

**Issues Paper**  
**ECOSOC Panel discussion on**  
**“Gender Mainstreaming in the United Nations operational activities”**  
**2 July 2004, 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.**  
**ECOSOC Chamber**

**Introduction**

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) endorsed gender mainstreaming as a major strategy for the promotion of gender equality. Two years later, the Economic and Social Council adopted agreed conclusions 1997/2 on “Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system”. In those agreed conclusions, ECOSOC defined gender mainstreaming 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, as 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.

**Gender mainstreaming in operational activities**

Achieving gender equality at the country level, through gender mainstreaming in operational activities, is not only an end in itself but also a prerequisite for effective outcomes of UN system programmes and activities. UNDP’s new Multi-Year Funding Framework (2004-2007), for instance, asserts that the promotion of gender equality is one of five key factors in enhancing effective development. Instruments such as the Common Country Assessment (CCA), United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP), have proven to be vital tools in this effort. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which serve as guideposts for the United Nations development agenda, also have the potential to play a key role in furthering the cause of gender equality.

UN country teams, led by the Resident Coordinators, have provided support to Governments of host countries as they seek to integrate gender perspectives into their policies, programmes, legislation, budgets, and data-collection mechanisms. The country teams have also provided valuable assistance, in part through the Joint Staff Assessments, in ensuring that gender concerns are integrated into the PRSPs. A World Bank desk review (2004) of 18 full PRSPs found that the proportion of PRSPs that included significant analysis of gender inequality rose from 17 percent in 2002 to 33 percent in 2003. Progress has been made in many sectors, including those where major challenges of mainstreaming gender perspectives have been encountered, such as macroeconomics, rural development, energy, transport, information and communication technologies, HIV/AIDS, and peace and security. Gender perspectives have been incorporated into guidelines on technical sectors including physical planning, infrastructure, water and sanitation, environment, and food security.

The CCA and UNDAF processes have provided useful frameworks for incorporating gender perspectives into operational activities. The 1999 CCA guidelines identified gender equality as a cross-cutting issue and highlighted the importance of involving women’s groups in the process. In 2001, the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE)

established a task force on gender mainstreaming in the CCA/UNDAF process to call attention to gender issues in national development and strategic planning. In 2002 and 2003, the revised integrated CCA and UNDAF guidelines further integrated gender perspectives into the CCA/UNDAF exercise, emphasizing the gender component in all areas of United Nations programming, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

A recent survey of United Nations operational activities, undertaken by the inter-agency task force on gender mainstreaming in the CCA/UNDAF process in 2003, reflects an increase in the number of country-level gender theme groups, which promote the importance of achieving gender equality through advocacy, technical support, capacity-building, and community interventions. It is important that all country level theme groups mainstream gender perspectives into their activities.

Likewise, it is critical that gender perspectives are considered in specific strategies developed for achieving all eight MDGs. A recent UNDP study (2003) of national MDG reports in 13 countries found that the reports had substantively dealt with gender issues in relation only to MDG 3, which explicitly calls for gender equality, and, to a lesser extent, MDG 5, which addresses maternal mortality, and MDG 6, on HIV/AIDS. Gender issues were not reflected under Goal 7 (environment) and Goal 8 (development cooperation) in any of the reports. Gender equality must be recognized as a cross-cutting issue if the MDGs are to provide a truly useful set of benchmarks for development.

## **Gaps and Challenges**

The ILO's gender audit programme, an innovative process that evaluates the success of gender mainstreaming at the field level, addresses an ongoing challenge faced by entities across the United Nations system: communication, monitoring, and accountability between the headquarters and field offices. Guidelines developed at headquarters need to be implemented throughout the system in a way that maintains a basic consensus on the importance of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment goals while taking into account the specificity of each country.

Due in part to a lack of capacity, resources, and accountability, much work on gender mainstreaming in operational activities has focused on diagnosis, rather than on concrete action. Assessments of the CCA/UNDAF process, completed in 2002, found that although there had been some achievements in mainstreaming gender perspectives into CCA/UNDAF documents, limited attention had been given to follow-up of gender mainstreaming in country programming. The assessments revealed that the CCA indicators on women's empowerment were not systematically used to assess women's status and establish trend analyses. While women's concerns in education, health, and the microeconomy received ample attention, gender perspectives in finance, taxation, industry, employment, agriculture, water, and environmental issues were not adequately addressed.

Even when resources are made available, programme officers and field staff in many entities lack capacity to effectively mainstream gender perspectives in their daily work. In addition to gender training, it is important to support the documentation and dissemination of lessons learned and good practices.

## **Issues for Consideration**

In most entities, shortcomings in gender mainstreaming were linked to the lack of capacity and accountability as well as to lack of data disaggregated by sex. How can United

Nations entities work to build staff capacity and enhance gender mainstreaming mandates, in all country level theme groups and across the system? What are strategies for closing the gaps between policy and practice? How can country-level offices encourage the involvement of government and non-governmental organizations including local women's groups and networks in the implementation of gender-sensitive operational activities? How can collaboration on gender mainstreaming among United Nations entities be encouraged at the operational level? What data-collection and accountability mechanisms are required to successfully mainstream gender perspectives throughout the United Nations system?