

Inter-Agency Network on
Women and Gender Equality
New York, 26 February – 1 March 2002

IANWGE/2002/10
February 2002

WomenWatch Committee

Task Manager: DAW

Report of the WomenWatch Committee

to the Meeting of the Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality New York, 26 February to 1 March 2002

Committee members:

Amina Adam, DAW
Rema Nanda, UNIFEM
Olga Barmina, DAW
Marisa Kohan, UNIFEM
Carolyn Hannan, DAW (Task Manager)

Contributing partners:

ILO
INSTRAW
UNDP
UNESCO
UNICEF
World Bank

Mandate

The IAMWGE in 2001 agreed that the WomenWatch Committee would review further the recommendations made in the assessment report. The review should focus in particular on the role of the site as a portal and/or online resource, keeping resource implications in mind, as well as on the question of broadening participation of stakeholders beyond the UN system. It was agreed that until further review WomenWatch should continue as both a portal and online resource.

Intersessional activities

The Committee was able to carry out a considerable amount of the work mandated by the 2001 session of the Interagency Meeting, despite constraints related to the departure from New York of several members of the Committee in the second half of the year.

The requested review was carried out by the Committee during May and June 2001 and during January and February 2002. Some of the main conclusions and recommendations, which draw on both the assessment (final version submitted in May 2001) and the Committee's own evaluation of the work on WomenWatch to date, include the following:

- There needs to be a stronger sense of ownership of the WomenWatch as the interagency website by the whole Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality;
- A clearer vision of what needs to be done to make WomenWatch a more dynamic site for the interagency network should be developed, both at technical and substantive levels;

- The management of WomenWatch has to be made more effective, including through the mobilization of more resources, both human and financial, to support the work with WomenWatch.
- WomenWatch should continue as a portal to UN gender resources. Since the establishment of a portal in itself involves significant challenges, creation of on-line resources should only be considered at a much later stage, and then probably only in areas where there is special interest or where major gaps exist.
- The initial focus of the Committee on developing partnerships should be on the Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality rather than on organizations and networks outside the United Nations. Existing contacts with NGOs, such as APC and WomenAction 2000, should be maintained but the focus of efforts to develop active partners would be concentrated on the UN itself.

A number of actions which can be taken immediately to achieve the recommendations of the Committee were identified, including:

- Expansion of the membership of the WomenWatch Committee among members of the IANWGE, with DAW as the Secretariat for the IANWGE continuing to act as Task Manager;
- Preparation of a proposal for submission to donors, which includes provision for a full-time substantive information expert as well as a full-time technical expert;
- Preparation of a management plan, outlining how the work of the Committee can be made more effective and take more effectively into account the new challenges – technical as well as substantive – involved in the establishment of a portal;
- Improvement of the dissemination of information on WomenWatch as the entrypoint to information and resources on gender equality and the advancement of women in the UN, including through DPI.

As part of the review, a plan for the reconstruction of the WomenWatch site was developed. The plan covers the first stage of portal implementation which includes:

- Designing the internal structure of a portal database,
- Creation of a mechanism for presenting a database of links through the web-site,
- Creation of a mechanism for updating and modifying the database,
- Collecting Internet links to all UN bodies which have activities in different areas and placing those links in a database,
- Creating a classification of all the data into sections and subsections,
- Preparing descriptions for all the major portal sections and most informative links,
- Synchronizing the former version of WomenWatch web-site and the portal to ensure easier transition to portal.

The following concrete activities were also undertaken:

- In February 2002 the first stage of creating a database-driven portal was completed with a total of approximately 550 links being collected and processed;

- In November 2001 a new section on "Women in Afghanistan" was created on the WomenWatch web-site. Links to all parts of the UN system working on Afghanistan need to be created.
- Web-site maintenance and updating were carried out on a regular basis.

With regard to partnerships outside the UN, in line with the objective of WomenWatch to strengthen the capacity of civil society and women's organizations to use ICTs as a vehicle to enable sharing of strategies, influencing policy-making, and strengthening social movements, WomenWatch supported Phases I and II of the Association for Progressive Communication's Global Women's Network Programme (APC/WNSP) to organize an ICT Gender Audit Methodology for ICT project planners (donors, policy makers and women's organizations). APC/WNSP has trained organizations in the use of the methodology and further testing of the methodology is to be done during 2002.

Potentials for moving forward

It is clear that WomenWatch can only be successful as an interagency website if there is increased interest and involvement by all members of IANWGE. Contributions to, and use of, WomenWatch will depend on a better understanding of the value-added of WomenWatch for members of IANWGE. Greater efforts will have to be made to mobilize interest and disseminate the value of close association. WomenWatch is the most well-known website on gender equality and women's advancement in the UN. One clear value for members of IANWGE is the fact that some users looking for information on gender and specific sectors and topics may only find their way to agencies through WomenWatch.

The placing of a dynamic IANWGE webpage on WomenWatch, highlighting the work of the network, including through all taskforces, may also be seen as a way of strengthening the recognition of the work of the interagency network, and indirectly also of all its members.

Establishing effective management will be critical for improving WomenWatch. An initial strategy will be to increase the number of active members in the WomenWatch Committee. The goal should be to have between 6-8 IANWGE members on the Committee. While headquarter representatives of agencies based outside New York may not be able to attend regular management-oriented meetings of the Committee in New York, they could be represented by their Liaison Offices in New York, as is increasingly the case in other taskforces.

In addition, different levels of participation could be envisioned. An overall Policy Advisory Group (comprised of headquarters-based Gender Focal Points) could meet once a year in conjunction with the annual IANWGE meeting to give overall policy and management advice and support. Regular meetings of a working level Management Committee could be held in New York, with staff from Liaison Offices of agencies based outside New York. If deemed useful and funding is available, a meeting of the webmasters in entities on the WomenWatch Committee could also be organized once a year to discuss technical issues. In addition, a virtual forum for the webmasters of all members of IANWGE could be initiated. This would facilitate the improvement of WomenWatch, support individual webmasters throughout the system as necessary, and provide an effective network for sharing of information on websites.

On the technical side, the establishment of WomenWatch as a portal involves a significant number of challenges, particularly around the issue of directory resources. If links are to be made to entity websites (and even particular resources on these websites) according to identified categories of interest, effective means of ensuring accuracy, relevance and updating

need to be established. This will require considerable further attention. The identification of categories and interest would, for example, need discussion and agreement. One important category could be, for example, sections on the incorporation of gender perspectives into global conferences and follow-up to past conferences.

Proposed WomenWatch activities for year 2002

Management level:

- Efforts should be made to expand the membership of the WomenWatch Committee among members of the IANWGE to at least six;
- A proposal for funding should be submitted to donors to secure a full-time substantive information expert as well as a full-time technical expert, as well as funds for equipment and other activities;
- A management plan should be developed which outlines how the work of the Committee can be made more effective, particularly in response to the challenges associated with the establishment of the portal;
- A strategy should be developed for disseminate of information on WomenWatch should be made throughout the UN system.

Technical level:

After the portal is officially launched and made available for a general audience, WomenWatch can move forward with the second stage of transforming itself into a portal. Activities will include:

- Creation of a search mechanism within the portal database of web links (currently the site has a very limited search function in the administrative mechanism);
- Translating the web-interface (including section titles and descriptions) of the portal into all official UN languages;
- Receiving and processing user feedback which can propose new technical features to be implemented in the portal and show the need for particular kinds of information;
- Reorganization or splitting into sub-sections in order to eliminate listings that are too long (Current experience with maintaining the database has already indicated this need);
- Collection and processing of more country-specific information (Ideally, each country should have a separate section under WomenWatch to reflect the UN system gender-related activities in each country);
- Information updating in the portal. (A policy of updating should be established and the responsibility of all agencies in this respect made clear.)
- Establishment of closer links to substantive experts (Gender Focal Points in all UN entities) to ensure that information compilation in WomenWatch is accurate and adequately reflects the scope of UN system activities and events;
- Establishment of closer connections with WomenWatch partners in order to be able to facilitate accurate reflection of agencies' activities on gender equality.

Other activities could include:

- Preparing "feature pages" on problem areas or issues on which there is great public interest, such as the current one on Afghanistan. This will help strengthen the WomenWatch position as a one-stop site to search for UN gender-related information;
- Promoting and advertising the most important upcoming UN system events, through WomenWatch and inter-linking with other agencies;

- Coordination with DPI to eliminate duplication of work and confusion users might have about the scope of UN gender-related activities;
- Developing other database mechanisms, for example, the database of national machineries contact information that is being compiled by the DAW could be linked to the web-site.

The Afghanistan section should be expanded and links established to all members of IANWGE working on Afghanistan.

A section on IANWGE, including the work of all taskforces, should be finalized.

Issues for the Network to consider

1. What is the value of WomenWatch for members of IANWGE?
2. How can greater ownership of WomenWatch as an interagency website be encouraged, over and above those members of IANWGE which will become members of the WomenWatch Committee;
3. What are the constraints to using WomenWatch as an entrypoint to all UN information and resources on gender equality, and how can these be overcome?
4. How can the management of WomenWatch be made more effective?