



PREPARING FOR THE 2014 DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FORUM: VIENNA POLICY DIALOGUE

Advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women: *role of development cooperation*

SUMMARY

13-14 December 2012, United Nations Headquarters, Vienna, Austria

UNDESA, in collaboration with UNWOMEN and the Government of Austria, organized this first in a series of multi-stakeholder consultations in preparation for the 2014 United Nations Development Cooperation Forum (DCF).

The key objectives of this policy dialogue were to:

- Discuss how gender equality and the empowerment of women could be firmly placed at the centre of a post 2015 development agenda, based on the experience of the MDG framework and in light of emerging development challenges and a changing development landscape.
- Explore root causes of persistent gender inequalities and identify how international development cooperation can help reinforce efforts to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, including through gender responsive mutual accountability, budgeting and planning.
- Ensure that global agreements on these issues are translated into national actions.
- Ensure meaningful inclusion of women's advocates in national and international policy dialogue and decision-making processes.

The Vienna Policy Dialogue brought together some 80 senior policy makers and experts from development cooperation and gender equality portfolios in Member States, civil society organizations, parliaments, think tanks and the United Nations system. It capitalized on the keen interest of participants to reflect on how challenges and opportunities related to gender equality, the empowerment of women and women's rights could be instilled in the ongoing discussions on a post-2015 development agenda, with a sense of priority. The present summary serves to inform ongoing thematic, national and global consultations, including the preparation of the 2014 DCF.

KEY MESSAGES

I. The MDG experience on gender equality and the empowerment of women

- **Gender inequality remains a major obstacle to development and MDG achievement and comes at considerable cost to the economy.** Gender equality, as a human right, is not only a goal in itself but also essential to the achievement of all development goals. In spite of the economic and financial crisis that continues to beset much of the world,

great strides have been made towards the MDGs. Yet, progress has been mixed and uneven. Women and girls have not benefited equally from past progress. They continue to face discrimination in access to education, work and economic assets. Some hard-won gains on all dimensions of gender equality have even been lost in recent years.

- **Development cooperation has a critical role to play in supporting Member States and other stakeholders in their efforts to promote gender equality, the empowerment of women and women's rights.** It can also contribute to independent, high quality analysis of progress in gender equality and collection of information on the status of women, their empowerment and remaining challenges for advocacy and accountability purposes. A fresh look must be taken, however, at the effectiveness of existing approaches, including efforts to help mainstream gender equality in national development strategies.
- **The MDG experience holds many valuable lessons on how to best mainstream and prioritize gender equality, women's rights and the empowerment of women.** Perceptions of the actual impact of the MDGs on the advancement of women remain mixed. Some participants noted that there was no strong empirical link between the adoption of the MDGs and progress in gender equality. Others reiterated that the MDGs have served as a catalyst for gender equality and the empowerment of women, notably by mobilizing additional financial resources and galvanizing political support.
- **The MDG experience shows that sustaining political will remains imperative.** Making greater progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women will depend on the ability to create: strong incentives, such as gender-sensitive legislation on a wide range of issues (e.g., on sexual harassment, discrimination, inheritance rights, age of marriage, and gender responsive budgeting (GRB) and accountability structures of government vis-à-vis gender goals); tools to track funds supporting all dimensions of gender equality; broader awareness among policy makers of root causes of inequality; and stronger public demand for targeted interventions that empower women.
- **Addressing gender equality effectively remains a complex undertaking.** A broad range of interrelated dimensions must be tackled simultaneously, including violence against women, abuse, trafficking and discrimination; land and property ownership; reproductive health and rights; unpaid care work and wage disparities; and participation of women in policy and decision making. It is vital also to rethink the role of masculinity in gender equality and the reasons for sustained patriarchy and to broaden the debate to challenges related to all representations of sexuality.
- With three years left before the MDG deadline, **efforts must be redoubled to close gender gaps**, building on innovations and success stories that work, including e.g. cash transfers, land reform, access to reproductive health and social media. At the same time, it is important to start a reflection on how to address gender equality in a post-2015 development agenda.
- **It remains a challenge to secure adequate financing for gender equality.** Availability of adequate resources depends on broad political will. Creating gender-specific budget lines in national and sectoral budgets and monitoring and publishing information on targeted allocations to women can be critical "pull factors" for sustainable financing. External assistance remains vital in most contexts; it should be allocated in a way that supports existing, home-grown efforts to promote gender equality, rather than fragment or undermine them.

II. Lessons for a post-2015 development agenda

- **The world has changed in a way that challenges the business as usual.** To produce transformative change for women, a compelling narrative with clear priorities is needed that advances the position of women – as agents of development and resilient economies – at the heart of international discourse on development.
- **Anchoring gender equality and the empowerment of women at the heart of a post-2015 development agenda is not only a moral imperative but also essential to accelerate development progress.** A post-2015 development agenda must address the underlying economic, social and cultural causes and power relations which perpetuate gender inequality. It must recognize women as a central stakeholder.
- **The post-2015 development agenda should aim for both a stand-alone gender goal and the integration of gender equality into all aspects of the agenda. The agenda must also be underpinned by a gender-responsive global partnership for development.** The MDG experience suggests that, to better address structural causes of gender inequality and gender gaps, the development agenda should include both universal goals, applicable to all countries, and country-specific targets, given countries' different national circumstances and given common but differentiated responsibilities. Gender-related targets should be inspired by past international standards and commitments.
- **The United Nations is making every effort to facilitate an inclusive, transparent and open process and to deliver as one system in the definition of sustainable development goals (SDGs).** National and thematic consultations are a key entry point to express views and positions on the agenda and universal SDGs that draw lessons from the MDGs. Women must have the opportunity to engage in a meaningful manner in the different strands of this process.
- **A future development agenda must better address a number of critical relationships that undermine the empowerment of women and women's rights.** As a vital element of a functioning formal economy, care work should be formalized, paid and linked to adequate benefits from public sources, so as to create jobs and ensure that women have the option of participating in the formal labour market. Progress in gender equality and the empowerment of women goes hand in hand with an improvement in the reproductive health and rights of women. Social and electronic media, which have become important means of promoting change and ensuring the enforcement of laws, provide an additional channel to promote greater accountability between governments and citizens in the area of women's rights. The development agenda must also address the persistently high level of violence against women, including by improving the collection, analysis and diffusion of data on violence against women.
- **Parliaments can help advance gender equality by translating international legislation into national legislation and by ensuring a gender responsive national budget.** Parliaments need to more fully harness their potential to serve as a catalyst for gender equality through their role in preparing the national budget and in translating international legislation into national laws and regulations. To promote this agenda and the equal representation of women in parliament, it is useful to establish a minimum quota of women in parliament.

III. Mutual accountability as a powerful catalyst for gender-responsive development partnerships

- **Inclusive and transparent mutual accountability and results frameworks are imperative to effectively monitor compliance with development cooperation commitments, disbursements, and use and impact of flows.** Such frameworks do not exist in a large number of developing countries. Where they do, gender-specific targets are missing, making it impossible to ensure that providers and recipients of development cooperation follow through on promises made on the quantity, quality and effectiveness of their cooperation, including gender-specific results.
- **Limited progress to implement mutual accountability has technical and political reasons.** There remains inadequate capacity to collect data, identify priorities and continuously monitor and evaluate the role of women in society. Another factor limiting progress is the multiple interests of providers of external finance and challenges in developing harmonized targets that correspond with women's priorities at country and local level. Existing frameworks are also limited in terms of holding some providers, including the private sector, to account for delivering on development cooperation commitments and for upholding social and human rights standards through their cooperation.
- **A number of methodological issues also undermine progress.** Despite continuous attempts at global level to measure concepts such as empowerment, it remains difficult to track funding for gender equality, especially if it is not earmarked for gender equality, and to quantify its specific gender impact. Experience shows that making expenditure reviews public and facilitating inclusive policy dialogue is vital to develop country-specific indicators. Harmonizing reporting structures of providers can be equally important.
- **Broad and balanced participation of different stakeholders, especially women and their advocates, is vital to guarantee lasting impact of mutual accountability mechanisms.** National women's machineries (NWMs) must be involved early on to instill the notion of gender responsiveness in this process. Gender equality must become a priority in the aid oversight function of parliaments.
- **Indicators and targets to review and assess the commitment to gender equality are vital to empower citizens in their efforts to hold governments and providers of external assistance to account for gender-responsive policy making.** They must be established with broad participation of all development cooperation actors. Enforceable, global targets are vital drivers for country-level accountability efforts. The new indicator to track gender equality agreed upon in follow up to the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness is considered a vital incentive in this regard. Gender indicators of the post-2015 development agenda could build on this and other existing indicators.
- **Accountability structures at all levels must be further unpacked to identify areas of opportunity to promote gender equality.** Greater diversity of development actors and a more complex global agenda complicate the multiplicity of accountability structures in place. Independent analysis of funding modalities and structures to review progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women is essential to promote the understanding of the often complex accountability systems in place at country level and to identify opportunities to further prioritize gender equality.
- **Country experiences point to specific entry points for women's advocates in promoting accountability at technical level.** Partnership policies and sectoral or thematic (including gender equality) working groups between representatives of provider and recipient

countries should include a strong gender narrative. Civil society should be an integral part of their work to develop, implement and monitor targets and indicators.

- **Many initiatives to promote gender equality are small-scale and grassroots projects.** They have limited funding, but often tremendous, yet hard-to-measure impact on the lives of women. Local participatory budgeting is an important way to build capacity and trust. Basket funds where local organizations apply for funding have also had positive effects as transparent funding tools. The power of social and electronic media should be used more effectively to hold governments and aid providers more accountable and to reach out to citizens at large.
- **Existing global and regional accountability mechanisms remain vital guideposts for delivery on pledges, disbursements and impact made by actors at all levels.** Effective frameworks are already in place for some sectors. Yet, they must consider gender equality as a greater priority, for example, in the areas of climate change financing and food security. The new G8 scorecard system is a good example in the right direction. CEDAW and the Beijing Programme for Action continue to provide the backdrop for the promotion of gender equality at global level. As part of the monitoring of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, the new gender indicator will instill new momentum on the tracking of development cooperation to gender equality. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) could serve as the United Nations accountability forum for gender equality. Linkages to the universal periodic review and various Special Rapporteur functions have also been suggested as ways to improve information flow and the methodology behind accountability structures in place at global level for gender equality.

IV. Gender responsive planning and budgeting to prioritize gender equality in public policy making

- **Gender responsive planning and budgeting (GRB) serves as powerful tool to translate gender-related human rights obligations into practice in public financial management and macroeconomic policy making.** Using the budget as a lever to address inequalities between men and women can be paired with an effort to publish performance and expenditure reports with strong emphasis on the gender impact of different macro-economic policies and their results. Such efforts have shown that women can have a remarkable impact on government policy making and spending. Yet, their actual impact on closing the gender gap needs to be strengthened.
- **Experience has shown that GRB is particularly successful where it is implemented as a non-negotiable part of public policy across all levels of government.** In light of the broad range of gender inequalities, real progress that is felt by women can only be made if all government entities subscribe to GRB. Its success largely depends on a solid legal basis demanding all parts of government to implement this practice, twinned with the formal adoption of gender equality as a priority in public financial management.
- **There are striking similarities among all countries in terms of their approaches to promote GRB, even though developing countries are well ahead in implementation, with many valuable lessons to share.** Participatory budgeting processes at local and national level often lead to greater engagement of women in budgeting and accountability procedures.
- **Capacity development for GRB should empower non-state actors and government staff.** To effectively engage, women's advocates need to be supported through targeted

modalities that make financial support easily available. Extensive training of staff, including those responsible for planning and budgeting at municipal and local levels, is a key prerequisite for the success of GRB. Recipient countries' efforts to fully implement GRB rules also depend on the degree to which providers report their development cooperation on budget.

- **Widely available and detailed information on commitments on gender equality, disbursement and use and impact of development cooperation on all aspects of gender equality, are vital for gender-sensitive planning and budgeting.** Limitations with regard to the availability of aid information for gender equality are not a question of access, but one of user friendliness and capacity to use the information. It is critical to avoid discrepancies due to different standards to collect data. Systems adapted to local needs should be the primary source of information, while common standards are critical to systematize the information at global level. Between now and 2015, efforts should be stepped up to close information gaps.

V. The role of ECOSOC and the DCF in promoting gender equality in global policy dialogue and national policy making

- **The Development Cooperation Forum has a role to play in connecting efforts at national level with global commitments, including on gender equality.** In its 2012 to 2014 cycle, the Forum will continue to take a leadership role in the area of mutual accountability aimed at ensuring better delivery by different actors on their commitments. This work should specifically focus on promoting gender targets in such compacts at national and global levels. It was proposed that a DCF symposium on monitoring and evaluation of gender equality and their limitations could be organized.
- **As a mechanism of the Economic and Social Council, the DCF provides ample policy space for all development cooperation actors and features gender equality prominently on its agenda.** Including through the DCF, ECOSOC should aim to leverage the legitimacy of the General Assembly, while avoiding overlap with its work. With its UN system coordination role, ECOSOC can play an important role in breaking down silos and promoting an integrated approach to development, including in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women. It was proposed that the DCF could meet on an annual rather than on a biennial basis. Participants further stressed that, while the Forum lacks decision-making power, it provides an important multi-stakeholder platform.