

## **INFORMAL CONSULTATION ON “STRATEGIES FOR THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY- IS MAINSTREAMING A DEAD END?”**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

from an informal consultation held near Oslo from 6 to 9 November 2002 organized by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Following four days of discussion of strategies for gender equality in international organisations, the gender focal points of 15 UN organisations and development banks together with representatives of 5 donor agencies and resource persons drew the following conclusions and recommendations related to lessons learned in promoting institutional change and effective strategies for the future:

**A. Gender mainstreaming** is not a dead end strategy. But it is not always fully understood and implemented in the right way.

\* There is confusion about concepts: “gender” and “women”. However, one does not exclude the other. The use depends on the context. “Gender” is most fruitfully used as an adjective, not a noun, in concepts like “gender equality” and “gender analysis”.

“Women” (and girls) are essential actors and target groups in relation to gender equality. It is important to analyse issues so that gender differences and disparities appear and women are visible in relation to men.

\* There is also confusion about goals and means. The goal is gender equality and women’s empowerment. To achieve the goal, different strategies and actions are needed according to circumstances. Polarisation of approaches does not work. A main strategy is gender mainstreaming of all policies, programmes and projects. But “women must not be lost in the mainstream, or malestream!”. Targeted women-specific policies, programmes and projects are necessary to strengthen the status of women and promote mainstreaming. In any case, there must be specialist support, institutional mechanisms and accountability.

\* Agencies have chosen different bases for their action: human rights or efficiency considerations. In fact, it is not a question of either/or. The human rights basis is more fundamental, but is not always made explicit and in some organisations it is not well understood or appreciated. The emphasis will vary from one organisation to the other, but it is important to realise that the promotion of gender equality implies a social transformation in society in addition to more effective economic development and poverty reduction.

**B. Global commitment.** The international women’s conferences from Mexico (1975) to Beijing (1995) established a global consensus and commitment to promote gender equality which was reaffirmed by the Millennium Summit (2000). This is a long term commitment and it is important to keep the goal on the agenda. Ongoing political and financial support from Member States is essential to maintain focus on gender issues and ensure implementation of the recommendations. The mandates and policy statements of UN organisations and development banks should have conceptual clarity and explicit language so people understand them. Commitments should be clearly spelled out, given visibility and cultivated. Without pressure from governing bodies and top management mandates and policy statements do not get implemented. External advisory gender boards or panels can be used to answer questions and help elucidate and depersonalise issues.

**C. Organizational change.** The challenge is to transform multilateral organisations to actively pursue the goal of promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment

through a process of gender mainstreaming and other forms of organizational change. As gender equality often touches on power relations, there can be strong discomfort and even resistance to change. To make progress the following is needed:

- strong, active leadership
- incentives and accountability
- a critical mass of committed individuals

**D. Tools.** Useful tools include

- partnerships: internally and externally
- action plans to move from general policies to practice
- advocacy events to keep the issues visible
- simple, understandable language that is suitable for non-specialist audiences
- universal norms, country statistics and local knowledge
- sex-disaggregated data and analyses
- best practice dissemination to excite the imagination
- regular reporting on commitments, monitoring and evaluation
- gender champions in relevant positions with appropriate financial resources
- gender-balanced staffing and supports, including adequate training
- individual recognition for good practice, rewards and incentives

**E. Top management.** Responsibility for promoting gender equality is system-wide and rests at the highest levels of management. The active support of top management is crucial to increase action and impact. There must be more than lip-service. Leaders need to issue regular instructions and “walk the talk”. The responsibility of different levels of management must be clearly defined. The most important responsibility must be to create an enabling environment for gender equality. Measures – score-cards – for “enabling environment” should be put in place by top management. The gender units/advisers need to be proactive in advocating with and assisting top management to obtain the necessary support for gender equality. Also female top leaders need assistance on this. There are competing concerns, goal congestion and resistance to change and to addressing gender issues.

**F. Enabling environment.** An enabling environment for the promotion of gender equality is important. Indicators of this include among others:

- percentage of core funds dedicated to gender issues
- gender inputs and outputs in corporate programmes and results frameworks
- gender issues integrated in corporate policy
- gender mainstreaming performance in performance appraisal reviews of staff
- gender perspectives in human resources policy: affirmative action in recruitment, gender balance, work/life measures, harassment policy, value and visibility of interdisciplinary skills in vacancy announcements and promotions
- regular gender “audits” including baseline data and monitoring

**G. Gender units.** To promote gender equality, funds and competent staff are required. Corporate gender units are necessary. Regarding the level, resources and institutional placement of the gender units, the key objective is maximum and timely access to key corporate strategic processes and high-level management. There must be a critical mass of staff resources/gender specialists kept together and then ideally additional fulltime specialists in other units and decentralized offices. There should be allocation of adequate resources and a match of expectations and resources expressed in clear terms of reference of catalytic functions of the gender unit.

**H. Capacity-building.** Capacity-building for gender mainstreaming is still needed in international organisations. A corporate capacity-building plan should be elaborated and

be the responsibility of the staff training and capacity-building unit. The sustainability of efforts and investments is crucial, particularly in times of high staff turn-over. It is important that policy informs practice as practice should influence policy. Capacity-building should be tailor-made and demand-driven for various audiences: orientation for newcomers, gender modules in other courses (e.g. project cycle), gender sensitivity training, gender analysis training etc. Examples of successful practice are very useful and more cases should be presented. But lessons learned cannot only be general, some must be context-related.

**I. Networks.** Networks and alliances are important within the organisation and outside. Internally, ownership should be shared with both women and men, and between Headquarters and the field. Externally collaboration should be established with governments, civil society and other UN organisations. Links should be established and support provided for women's organisations and groups, keeping in mind the character of the different groups and organisations. It is also important to collaborate with business and professional organizations, employers and trade unions, social and cultural associations, youth clubs etc.

**J. Involvement of men.** The involvement of men is important to promote gender equality: more male staff in gender specialist posts, more male gender focal points in other units and more male trainees/facilitators for gender capacity-building courses. Training curriculum should be "packaged" with a results-oriented focus to appeal to managers. It is important to break stereotypes. HIV/AIDS might be a good entry-point for talking with men about "masculinity", gender-based violence, trafficking etc. Contacts should be established with male government and NGO representatives and they should be encouraged to participate in advocacy events and discussions.

**K. Accountability.** To monitor progress it is important to define different roles and responsibilities for staff members at different levels of accountability. Existing accountability mechanisms need to be catalogued or mapped by level: leadership (executive head), management (ADGs/Directors), gender advisers in units, corporate gender units, country representatives. The role and accountability should also be mapped for non-programme/non-technical units such as evaluation/audit offices, programme budget offices and human resources offices. Core competencies needed for fulfilling various responsibilities need to be identified. Special attention should be given to the development of results frameworks and systematic measurement of results. Even if planned results are not achieved, efforts undertaken to meet gender commitments should be acknowledged.

**L. Mottos:**

"Whatever works, do it" (don't be hung up in dogmatic approaches or language)

"Be persistent (things are never fast and easy), passionate (both competence and involvement are needed) and keep a sense of humour (there are many perspectives and ways of thinking)"

"Don't compromise your dignity" (there are limits to what a gender focal point can or should do)

"Damned if you do, damned if you don't" (there are rarely simple solutions)

"Don't reinvent the wheel, there are so many wheels" (learn from the experiences of others)

"The more you advance, the more remains to be done" (new opportunities entail new challenges)