

Gender mainstreaming: Some experience from the United Nations
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I would like to begin by thanking the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for inviting me to this conference and congratulating them on organizing this conference and developing an excellent policy and tool kit on gender equality. I would like to contribute by sharing some of the experiences of the United Nations in gender mainstreaming.

Introduction

Gender mainstreaming was endorsed as a major strategy for the promotion of gender equality by Member States of the United Nations in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. The authoritative definition of gender mainstreaming was provided by the Economic and Social Council in 1997:

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. (ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2).

Gender mainstreaming was established as a strategy for promoting the achievement of gender equality because of the failure of previous strategies. Lessons learned from implementation of special projects and activities for women in the 1970s and 1980s indicated that, while such projects remain essential, by themselves they cannot bring about the required changes to the status of women. Activities focused on women tended to be marginalized and women's access to resources and power remained minimal. Awareness of these constraints led to the integration strategy which attempted to address the issue of marginalization by incorporating "women's perspectives" into policy development and project design and implementation. However women's perspectives were still seen as "add-ons" and usually incorporated at later stages of

planning processes when all major decisions had been taken and little real impact could be achieved. Efforts to redress these failings led, in turn, to the gender mainstreaming strategy. Gender mainstreaming was based on the need to move beyond trying to unquestioningly integrate women into the existing development agenda to transforming the agenda so that it more adequately responded to the realities and needs of both women and men.

The term 'mainstreaming' thus came from the objective to bring attention to gender equality into the mainstream or core of development activities. A number of important elements in the mainstreaming strategy can be identified. One is the necessity to give attention to gender equality from the **initial** stages of processes so that there is potential to influence goals, strategies and resource allocations and thus bring about changes in policies, programmes and other activities and make a real difference to gender equality. Secondly, the Platform for Action (Beijing 1995) made it very clear that **gender analysis** is the first essential step in the mainstreaming strategy. Before any decisions are taken in any area of societal development an analysis should be made of the current responsibilities and contributions of women and men and the potential impact of planned processes and activities on women and men respectively. Third, it is important to note that gender mainstreaming requires a focus on both **women and men**. It is not possible to adequately implement gender mainstreaming by focusing exclusively on women. A fourth critical factor is that gender mainstreaming requires **explicit** attention to gender perspectives. Gender mainstreaming can never make gender perspectives invisible; on the contrary this strategy should make them very visible and show that links between gender perspectives and achievement of the overall goals of the policy or programme. If gender perspectives are not visible, it is not gender mainstreaming. Fourthly, gender mainstreaming is not about adding a women's component to existing programmes, and it involves much more than increasing the numbers of women participating. It should **situate gender equality issues at the centre** of policy decisions and resource allocations. Finally, building on these factors, gender mainstreaming should involve a **transformative** process, which means that incorporation of gender perspectives would identify the need for changes in goals, policies, strategies and actions, as well as institutional changes – changes in structures, procedures and cultures. Once the perspectives of all stakeholders are fully incorporated through gender mainstreaming processes, it is rarely possible to do “business as usual”.

While gender mainstreaming is recognized as a critical strategy for gender equality, at the same time it is acknowledged that gender mainstreaming does not eliminate the need for targeted activities to promote the advancement of women and gender equality. Such activities are still required to address serious gender gaps; to support women's empowerment and develop women's leadership capacities; and to test new ideas and approaches. Gender mainstreaming does not do away with the need for gender specialists or experts.

What gender mainstreaming involves

The ECOSOC agreed conclusions (1997/2) provide considerable clarity on what needs to be done to implement gender mainstreaming. Guidance is provided on institutional aspects as well as operational or programmatic.

At operational and programmatic level the following commitments are made: *Specific strategies* should be formulated for gender mainstreaming; and *priorities* should be established.

Long and medium-term plans and budgets should be prepared in such a manner that gender perspectives and gender equality issues are explicit.

The initial *definitions of issues/problems* across all areas of activity should be done in such a manner that gender differences and lowing coc3gional or programmatic.

events, as well as in planning, implementing and monitoring projects and programmes.

Thirdly an *approach or methodology* has to be identified for successfully incorporating gender perspectives into these work-tasks in a manner which facilitates influencing goals, strategies, resource allocation and concrete outcomes. Different worktasks require different approaches and methodologies. *Institutional development*, in terms of developing guidelines, utilizing gender specialists, providing competence development for all personnel, is also required to support gender mainstreaming.

Implementation within the United Nations

There have been many achievements since consistent efforts to implement gender mainstreaming began in 1995 but huge gaps in implementation remain. It is important to be able to both identify and highlight the gains made as well as the obstacles and challenges remaining.

In recent years, a more positive policy environment for gender mainstreaming has developed. The greater recognition of the importance of social dimensions of development has resulted in increased attention to aspects such as community participation and ownership. This has facilitated a stronger focus on specific groups, including both women and men. The emergence of a more holistic framework for poverty eradication and sustainable development, with a strong focus on the empowerment of all stakeholders, also provides opportunities for greater responsiveness to the integration of gender perspectives. Much more needs to be done, however, to address the links between social and economic development.

Progress in implementation within the United Nations involves a focus on efforts of Member States at the intergovernmental level as well as the efforts within United Nations entities themselves. Some brief examples of progress at both these levels will be provided.

Intergovernmental level

Considerable progress has been made at intergovernmental level. There are today very clear mandates on gender mainstreaming, including general overall mandates as well as very specific mandates for different areas, such as water, energy, entrepreneurship and budgets. Commitments made at global level by Governments on integrating gender perspectives into different policy areas have supported the gender mainstreaming efforts at national and local levels. This is not to say, however, that these commitments, in and of themselves, ensure change. A lot of follow-up and hard work is required to ensure implementation. More effective methods and mechanisms for holding Governments accountable to these commitments need to be developed.

The Commission on the Status of Women is the principle policy-making body on gender equality at global level and gender mainstreaming is a standing item on the

agenda of the Commission. An annual report of the Secretary-General provides information on efforts made within the United Nations system, and a resolution on gender mainstreaming is adopted by the Commission. Member States increasingly share experience and good practice on gender mainstreaming in their national statements to the Commission. Gender mainstreaming is a strong focus in the two themes that the Commission addresses annually, in the Secretary-General's reports on these themes, the panels of experts to discuss experiences in implementation and good practice examples, and in the high-level roundtable on institutional mechanisms which was introduced for the first time in 2003, as well as in the agreed conclusions (recommendations) adopted by the Commission. The Commission increasingly emphasizes the need for a stronger focus on implementation of the norms and recommendations adopted, including on gender mainstreaming.

In the past, the Commission on the Status of Women was the only intergovernmental body which systematically took up gender perspectives. Thanks to gender mainstreaming, other bodies, such as the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions and some committees of the General Assembly regularly give attention to gender equality issues. The Security Council has in recent years also brought gender perspectives into discussions of peace and security.

An annual report of the Secretary-General on gender mainstreaming in the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) – for example, the Population Commission, the Commission on Social Development, the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Statistical Commission – is presented to the ECOSOC.

process. Some progress was certainly made in the International Conference on Financing for Development, even if not all the gains hoped for were achieved. For some of the participants in the preparation for the conference – particularly those from Ministries of Finance - it was probably the first time ever to consider gender perspectives in trade, debt, and national resource allocation. It is important to build on the awareness raised and the actions agreed upon. A key challenge is to ensure integration of gender perspectives in all follow-up and implementation processes in relation to these conferences, summits and special sessions.

In resolution 56/133 the General Assembly pointed out the importance of incorporating gender perspectives into follow-up of the Millennium Declaration. The Millennium Development Goals, arising from the Millennium Declaration, provide the framework around which the United Nations now organizes its work.

One of the areas where clarification of gender perspectives has led to substantial progress is the field of human rights. The work of the human rights treaty bodies, thematic and country rapporteurs, as well as the resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights, is increasingly informed by gender analysis. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women monitors the implementation of gender mainstreaming. States Parties refer to progress in gender mainstreaming in their reports to the Committee; gender mainstreaming is raised in the constructive dialogue; and the Committee highlights the strategy as relevant in the Concluding Comments prepared.

Some progress has been made in areas where previously little attention was given to gender perspectives. For example, in the area of peace and security, Security Council resolution 1325 has opened new possibilities for addressing critical gender perspectives. The resolution makes very concrete suggestions for actions to be taken. Among other things, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to prepare a study on women, peace and security and to present a report to the Council in October 2002. Discussions in the Security Council, based on the Secretary-General's report, concluded that not enough has been done since the adoption of the resolution to give attention to gender perspectives within the United Nations and by Member States. A Presidential Statement on women, peace and security, adopted by the Council on 31 October 2002, highlights what further needs to be done to move positions forward. The Security Council has consulted with women's groups in some of its missions and met with representatives of women's groups in closed meetings in New York on a number of occasions. While much more remains to be done, resolution 1325 has provided a unique opportunity to push for change in the area of peace and security. It is encouraging that this resolution is being broadly utilized in innovative ways by women's groups at grassroots level to move their agendas forward.

An important development in the intergovernmental process is also the development of a strong constituency for gender mainstreaming among Member States. Over the past few years, representatives of around 20 missions have met on a regular basis in New York to discuss how gender perspectives can be more effectively

incorporated into intergovernmental processes, the work of the United Nations system, as well as within their own missions.

Within the United Nations system

Entities of the UN system have increasingly focused on implementation of gender mainstreaming. There has been a strong emphasis on development of policies. These include overall organization policies on gender equality, such as that recently developed in UN HABITAT, World Bank and the World Food Organization, as well as policies on gender equality in relation to specific sectors, such as on decent work in ILO, water resource development in UNDP and agriculture in FAO. Less has been done in terms of ensuring adequate attention to gender perspectives in mainstream sector policies, i.e. in existing policies on water, energy, entrepreneurship, macro-economic development. Experience has shown that policies on gender equality are only effective if implementation strategies or action plans are developed, such as that developed recently in the Department of Disarmament Affairs or under development in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

United Nations entities have continued to work at operational level to ensure that gender perspectives are taken up in data collection, research, analyses and in the planning, implementation and monitoring of projects and programmes. Some examples of these can be found in the kits on gender mainstreaming prepared for the Economic and Social Council in 2002. (http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/gm_facts/).

Considerable work has been done within United Nations entities on institutional development, such as capacity building including training, methodology development, and development of monitoring and accountability mechanisms. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has, for example, developed and delivered a training programme for all its professional staff on gender mainstreaming, with a more hands-on approach, using consultation sessions rather than traditional training methodologies. The ILO has carried out a Gender Audit to ascertain the level of gender awareness and the progress made in bringing attention to gender issues in parts of the organization. WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR and other entities have focused on gender mainstreaming in programme budget processes which led to increased attention to gender perspectives in the most recent budget documents.

Progress has also been made in putting together tools for gender mainstreaming, including guidelines, manuals, and checklists. There is probably some type of manual or guidelines for almost every area of work covered by the United Nations system today. At times, however, these guidance materials are more complicated than is necessary and this can reduce their effectiveness. In the areas of disarmament, sustainable development, social development, and crime prevention and drug control, briefing notes have been prepared by different parts of the United Nations Secretariat. The briefing notes are four pages long and contain three sections. The first section introduces the linkages between gender perspectives and the issue being discussed; the second section provides some ideas on what might need to be done differently as a result of understanding these

linkages; and the third section provides a resource listing with good references, websites, etc., to assist in developing a deeper understanding of how to bring gender perspectives to the centre of attention in relation to the issue/sector under discussion.

Almost all United Nations entities have gender experts or gender focal points (non-specialists who are assigned to spend part of their time on catalysing for and monitoring progress in gender mainstreaming). The mandates, access to decision-making processes, support from high levels and resource allocations of these experts and focal points vary considerably across the United Nations systems. A strong inter-agency network of gender specialists and focal points has been established in the United Nations which brings together representatives of more than 60 United Nations bodies to share experiences and good practice on gender mainstreaming. An annual workshop on gender mainstreaming is organized by the network for its members. Through taskforces organizations come together within the network to promote gender mainstreaming in different areas, such as programme budgets, financing for development, ICTs, trade and water.

Constraints and weaknesses in implementation

Despite the knowledge gained and the efforts made at research, data collection and policy development, gender perspectives are still not seen as an integral routine part of development activities in all areas. The analysis of issues and policy formulation is not always informed by a consideration of gender differences and inequalities, and opportunities for narrowing gender gaps and supporting greater equality between women and men are not yet consistently identified. Gender perspectives are not central to data collection, analyses, budget allocations and planning processes; gender analysis is not utilized systematically and effectively; specific studies carried out on gender issues do not have the full intended impact on policies and programmes. At institutional level, even where policies and strategies on gender equality are put in place, management commitment and political will are often not explicit; resource allocations have not been adequate; responsibilities are not spread evenly throughout organizations; there are no effective accountability mechanisms; and training has not proven to be effective, as it has been implemented to date.

In addition, even where constructive efforts have been made, the process has not always been transformative. Efforts are still very much at the level of “adding on” gender perspectives. In this context, it needs to be stated of course that many organizations are starting from a very low level of knowledge, awareness and capacity. It is impossible to move from zero levels of competence to transformative processes. Gender mainstreaming requires a process of change and there has to be constant monitoring of progress.

Much of what is being called gender mainstreaming today is not, in fact, what was intended with the establishment of the strategy. Inappropriate use of the term gender mainstreaming does much disservice to the strategy and the original intentions. Misuse of the term is often due to misunderstanding of what gender mainstreaming is. In other cases it stems from a lack of ability to effectively implement the strategy. It may, however, also

be an attempt to discredit the strategy or to do away with special focuses on women or use of gender specialists. Gender advocates should more emphatically point out misuse of the concept of gender mainstreaming – especially clarifying that gender mainstreaming requires explicit attention to gender perspectives.

One of the reasons for lack of progress is the limited understanding among personnel in many organizations of the important linkages between gender perspectives and different sector areas. The knowledge produced through research on gender perspectives in different sectors and issues is not being disseminated and utilized as effectively as necessary. If the linkages between gender perspectives and all sector areas are made clear, effective action plans can be put in place and real changes made to the

presumable cause of this constraint is a second problem – the failure to recognize the value-added for achievement of all other goals of attention to gender perspectives. More explicit policy links must be made in the critical guiding documents in organizations. Developing a separate gender equality policy is not enough. This in turn linked to the lack of capacity to carry out and effectively utilize gender analyses. Even if the analyses prepared are sound, lack of willingness or capacity to apply them and to recognize and build on the policy and programmatic implications can hinder progress. All of these constraints are in some way linked to the persistent false separation of economic and social development. Gender perspectives and the promotion of gender equality are still too often perceived as purely “social” or “soft” issues, and the critical importance of gender perspectives for macro-economic development is overlooked.

A way forward:

What can be done to meet some of these challenges and deal with the constraints? A

- c) Greater attention has to be given to *monitoring* progress and documenting and disseminating *good practice* examples.
- d) Ways to ensure that *both senior and middle-level management* take on responsibility for, and promote and facilitate, gender mainstreaming need to be developed, and accountability mechanisms put in place to ensure their active involvement.
- e) Gender advocates and specialists must play *more catalytic roles* - not trying to do gender mainstreaming for others but promoting, supporting and monitoring the implementation of the strategy in other departments/divisions.

Gender mainstreaming in a national context

Gender mainstreaming in a national context requires many of the elements already discussed in the context of the United Nations:

Development of an overall policy – with roles and responsibilities and accountabilities of all line ministries clearly outlined, capacities needed for implementation identified, resources allocated and explicit top level commitment and support secured;

Integration of gender perspectives in the policies and strategies of line ministries;

Incorporation of gender perspectives into planning and budget processes;

advocacy, human rights monitoring, service delivery, social movements or monitoring the commitments made by Governments in different areas. Mainstream NGOs do not necessarily take gender perspectives into consideration adequately. Other stakeholders at national level, such as parliamentarians, trade unionists and employer groups, also need to be sensitised to the need for gender mainstreaming to ensure that all policies and programmes at national level are gender-sensitive.

In conclusion

In conclusion, ensuring that both women and men will be able to influence decisions and resource allocations requires going beyond simply increasing the number of women in different positions, to providing real opportunities to both women and men for influencing the agendas, institutions and processes of development in all areas. Values, norms, rules, procedures and practices can effectively restrict women's potential to make real choices, and make efforts to give explicit attention to relevant gender perspectives very difficult. For this reason, institutional development is a critical element in successful gender mainstreaming. The mainstream agenda can only be transformed when the perspectives of both women and men inform the design, implementation and outcomes of policies and programmes. This requires analysing the gender perspectives in each and every area of development and using this analysis as the basis for policy and programme development. Gender mainstreaming also requires attention to effective consultation with and participation of women as well as men in all phases of development activities. In essence, gender mainstreaming is about ensuring that both women and men can influence, participate in, and benefit from all development processes.

Gender mainstreaming is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. And, like any other strategy, it is only as good as it is implemented. Gender mainstreaming will remain a critical strategy for the new Millennium. There is a theways inwhiach itshoulnd bs implemr
process,