

The policy context for gender mainstreaming in the United Nations

Presentation to the UNCHS Habitat workshop on
UNCHS Habitat's Gender Policy Revision

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Introduction

I would like to firstly express appreciation to the UNCHS Habitat, on behalf of the Special Adviser to the Secretary General on gender equality, Ms Angela E.V. King, for the opportunity to share some of the experiences of the United Nations in gender mainstreaming at this workshop. I would also like to congratulate UNCHS for its commitment to gender mainstreaming, illustrated through the gender policy revision being undertaken, and to commend in particular the emphasis on stakeholder involvement in the process, which this workshop clearly exemplifies.

The gender mainstreaming strategy

The focus on the advancement of women and gender equality within the United Nations over the past three decades has led to an increased international recognition that there are important gender perspectives in relation to the overall goals of the United Nations, such as poverty eradication, human rights, good governance, environmentally sustainable development, and to all areas of the work of the United Nations. These perspectives must be taken into account in policy making and planning, to ensure the achievement of both gender equality and sustainable people-centred development. The 189 countries attending the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 endorsed gender mainstreaming as a strategy for promoting equality between women and men. Governments and the United Nations made commitments to consider the realities of women and men and the potential impact of planned activities on women and men, before any decisions were taken, actions planned or resources allocated. 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 throughout the world.

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy, an approach, a process, a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. The ultimate goal is equality between women and men. As a strategy gender mainstreaming entails bringing gender perspectives to the centre of attention in all areas of societal development (economic and political as well as social)

and in all types of activities. This involves identifying and addressing relevant gender perspectives in data collection and research, analysis, legislation, policy development, development of projects and programmes as well as in training and other institutional development activities. Mainstreaming can reveal a need for changes in goals, strategies and activities to ensure that both women and men can influence, participate in and benefit from development processes. It can require changes in organizations – structures, procedures and organizational cultures – to create organizational environments which are conducive to the promotion of gender equality.

The strategy of mainstreaming is defined in the ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions, 1997/2, as “...*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.*”

Gender mainstreaming means bringing in the perceptions, knowledge, contributions, priorities and needs of both women and men to enrich development. Identifying and addressing gender perspectives is important from a human rights and social justice perspective; it is equally important for ensuring sustainable people-centred development in all areas and for ensuring that other social and economic goals are attained. Sustainable and effective development can only be achieved in any area of societal activity, including economic development, if the interests and needs of all groups in society – including both women and men - are taken into account and the potential of all groups is released. The role of the mainstreaming strategy in promoting and facilitating the full contributions of both women and men to social and economic development has been clearly identified (including in the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women between 1996 and 1999). Gender mainstreaming involves, however, much more than increasing women's participation; it involves identifying and addressing the gender perspectives – the linkages between gender and different sector areas - in the work of an organization. The limitations of approaches which ignore gender perspectives have become increasingly clear.

A strong intergovernmental mandate for gender mainstreaming

The gender mainstreaming strategy was strongly endorsed in the Platform for Action in Beijing in 1995. The Platform for Action clearly states that before any decision is taken in any area of societal development, an assessment should be made of the situation of women and men (which includes the contributions made by both women and men as well as any specific needs and problems faced) and the potential impact of the planned activities on women respective men. The importance of gender mainstreaming is specifically mentioned in relation to all twelve of the Critical Areas of Concern identified in the Platform for Action. Gender analysis was established as a critical instrument for

gender mainstreaming, through identifying the relevant important gender perspectives to be addressed. The analysis required should, however, be carried out before any actions are taken or planned – before policies and strategies are developed, activities planned and resources allocated. Gender perspectives must be incorporated as an integral part of all activities and not inserted as an after-thought. This is one of the key differences between gender mainstreaming and earlier strategies for promoting gender equality, where attention to gender perspectives usually came in far too late.

The gender mainstreaming mandate was reinforced within the United Nations system in a number of important documents, the ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2 which provided some basic overall principles for gender mainstreaming; the Secretary-General's communication on gender mainstreaming on 13 October 1997 which provided more concrete directives to heads of all United Nations entities; and the outcome document from the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The following aspects are emphasized:

- *Responsibility* for implementing the mainstreaming strategy is *system wide*, and rests at the *highest levels* within agencies, departments, funds, and commissions; and adequate *accountability mechanisms* for monitoring progress need to be established.
- *Specific strategies* should be formulated for gender mainstreaming; *priorities* should be established.
- The initial *definitions of issues/problems* across all areas of activity should be done in such a manner that gender differences and disparities can be diagnosed – assumptions that issues/problems are neutral from a gender equality perspective should never be made. Gender analysis should always be carried out, separately or as part of existing analyses.
- *Analytical reports and recommendations* on policy or operational issues within each area of responsibility should take gender differences and disparities fully into account.
- *Medium-term plans and programme budgets* should be prepared in such a manner that gender perspectives and gender equality issues are explicit.
- Gender mainstreaming requires that efforts are made to broaden women's *equitable participation at all levels of decision-making*, including in peace processes.
- Systematic use of *gender analysis, sex-disaggregation* of data, and commissioning of *sector-specific gender studies* is required.
- *Training* should be provided to all personnel at headquarters and in the field, with appropriate follow-up.
- Mainstreaming *does not replace the need for targeted, women-specific activities*; nor does it do away with the need for *gender units or focal points*.

- Clear *political will and allocation of adequate resources* for mainstreaming, including if necessary additional financial and human resources (gender units or focal points), are important for translation of the concept into reality.

More recently, the Commission on the Status of Women resolution (E/CN.6/2000/1.6 rev 1) reaffirmed that gender mainstreaming constitutes a critical strategy in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and for achieving the overall goal of gender equality. It calls on EOCSOC to consider establishing the monitoring of gender mainstreaming in the United Nations system as a regular item on its agenda and to devote an entire segment by 2005 to the review and appraisal of the system-wide implementation of the agreed conclusions 1997/2, requesting the functional commissions as part of this review to report on progress made to implement the agreed conclusions in their work.

Apart from these more generic intergovernmental mandates which apply to all parts of the United Nations, there are also very specific mandates on the need to incorporate gender perspectives in the different areas of the work of the United Nations. Specific mandates exist, for example, for the work on population, statistics, human rights, governance, poverty reduction, crime and drugs, peace support operations, as well as on the area of work of UNCHS Habitat. A good example of a very strong specific mandate is the Security Council resolution 1325 (October 2000) which highlights the importance of incorporating gender perspectives in all areas of peace support operations and calls for specific actions in relation to peace negotiations, conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance, human rights activities, and peacekeeping operations. It calls for greater representation of women in all peace support operations and the development of training and guidelines for personnel working in these areas.

Implementing gender mainstreaming in the United Nations system

Throughout the United Nations system efforts are being made to implement the mainstreaming strategy, to develop the capacity to identify and address relevant gender perspectives in all areas of work, at both policy and programme level. Policies and action plans on gender equality have been developed in many United Nations entities. Many entities have also 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 is taken into consideration in data collection and research, analysis, support to legislative change, policy development and monitoring and evaluation.

Entities in the United Nations system support Governments to develop gender-sensitive policies and strategies and to take gender perspectives into consideration in planning, implementing and monitoring development interventions in health, education,

poverty eradication, agriculture, water resources management and all other areas of collaboration. Considerable support is given to capacity development. Non-governmental organizations and women's groups and networks in civil society are also supported to play critical advocacy roles in relation to gender mainstreaming and to monitor the adherence to all commitments made by Governments. Efforts are also being taken to involve more men in promoting gender equality through gender mainstreaming.

The ACC Interagency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality, which brings together the Gender Focal Points from all entities in the United Nations system, has proven to be a particularly useful fora for exchange and collaboration on gender mainstreaming. Through a system of ad hoc taskforces, the Meeting has contributed to the development of methodologies for gender mainstreaming and exchange of good practice examples. The Meeting also provides an opportunity for assessing the implementation of gender mainstreaming across the system.

The importance of policies and action plans

Experience within the United Nations, in other international organizations - including bilateral development cooperation agencies and non-governmental organizations, as well as in Member States, has shown clearly that the existence of a clear policy and action plan (strategy) for gender equality facilitates attention to gender perspectives in the policy and operational level work of organizations. Work being undertaken within the United Nations on mainstreaming gender perspectives into programme budget processes has clearly illustrated that the more explicit the commitment of the organization to gender equality, the greater the potential for including gender perspectives in Medium-term Plans and Programme Budgets. The development of specific gender equality policies and action plans indicates the commitment of top management within an organization. Policies and action plans on gender equality, which explicitly outline the importance of gender perspectives for the work of organizations, highlight goals, give clear guidance and establish measures of good performance, provide critical impetus for professional staff to take on responsibility for incorporating gender perspectives in their day-to-day work.

A policy on gender equality should present the *goal of gender equality* in the context of the overall goals of the organization, clearly outlining the linkages between gender perspectives and the work of the organization and the implications for policy and programme development. It should define underlying *concepts*; present the intergovernmental *mandates*; provide a *rationale* for focusing on gender equality; identify the basic starting points or *principles* for incorporating gender perspectives; and identify *priorities* for the organization. The *approach and methodology* to be utilized in promoting gender equality as an integral part of the work of the organization should be concisely presented. The *roles, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms* should be briefly outlined, as well as the *institutional arrangements*, including gender specialist resources and capacity building approaches.

The concise “road-map” for gender equality provided in a policy document would then need to be further developed in an action plan which outlines in more detail the approach, methodology, concrete activities and institutional arrangements. An action plan should establish *clear measureable goals* for all areas of activity and develop impact *indicators* for monitoring and evaluation.

It is important that care is taken not to develop specific gender equality policies and action plans with “a separate life” within an organization and no relation to other important policies and strategies in the organization. The interrelationships between gender equality goals and other overall goals and cross-cutting issues need to be elaborated and addressed at both policy and programme levels. A good practice example can be seen in the work of FAO where the development of the Gender and Development Programme of Action was clearly linked to the Medium-term Plan. An important element in achieving the integration of a gender equality policy and/or action plan within an organization is the endorsement process by top management. The endorsement process should give adequate attention to the issue of competencies required and how these can best be acquired, as well as what institutional development will be needed to ensure successful implementation, particularly related to roles, responsibilities and accountability. The issue of resources has also to be directly addressed in the endorsement process. Some organizations have utilized gender taskforces or advisory groups which have been particularly effective when they involve senior management. Equally critical is the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation process, including measurable indicators, which actively involves top management.

In some organizations, the decision has been taken not to develop a separate specific policy and action plan on gender equality. Instead efforts are made to incorporate gender perspectives into existing overall policies and strategies, linking gender equality clearly to sector goals. This approach is very positive but more difficult to achieve, since most overall sectoral policies and strategies do not allow for elaboration of concepts, rationales, approaches, methodologies, roles and responsibilities, competence requirements relating to the promotion of gender equality, which are required to support staff. Where such an integrative approach is adopted, it is often necessary to develop complementary support instruments, such as guidance notes on concepts, gender mainstreaming methodologies, institutional development etc, to establish the necessary enabling environment for the successful implementation of the policy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to come back to a point raised earlier in the presentation and emphasize its importance. That is, that the gender mainstreaming strategy does not replace the need for targeted activities to promote gender equality. Mainstreaming and targeted activities are complementary strategies. Both strategies are critical for achievement of gender equality. A gender equality policy should incorporate targeted activities as well as gender mainstreaming. Nor does the mainstreaming strategy imply that gender specialist resources are no longer needed. As professional staff in

organizations strive to identify and address gender perspectives in their work they often need more support rather than less, at least in the initial stages. Gender specialists should play strategic catalytic roles – promoting, facilitating and supporting gender mainstreaming. The existence of a gender equality policy and action plan provides an invaluable support to the work of gender specialists.

A strong, continued commitment to gender mainstreaming remains one of the most effective means for the United Nations to support real change in relation to the promotion of gender equality at all levels - in research, legislation, policy development and in activities on the ground, and to ensure that women as well as men can influence, participate in and benefit from development efforts. Efforts will continue within the United Nations to ensure that there is explicit commitment to the goal of gender equality, through separate policies and action plans, or as an integral part of existing policies and strategies.

I wish UNCHS Habitat every success in the review process and in the development of a new policy and action plan on gender equality. This will most certainly provide an additional good practice example for the United Nations system.

Thank you.