

# **Overview of the work of the Inter-Agency Taskforce on Gender Mainstreaming in the Programme Budget Process**

**Statement to the workshop:  
Meeting the Challenge of Gender Mainstreaming in the Programme Budget Process  
ILO Geneva, 22-23 November 2001<sup>1</sup>**

**Presented by  
Carolyn Hannan, Principal Officer for Gender Mainstreaming  
Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women**

Madame Chairperson  
Colleagues

I am pleased to have this opportunity to present information on the work of the Inter-Agency Taskforce on Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Budget Processes which was established by the ACC Inter-Agency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality in February 1998.

I would like to begin by forwarding a strong message of support from Ms. Angela King, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, who was not able to attend the workshop. Ms. King is also the Chairperson of the Inter-agency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality, to which the taskforce reports. Ms King congratulates ILO for the initiative to organize and host this workshop and wishes the participants successful discussions.

In my presentation I will provide a brief introduction to the Inter-agency Taskforce on Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Budget Processes before moving on to discuss the gender mainstreaming strategy and the intergovernmental mandates for the gender mainstreaming in programme budgets and finally outlining the work of the inter-agency taskforce. Two consultants to the taskforce, Mr. Tony Beck and Ms. Isabella Bakker, will then talk in more detail about the findings of the two projects commissioned by the taskforce.

## **The Inter-agency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality and its Taskforce on Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Budget Processes**

The Inter-Agency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality (comprised of representatives of all United Nations entities) has been charged with ensuring greater coordination, collaboration and exchange on gender equality throughout the United Nations system. An important part of this work is the development of common approaches, methodologies and instruments for gender mainstreaming. Much of the work of the Interagency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality is carried out by taskforces, which have specific, time-

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<sup>1</sup> Organized by the Inter-Agency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality and ILO

limited mandates. These taskforces report to, and have their mandates endorsed by, the Inter-agency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality on an annual basis.

The Taskforce on Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Budget Processes<sup>2</sup> was established in February 1998, as a direct response to both the ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2 and the increased recognition that gender perspectives are relevant and important in budgetary processes. It aims to assess the implementation of gender mainstreaming in programme budget processes throughout the United Nations system and to support the development of concrete methodologies for incorporating gender perspectives in programme budgets, including through identifying good practice examples.

Long-term anticipated outcomes include the more adequate reflection of gender perspectives in planning and budgeting processes throughout the United Nations; greater attention and resources allocated to gender perspectives in the substantive work programmes; and increased potential for assessing the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the work of the United Nations.

### **The gender mainstreaming strategy**

The 189 countries attending the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 endorsed gender mainstreaming as a key strategy for promoting equality between women and men.<sup>3</sup> Governments and the United Nations made commitments in the Platform for Action to consider the realities of women and men and the potential impact of planned activities on women respective men, before any decisions on goals, strategies, actions and resource allocations are made. The United Nations and other international organizations were called upon to implement the strategy in their own work and to support the efforts of Member Countries.

In 1997 the Economic and Social Council provided concrete guidelines on how the United Nations should work to incorporate gender perspectives in its work programmes (ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2). The importance of the gender mainstreaming strategy was reinforced in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to follow-up the implementation of the Platform for Action (June 2000). Other intergovernmental bodies and events have also provided important mandates for gender mainstreaming in specific areas of work of the United Nations.

Gender mainstreaming developed because the strong focus on the advancement of women and gender equality within the United Nations over the past three decades led to increased international recognition that there are important gender perspectives in relation the overall goals of the United Nations, such as poverty eradication, human rights, good

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<sup>2</sup> The taskforce includes representatives of UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP, World Food Programme and the Division for the Advancement of Women. The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women acts as the Task Manager.

<sup>3</sup> Gender mainstreaming is one strategy; targeted activities for gender equality is another complementary strategy.

governance, environmentally sustainable development and peace and security, as well as in all other areas of the work of the United Nations. These perspectives must be taken into account in data collection, analysis, policy making and planning, to ensure the achievement of gender equality, effective and sustainable development and peace and security.

Gender mainstreaming<sup>4</sup> thus involves bringing the contributions, perspectives, priorities and needs of both women and men to the centre of attention in all areas of societal development and allowing these to inform the design, implementation and outcomes of policies and programmes. Implementing the mainstreaming strategy within the United Nations system itself, and supporting the implementation of the strategy by Member States, is one of the most important means for the United Nations to further the advancement of women and promote gender equality at national, regional and international levels.

Concerted efforts have been made throughout the United Nations to develop the capacity to identify and address relevant gender perspectives in all areas of work, at both normative/policy and operational/programme level. Many organizations have established institutional arrangements to support gender mainstreaming, such as gender units and gender focal point systems, and capacity building initiatives are undertaken across the system. Gender perspectives are being incorporated into procedures and processes, such as planning, budgeting and reporting processes, and guidelines and other materials to support staff are being developed to ensure gender perspectives are taken into consideration in data collection and research, analysis, support to legislative change, policy development and monitoring and evaluation.

Much remains, however, to be done before gender mainstreaming is consistently implemented across the United Nations system. A major continuing constraint is the lack of clarity on what gender mainstreaming entails, particularly in relation to the concrete implications of the strategy in different areas of development. I would just like to mention one related problem here – the equating of gender mainstreaming with gender balance within the United Nations. Gender mainstreaming concerns identifying and addressing gender perspectives in the substantive work programme of the United Nations, while gender balance is concerned with ensuring balance between women and men in all categories of staffing, at all levels. While these two areas of work are clearly interrelated – being two elements of the overall efforts of the United Nations to promote gender equality –

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<sup>4</sup> An authoritative definition of gender mainstreaming has been provided in the ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2:

*"Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality."*

they are quite separate in practice. Gender mainstreaming in programme budget processes has nothing to do with the number of women and/or men in budget departments, as programme staff or as gender focal points. It has to do with integrating relevant gender perspectives into work programmes through incorporation in objectives, expected accomplishments, indicators and activities.

### **Gender mainstreaming in programme budgets**

Over recent years there has been an increased awareness of the importance of resource allocations and budgets for gender equality. In a growing number of countries gender perspectives are being incorporated into national budget processes. This work includes analysing existing budgets from gender perspectives and assessing the correlation of resource allocations with policy commitments; training individuals and groups in civil society, including women's groups, on analysis of budgets and lobbying techniques to influence budget processes at different levels; and working to incorporate gender perspectives in the formulation of budgets.

The preparations for the International Conference on Financing for Development (Monterrey, Mexico in 2002) has identified the incorporation of gender perspectives in national budgets as an important element in financing for development. In addition, a recent conference organized by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the OECD, the Commonwealth Secretariat, IDRC and UNIFEM in Brussels in October 2001, called for the integration of gender perspectives in national budgets by 2015.

Throughout the United Nations system there has been a growing realization of the importance of influencing the goals, resource allocations, activities and outcomes in the work programmes from a gender perspective. It has become increasingly evident that greater focus is required on Medium-Term Plans, Programme Budgets and Performance Assessments if gender mainstreaming is to be successful. The rationale for gender mainstreaming in programme budget processes is to increase gender equality as well as achievement of effective development in other sector areas.

This work in the United Nations is facilitated by strong intergovernmental mandates on incorporating gender perspectives in programme budgets. The Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly have emphasized the importance of gender mainstreaming in budget processes. For example, the General Assembly Resolution of December 1997:

*"Requests all bodies that deal with programme and budgetary matters, including the Committee for Programme and Coordination, to ensure that all programmes, medium-term plans and programme budgets visibly mainstream a gender perspective."* (A/Res/52/100, para 11)

More recently, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 explicitly called for attention to the goal of gender equality in budgetary processes at national, regional and international levels (A/S-23/10/Rev.1, para

65).<sup>5</sup>

A key element in these intergovernmental mandates is the request that attention to gender perspectives be **visible**. Gender mainstreaming in programme budget processes should bring gender perspectives explicitly to the fore, to the centre of decision-making processes.

### **The efforts of the taskforce to bring greater attention to gender perspectives in programme budgets**

The work of the Inter-agency Taskforce on Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Budget Processes draws on the experience with national budgets but attempts to move beyond analysis of existing budgets in terms of impacts on women and men and assessing coherence with policy goals, to the development of approaches and methodologies to influence the formulation of programme budgets. The focus of the work is on budget narratives as well as budget codes and also encompasses the directives on gender mainstreaming in budget manuals and budget instructions.

During 1998-1999 the taskforce carried out an initial assessment of the efforts of all parts of the United Nations system to bring gender perspectives to the centre of attention in programme budget processes, established dialogue with the United Nations Planning and Budget Division in the Secretariat and began a study of the efforts made to give attention to gender perspectives in the changes being undertaken in the budget processes within UNICEF.

A project on "Mainstreaming Gender Equality into Budget Processes within the United Nations System" was carried out between December 1999 and June 2000.<sup>6</sup> Phase One of the project consisted of an inventory of efforts made by organizations outside the United Nations to incorporate gender perspectives in internal budget processes, in order to build on existing experience. The findings from this phase revealed that little had been done apart from the work on national budgets. Phase Two involved an overview of the efforts made within the United Nations itself, based on a study of documentation, a written questionnaire and follow-up telephone/personal interviews. This phase involved 53 United Nations entities. The nature of the process in this phase meant that the findings were at a rather general level. While the overview revealed that much more needed to be done to bring gender perspectives into programme budget processes, some good practice examples could be identified in a number of entities. Phase Three deepened the level of analysis through case studies in five United Nations entities, DPA, ESCAP, ILO, UNFPA and WHO.

Building on the lessons learned from the first project, the inter-agency taskforce

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<sup>5</sup> Other clear mandates are found in the ECOSOC Resolution, July 1998 (E/Res/1998/26, para 13); ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions July 1997 (1997/2, pps. 29 and 31); and the letter of the Secretary-General to heads of all United Nations entities in October 1997

<sup>6</sup> The project was carried out for the taskforce by consultants: Tony Beck (team leader), Isabella Bakker, Alicia Mondesire and John Mathiason.

carried out a second project involving case studies in five additional entities – ESCWA, FAO, OCHA, UNICEF and UNCTAD – between January and June 2001.<sup>7</sup>

I will not spend a lot of time talking about the findings of these projects as this will be covered by the consultants. However I would like to emphasize one point, the value of the process involved, i.e. assessing progress in gender mainstreaming through a consultative process involving all actors – budget staff, programme staff and gender focal points. Members of the Inter-agency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality, whose organizations had been involved in the case studies, have emphasized the importance of the process as much as the findings contained in the reports prepared for each participating entity. Of particular importance was the encouragement of dialogue between programme staff, budget staff and gender focal points.

### **Future directions**

Although the initial intention of the inter-agency taskforce was to follow the case studies with the development of generic guidelines for programme budgets and budget coding systems, the findings of the projects, particularly in highlighting the diversity of programme budget processes in the United Nations system, have pointed to the difficulty of developing generic guidelines for the entire United Nations system. The findings also pointed to the need for further in-depth case studies, both because of the need to better understanding the diversity in programme budget processes in the United Nations system, as well as to capitalize on the process value of the case studies.

A third project will therefore be undertaken in 2002 which will focus on an additional five entities.<sup>8</sup> On the completion of this project an overall report will be prepared for submission to the ACC Inter-agency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality and further to the ACC High-Level Committee on Programmes. A workshop will be organized in New York in late 2002 for budget staff, programme managers and gender specialists in each of the 15 entities involved in the case studies, to disseminate the main findings and further elaborate strategies for bringing greater attention to gender perspectives in programme budget processes.

Not all work on promoting greater attention to gender perspectives in programme budget processes can or should be done in the context of the inter-agency taskforce. It is important to consider the ways and means for furthering work in this area within individual entities, and for feeding the learnings from these efforts back into the inter-agency process. The utilization of the impetus created by the taskforce by individual members of the committee in their own organizations needs to be given further consideration.

The taskforce on programme budget processes, like all other such interagency taskforces, has the objective to stimulate further development in critical areas without

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<sup>7</sup> This project was carried out by two consultants, Tony Beck and Isabella Bakker.

<sup>8</sup> To date, ITU and UNDP have indicated interest in participating in this project.

taking over responsibility for this work. The taskforce therefore does not take upon itself organization of training workshops but rather recommends that budget offices or offices of human resource development should do this. The taskforce can facilitate gender mainstreaming by pointing to constraints and potentials and offering advice on how these might be overcome or built on, within the normal structures and processes. One important contribution the taskforce could make would be to document and disseminate good practice, to create greater understanding of what gender mainstreaming in programme budgets entails in practical terms.

### **This workshop**

This workshop for Europe-based United Nations entities, organized by ILO, is a very good example of the kind of spin-offs that the work of the taskforce should generate. Experience has shown that provision of opportunities for exchange of ideas, experiences and good practice on gender mainstreaming is a fruitful means of increasing awareness, commitment and capacity to implement the strategy. The discussions held here to meet the objectives set out for the workshop, i.e.:

- to analyse the ways in which entities have worked to incorporate gender perspectives in their programme budgets processes;
- to establish consensus on key constraints to progress on gender mainstreaming within programme budget processes; and
- to work on practical methods for overcoming these constraints.

will make a key contribution to ensuring that gender perspectives are incorporated into programme budgets in the future.

I would therefore like to thank ILO once again for taking the initiative to organize this workshop and hope for very concrete and useful outcomes, based on the wealth of practical knowledge and experience the participants will bring to the discussions.

Thank you.