

ECOSOC Panel discussion
Gender mainstreaming in the functional commissions of the
Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

11 June 2002

Informal summary prepared by the Secretariat

Background

1. In 1997, 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” outlining specific actions for the United Nations system. In order to ensure that gender mainstreaming was an integral part of all its activities, the Council, in 2001, established a new regular sub-item (7e) on its annual agenda on “Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system”. The purpose of this item is to monitor and evaluate achievements made and obstacles encountered by the United Nations system, and to consider further measures to strengthen the implementation and monitoring of gender mainstreaming within the United Nations system (Council resolution 2001/41). The Council also decided to devote the coordination segment of one of its substantive sessions, before 2005, to the review and appraisal of the system-wide implementation of the agreed conclusions 1997/2 into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system.

Purpose of the panel

2. On 11 June 2002, the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the Division for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, organized a panel discussion on “Gender mainstreaming in the functional commissions of ECOSOC”, to support preparations for the Council’s deliberations under the new sub-item 7(e). The panel was composed of Chairpersons/Vice-Chairpersons of functional commissions and the heads of the respective substantive Divisions of the Secretariat. This format was intended to highlight the importance of a systematic approach to gender mainstreaming that includes both gender-sensitive documentation and gender-sensitive policy formulation.

3. The panel discussion provided an opportunity to share experiences on lessons learned, good practices and challenges ahead with regard to gender mainstreaming in selected sectoral areas falling within the responsibility of functional commissions. The panel intended to draw attention to efforts already undertaken in the functional commissions to incorporate gender perspectives, and to identify and discuss constraints to gender mainstreaming, as well as what more could be done in the future.

Participants

4. H.E. Ms. Marjatta Rasi, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council with responsibility for the coordination segment, chaired the panel discussion. Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director, Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), acted as moderator. Mr. Othman Jerandi, Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and Ms. Angela King, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, made opening remarks.

5. Panellists were: H.E. Mr. Iftekhar A. Chowdhury, Chairperson, Commission for Social Development; H.E. Mr. Javier Paulinich, Vice-Chairperson, Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice; Mr. Gustavo Eduardo Ainchil, Vice-Chairperson, United Nations Forum on Forests; Mr. Johan Scholvinck, Director, Division for Social Policy and Development, DESA; Mr. Eduardo Vetere, Director, Centre for International Crime Prevention, ODCCP; Mr. Jagmohan S. Maini, Coordinator and Head, Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests, DESA.

Opening remarks

6. In her opening comments, Ms. Rasi suggested that by creating the new sub-item, the Council had acknowledged the need for a more focused effort to ensure a consistent application and implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy at both intergovernmental level and within entities of the United Nations. As the purpose of the new sub-item was to monitor and evaluate progress and obstacles in gender mainstreaming, it provided an incentive for expanding attention to gender equality concerns in all of the Council's activities and actions as well as to monitor adherence to agreed conclusions 1997/2 by its subsidiary bodies and the entities of the UN system. In this regard, the Chair expected that many of the experiences, good practices and lessons learned from the panel discussion would be of direct relevance to all the Council's segments.

7. In his opening remarks, the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women focused on the Commission's catalytic role in support of mainstreaming gender perspectives in United Nations activities, and in the work of intergovernmental processes. He provided specific examples where the Commission had presented recommendations to the relevant intergovernmental bodies or processes with the aim to facilitate attention to gender dimensions in these areas. The Chairperson emphasized that mainstreaming of gender perspectives was not limited to the work of the subsidiary machinery of the Council but that the Council itself had a leadership role to play in ensuring that its agreed conclusions 1997/2 were consistently and systematically adhered to, including in its own work. The Chairperson hoped for a more structured cooperation between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commissions participating in the panel.

8. In her opening remarks, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women focused on the institutional requirements and steps taken by the entities of the United Nations system to implement the Council's recommendations on gender mainstreaming as contained in its agreed conclusions 1997/2. The Special Adviser pointed out that the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE),

which she chaired on behalf of the United Nations, remained the most effective catalyst for enhancing system-wide capacity for gender mainstreaming. While emphasizing the critical role of gender focal points and gender experts in support of gender mainstreaming, she underlined the responsibility of management at all levels for attention to gender dimensions in their particular areas. The IANWGE also played an important role in securing the necessary commitment and support for gender mainstreaming from the executive heads of the entities of the system. She reported that institutional capacity for gender mainstreaming had been strengthened through training and competence development, work on methodologies and tools, and development of capacity to monitor progress and ensure accountability. At the same time, she also noted that members of the Network continued to face challenges in ensuring the systematic implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy, which required explicit commitment and support from the highest level in the form of institutional directives, strategies or action plans; mechanisms for monitoring and accountability, as well as for measuring impact; training and competence development of all staff; and availability of relevant data, studies and information to facilitate gender-specific analysis.

Panellists' presentations

9. As the moderator of the panel discussion, the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women reiterated that the role of the gender mainstreaming strategy was the achievement of the goal of gender equality – a development goal in and of itself, as well as a means for achieving other goals such as poverty eradication, sustainable development or social cohesion. Attention to gender perspectives was not always easily reflected in the discussions and documents on the diverse range of issues dealt with by the Council and its functional commissions and gender perspectives were still not seen as an integral part of the work in the economic, social and related fields, despite knowledge gained and efforts made at research, data collection and policy development. Critical questions on gender perspectives had to be raised in all areas. For example, in what way were gender perspectives relevant for the promotion and protection of human rights; what were the relevant gender perspectives in water resources management; how did gender perspectives come into play in decentralization processes; what role did gender perspectives play in poverty eradication? If the linkages were made clear, and an understanding that gender perspectives were important for achieving the goals of the United Nations, effective action plans could be put in place and real changes made to the way work was carried out.

10. Introducing the panellists, the moderator encouraged them to give examples of good practice, identify gaps and challenges and make proposals for future action, including steps the Council could take.

11. The Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development noted that the commitment of the Commission for Social Development to integrate gender perspectives in its work preceded ECOSOC's agreed conclusions 1997/2. Drawing a parallel to insufficient attention to social dimensions in policy formulation, he also identified remaining challenges for gender mainstreaming in social policy. To achieve stated goals, both a gender dimension and a social dimension should be inherent throughout policy formulation processes, and not be added at the end of such processes. The Director gave

several examples where gender perspectives had been reflected in reports submitted to the Commission for Social Development, including on integration of social and economic policy (E/CN.5/2002/3), social protection (E/CN.5/2001/2), and unpaid work and policy-making (discussion paper, 1999). He also identified future reports that lent themselves to the integration of gender perspectives. Turning to challenges, the fact that the Commission for Social Development had a multi-year work programme, and met every year before the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women would make it difficult to take advantage of input from CSW, if such input were provided. Likewise, it remained to be seen whether the Council would be able to exercise its annual monitoring function under the new sub-item, given the well-known constraints in the Council's general segment which included overload, disparate items and severe time constraints. Additional means for increased gender mainstreaming to complement the work under the new sub-item thus had to be sought.

12. The Chairperson of the Commission for Social Development agreed with the Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development that the area of social development had been successful in increasing gender perspectives in reports and outcome documents as a truly cross-cutting issue, and not simply as an "add on". At the same time, he called on the Secretariat to be more pro-active in integrating gender perspectives systematically in reports, to build up specialized expertise on gender perspectives within each commission, and to strengthen structural cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Commission on the Status of Women. The Chairperson also recommended that Member States provide the Secretariat with more details on attention to gender perspectives in national policies and social development programmes. Increased availability of sex-disaggregated data would be beneficial in the preparation of reports in order for the Commission to make specific recommendations. The Chairperson emphasized the crucial role of overall coordination at the ECOSOC level. He also recommended that gender mainstreaming be systematically placed on the agenda of joint bureau meetings of ECOSOC and the functional commissions. As regards ECOSOC's monitoring of gender mainstreaming in its subsidiary bodies, the Chairperson recommended that ECOSOC request its functional commissions to report every two to three years on gender mainstreaming and to undertake a comprehensive review at that time. The outcome of such consideration could be either a resolution with guidance to commissions, or a Chairperson's summary.

13. The Vice-Chairperson of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) provided a brief historical background on the establishment of the Forum in 2001. The mandate of the UNFF had a strong linkage to sustainable development and a strong human development component – forests provided medicine, food, firewood and served as a source of water. Women's roles were particularly relevant, as women were the main providers of forest products to their families, and were therefore stakeholders that could identify long-term needs. Women had to be part of policy-making processes and the formulation and implementation of community development programmes, including afforestation projects, to ensure that the long-term needs of all stakeholders were addressed. Women's ownership of forested land and attempts to decrease use of wood energy were other important factors contributing to sustainable development, in particular in countries with low forest cover. The Vice-Chairperson reported that the Forum had

organized, during its second session, a multi-stakeholder dialogue in which a number of women had participated. He recommended that ECOSOC should consider encouraging the Bretton Woods institutions to address gender perspectives, in particular when providing assistance to Member States. The Forum was keen to integrate gender perspectives as a cross-cutting issue in its work, especially as women had been identified as one of the major stakeholders in forestry. He anticipated that gender perspectives would be integrated into the 2002-2005 UNFF proposals for action.

14. The Coordinator and Head of the UNFF Secretariat underlined that the aim of the work on forests was to achieve sustainable forest management. Human subsistence, including poverty reduction and food security, were major concerns for the Secretariat. The Coordinator stressed that women played not only an important role in all forestry activities but also as negotiators of forest policies at national and international levels. Traditionally, forestry had been men's domain but this had changed in recent years and an increasing number of women had joined the sector as professionals. The Coordinator also cited a number of country examples, where women were increasingly represented in the forestry sector. Further progress was necessary, especially in developing countries, to increase attention to women's participation in, and contribution to the forestry sector. Improving gender sensitivity in forestry activities remained a challenge. He joined the Vice-Chairperson by voicing support for mainstreaming gender perspectives into the work of UNFF. Gradual steps were being taken towards addressing women's priorities and needs, and he called on Governments to identify specific items for discussion. One opportunity for increasing attention to gender perspectives were the reporting guidelines for Member States on forestry matters which were currently under negotiation. The Coordinator recommended that ECOSOC provide special provisions for women from least developed countries to participate in the work of the Forum.

15. The Director of the Centre for International Crime Prevention (CICP) gave examples of successful integration of gender perspectives in reports and decisions. The General Assembly and ECOSOC had adopted a number of resolutions on trafficking in women as recommended by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. The Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children, had been adopted in 2000. The Director noted the importance of systematic monitoring by ECOSOC of progress in gender mainstreaming. However, he shared the concerns expressed by the Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development on ECOSOC's capacity to monitor progress and challenges in gender mainstreaming in the framework of the new sub-item, given the existing workload and time constraints, and welcomed additional steps, such as the present panel. Other steps, such as competence development for staff on gender perspectives, which the Centre recently had undertaken, were also important.

16. The Vice-Chairperson of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice referred to a recent resolution of the Commission to mainstream a gender perspective into its activities, and requesting its Secretariat to integrate a gender perspective into all activities. He identified a number of challenges to implement this decision including lack of resources and insufficient competencies. While violence

against women was one of the issues that required continuous attention, gender perspectives also had to be integrated in other areas of CICIP's work, in particular organized crime and corruption, and in promoting a fair and effective system of justice. In these areas, collection of data had to be improved to identify the role women played and how to measure impact. A gender-sensitive approach was necessary in addressing the situation of victims and offenders as well as the provision of support services to victims, both women and men. The Commission would soon focus on kidnapping and in this regard, it would be interesting to examine who the victims were, women and/or men. To assist with the effective mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the work of CICIP, the Vice-Chairperson called for practical steps such as better coordination among Secretariats, the convening of Bureaux meetings on gender mainstreaming, including by videoconference, and participation by the Special Adviser in sessions of the Commission in Vienna.

Discussion

17. Panellists' presentations were followed by a discussion in which a large number of delegates made comments and suggestions, and posed questions. Delegates welcomed panellists' obvious recognition of their own responsibility for gender mainstreaming in their respective areas. It was pointed out that gender mainstreaming required a focus on both women and men, but that apparently so far, the focus had been mainly on women. The key recognition in agreed conclusions 1997/2 had been that policies impacted differently on women and men. Delegates sought examples where this key recognition had actually led to more effective policy-making. Panellists were also asked whether there were any "convincing cases", where attention to gender equality was facilitating the achievement of other goals.

18. Several delegates agreed on the crucial role of monitoring for ensuring systematic implementation of the mainstreaming strategy, and agreed that a monitoring mechanism was needed. The role of ECOSOC in support of gender mainstreaming was the subject of a number of comments, with delegates asking whether functional commissions would welcome the Council's specific guidance, whether commissions would consider such guidance useful or if such specific guidance would further overburden the commissions. Delegations welcomed the suggestion of having the functional commissions report to ECOSOC every two to three years on progress in gender mainstreaming in their work. A number of delegates shared the panellists' concerns about the limited capacity of the Council, under its new sub-item, to undertake the required monitoring, given the well-known time constraints of the general segment. Delegates emphasized that all multi-year work programmes of functional commissions should reflect gender perspectives, and underlined the Council's coordination and oversight role in this regard. Panellists were asked to provide specific examples as to what had been done to identify constraints and challenges to gender mainstreaming, and what actions had been taken to address them. Respondents agreed that a more determined effort on the part of the Council was necessary to achieve real progress. Commitments for specific activities were necessary within the commissions, especially because of their crowded agendas, to ensure accountability. Concrete actions, including in the framework of the multi-year work programmes, and through examples from the national level, were needed for progress.

19. Delegates asked for suggestions about further steps that could be taken by the Commission on the Status of Women to enhance its catalytic role. Attention was drawn to the Secretary General's report, which for a number of years now had analysed progress in gender mainstreaming in the functional commissions, but little information was available about steps taken in other bodies reporting to the Council. The discussion also highlighted the need to continue building capacity in the Secretariat and in the bureaux of the functional commissions for integrating gender perspectives in their work. Delegates also invited the Secretariat, and especially the substantive Secretariats of the Commissions, to be more pro-active in addressing gender perspectives.

20. Speakers suggested that Commission Bureaux could consider designating members to focus specifically on progress in gender mainstreaming. Commissions could also organize panels on gender mainstreaming as part of their regular sessions. Bureaux, or commissions, could request briefings on gender mainstreaming by CSW and/or OSAGI/DAW.

Recommendations for further action

21. Specific recommendations emanating from the event included:

1. The ECOSOC could request its functional commissions to take stock and report periodically on gender mainstreaming, every two to three years.
2. Commissions could request briefings on gender mainstreaming from the Commission on the Status of Women and the OSAGI/Division for the Advancement of Women.
3. Discussion of gender mainstreaming should be systematically placed on the agenda of the joint bureau meetings of ECOSOC and the functional commissions.
4. Commissions could designate a bureau member to monitor attention to gender mainstreaming.
5. Staff training on gender mainstreaming should continue.
6. Secretariat units should take on a more pro-active role in identifying gender issues in their areas of responsibility.

DAW/GAS, 18 July 2002