements raised. For most participants, the workshop represented a first opportunity to participate in an institutional assessment and learn the relevance of institutional concepts. Staff remarked that the exposure to these organizational elements during the workshop will help them to be more effective in their work and in their interactions with other personnel. The benefit of the OF process is that it ensures that the discussion that follows polling will be ordered and focused on the topics presented. The display of aggregated opinions allowed participants to get a sense of their working environment and what others around them are thinking. Discussions that follow the polling permit cross fertilization of ideas and information.
- (f) ABILITY TO ADDRESS SENSITIVE TOPICS: The OF technology allowed us to probe into sensitive institutional issues such as staff incentives for performance, the behavior of leaders in the organization, and communications and trust. The OF system has the advantage that organizers and facilitators can direct the discussion through the content and structure of the questions. For example, a statement such as "*my superiors demonstrate through their actions a commitment to gender objectives*" proved to be provocative and led participants to discuss openly this sensitive organizational topic.

- (g) PARTICIPANT OWNERSHIP OF GROUP DECISIONS: Participants were encouraged to propose solutions to identified problems taking into consideration organizational strengths. Specifically, participants were asked to reflect on how each individual could contribute to resolving identified bottlenecks. The result was a sense of personal and group ownership of the actions proposed during the workshops. One participant from El Salvador commented that the process had increased his self-awareness and made him realize that, in addition to his superiors, he too had a responsibility to help solve CENTA's internal organizational problems. Dissemination of reports to all staff who participated in the SOPs also contributed to greater ownership of the process and the results.
- (h) ACTION LINKED. The SOP workshops were designed to generate actions for improvement among participants in addition to collecting valuable organizational information. The workshops relied on employee wisdom and intellectual capital to come up with solutions. The OF technology permitted this process by making results of the polling immediately available for participants to reflect on.
- (i) DEMAND GENERATED BY OF-FACILITATED WORKSHOPS. The SOP workshops have generated a tremendous demand for the technology and the process. Each time the Bank has demonstrated the system, demand has been generated. In the case of CENTA, which is in a process of restructuring, management immediately requested the system to survey potential users on their demands and needs for agricultural extension services. Demand has also come from outside the rural sector. In Venezuela, after sitting in as observers in the CIARA SOP workshop, representatives of a World Bank-financed judicial reform project immediately requested the system to survey judges and other stakeholders in their sector.

### *Lessons Learned from Experience*

A number of lessons emerged from the OF-facilitated SOP workshops both in relation to the use of the technology and the design of the workshops. The most important lessons are discussed below.

- GETTING THE MIX OF PARTICIPANTS RIGHT. Experiences from the SOP workshops demonstrated the importance of getting the mix of people right, in order to facilitate full participation and avoid inhibition during the discussion periods following polling. For the Venezuela workshop, this point was somewhat overlooked for a number of reasons. The result was the dominance of one senior staff member who was defensive and discouraged lower level staff from expressing their opinions during the discussion periods. Other workshops did not

experience these difficulties because more thought went into selecting participants.

- GETTING THE STATEMENTS RIGHT. Statements must be clear and well thought out. Indeed, in order to design the statements, a preliminary institutional assessment must have been carried out. In the case of Venezuela, problems were superficially diagnosed, hence, discussions kept getting bogged down on the issue of perceptions on gender. Had this problem been properly identified, the strategy on the statements would have been different and the SOP would have produced a different outcome.
- FACILITATION AND OPERATION OF THE OF SYSTEM. It is important that the Technician feel comfortable with the subject matter to capture the essence of the discussion following each polling session. The first few workshops were hampered by the Technician's lack of familiarity with gender issues. This resulted in the disruption of the discussion as the Facilitator worked with the Technician to ensure comments were accurately recorded.
- EQUIPMENT. Equipment in good working order is critical. For one of the Nicaragua workshops, the Bank asked that the institution supply the laptop and the projection system, but the latter subsequently failed. The group was able to improvise but clearly this problem should be avoided to ensure maximum impact from the workshops.
- FACILITIES. Special attention should be taken to ensure proper facilities if workshops are to be in the field. For example, because the system relies on statements and answers being projected, light from windows must be blocked properly. Adequate power supply and adapters to accommodate the equipment is also a consideration.

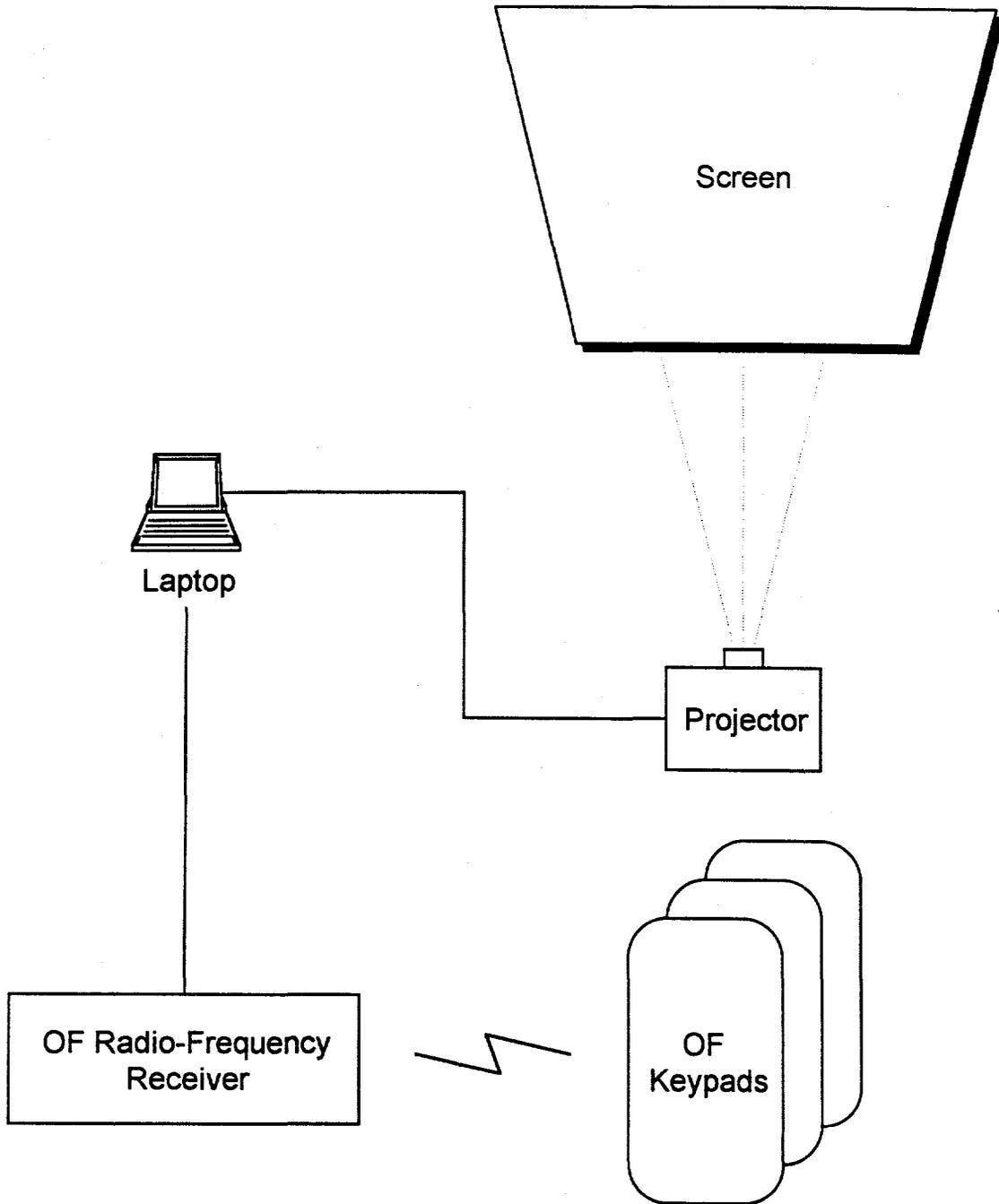
## CONCLUSIONS

The OF technology offers a new and exciting way to provide technical assistance in developing countries, which to some extent, could provide an alternative to high cost external technical assistance. Experiences on the GINO Programme demonstrate the capacity of OF to address key concerns in development assistance—such as attention to process and learning, participation, institutional development, and commitment and ownership—in one low cost and simple technology. In the past, it has not been clear how to combine these important elements in development assistance programs. While the OF technology was used to examine capacity on gender, it has broad application for organizational development and change. It can also be used to analyze very different types of organizations. As a next step, the Bank plans to pilot the technology to examine the capacity of grassroots women's groups in Mexico.

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# OptionFinder Equipment Set-up



## SAMPLE OF SURVEY STATEMENTS USED IN THE GINO PROGRAMME

### 1. Policies

- (a) I am familiar with the organization's policies.
- (b) I have access to the organization's policies.
- (c) Gender is included in the organization's policies.
- (d) The organization's policies are relevant for my job performance.
- (e) I am applying a gender approach in my work because it is an organizational mandate.

### 2. Structure

- (a) I am familiar with the formal organizational structure of the organization.
- (b) Within the organizational structure, I know who has responsibility for supporting gender work.
- (c) The organizational structure considers the needs and demands of clients.
- (d) The organizational structure is adequate to promote an organizational change on gender.

### 3. Organizational Processes and Service Delivery Mechanisms

- (a) The organization considers gender differences in defining its service delivery mechanisms.
- (b) Agricultural extension methodologies take into account how to reach both male and female clients.
- (c) The agriculture research agenda considers gender differences in agricultural technology needs.
- (d) I am familiar with the methodologies I am supposed to use for my work.

### 4. Staff Functions

- (a) I am familiar with my job responsibilities.
- (b) Applying a gender approach is one of my job responsibilities.
- (c) I am currently applying a gender approach in my work.
- (d) I have sufficient knowledge and skills to apply a gender approach in my work.

### 5. Incentives for Performance

- (a) There are incentives in place to perform well in the organization.
- (b) There are incentives in the organization to apply a gender approach.
- (c) My superiors recognize good performance in the organization.
- (d) I am recognized for applying a gender approach to my work.
- (e) My superiors demonstrate through their actions a commitment to gender objectives.

**6. Support to Apply a Gender Approach on Gender**

- (a) I have received training to assist me in applying a gender approach to my work.
- (b) I feel that I am able to apply a gender approach through the training I have received.
- (c) I have sufficient support from staff to apply a gender approach to my work.
- (d) I have received training on gender but there are no real incentives for me to change the way I work.
- (e) My superiors support me in applying a gender approach to my work.

**7. Perception on Gender Approaches**

- (a) I believe that the organization's gender approach is appropriate.
- (b) To apply a gender approach is equivalent to promoting feminism.
- (c) To apply a gender approach in our services is to promote the efficiency of the agriculture sector.
- (d) I feel personally threatened by having to apply a gender approach in my work.

**8. Client Demand**

- (a) I select the clients with whom I work.
- (b) I provide services to my clients according to demand.
- (c) Demand for the organization's services varies by gender.
- (d) In my region, potential exists to work with both male and female clients.
- (e) One of my roles is to capture the latent demand of women, given that women have less access to extension services than men.

**9. Workshop Evaluation**

- (a) I understood the objectives of the workshop.
  - (b) I had the opportunity to express my opinion openly.
  - (c) As a group, we had the opportunity to discuss institutional subjects in a participatory way.
  - (d) The facilitators helped to create an atmosphere of trust.
  - (e) The facilitators did a good job of recording our discussions.
  - (f) I recommend this methodology to explore other issues of importance to the organization.
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