

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GENDER MAINSTREAMING STRATEGY

Where does the gender mainstreaming strategy come from?

In efforts to promote the advancement of women and gender equality over the past few decades the approaches or strategies adopted have changed significantly. Initial efforts were focused on separate targeted activities for women. While many of these efforts produced positive results, particularly for the limited numbers of women who could benefit directly, this approach did not tackle the structural constraints to gender equality. Efforts in the 1970s shifted instead to integrating attention to women into all activities rather than keeping women on the sidelines of development. However the gains made through the integration strategy were limited by the fact that most efforts were undertaken too late in processes when all important decisions on goals, strategies and resources had already been taken. Equally constraining was the fact that integration was often taken to mean only increasing women's participation in development agendas already decided upon by others without taking their contributions, knowledge, priorities and needs into consideration. The potential for bringing about the types of structural changes required for achieving gender equality was therefore reduced.

In the 1980s a new approach evolved, the mainstreaming strategy, which aimed to make the goal of gender equality central to all development activities. The term mainstreaming came from the objective to bring attention to gender equality into the mainstream of development activities. An important element in the mainstreaming strategy is the ambition to give attention to gender equality from initial stages of processes so that there is potential to influence goals, strategies and resource allocations and thus bring about real changes in policies, programmes and other activities and make a real difference to gender equality.

What does gender mainstreaming mean?

The ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2 provided a clear definition of the mainstreaming strategy 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. 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."*

The mainstreaming strategy is utilized in areas where the principal objective is not promotion of gender equality but promotion of other goals, such as, poverty elimination, environmentally sustainable development, health development, peace support operations or economic development. Mainstreaming involves taking up gender equality perspectives as relevant in analysis, data collection, and other activities, to ensure that all processes take into account the contributions, priorities and needs of the entire stakeholder group, women as well as men. Attention to the goal of gender equality needs to be mainstreamed into research, analysis, policy development as well as operational activities.

The *Platform for Action* (Beijing Conference, 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 both women and men and the potential impact of planned processes and activities on women and men respectively.

Mainstreaming does not replace the need for targeted, women-specific policies and programmes, and positive legislation. Mainstreaming and empowerment of women are complementary strategies. The mainstreaming strategy should always be implemented in a manner which facilitates empowerment of women.

Where does the mandate for gender mainstreaming come from?

The mandate on the mainstreaming strategy comes from the *Platform for Action* (Beijing, 1995) where mainstreaming was established as the main global strategy for promoting gender equality, required in all the critical areas of concern. The ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2 also established some basic overall principles of mainstreaming. Initial definitions of issues/problems across all areas of activity should be done in such a manner that gender differences and disparities can be diagnosed. Assumptions that issues/problems are

neutral from a gender perspective should never be made; gender analysis should always be carried out. Efforts should be made to broaden women's equitable participation at all levels of decision-making and in all areas of societal development.

More concrete directives within the United Nations system were provided with the Secretary General's communication to management in October 1997. Analytical reports and recommendations on policy or operational issues within each area of responsibility should take gender differences and disparities fully into account. Medium-term plans and budgets should be prepared in such a manner that gender perspectives are explicit. Specific strategies should be formulated for gender mainstreaming and priorities established. Systematic use should be made of gender analysis, sex-disaggregation of data, and sector-specific gender studies and surveys should be commissioned as required. The General Assembly in Resolution 52/100 (December 1997) requested all bodies within the UN system that deal with programme and budgetary matters to ensure that all programmes, medium-term plans and programmes budgets visibly mainstream a gender perspective.

The gender mainstreaming mandate was significantly strengthened in the outcome document of the General Assembly twenty-third special session to follow up the Beijing Conference in June 2000 (A/S-23/10/Rev.1). In addition the Security Council resolution (S/2000/1044) arising from the Council's discussions on Women, peace and security on 24-25 October 2000 provides a strong mandate for gender mainstreaming in all areas of peace support operations.

Who is responsible for gender mainstreaming?

Overall responsibility for implementing the mainstreaming strategy should rest at the highest levels within Governments and other organizations, including in the United Nations system. Management levels should develop adequate accountability mechanisms for monitoring progress with mainstreaming. One means of ensuring accountability is to establish clear indicators of progress which can be monitored over time by management.

Although the mainstreaming strategy requires a shift of responsibility for promoting gender equality from specialists to all personal, especially management levels, this does not imply that gender specialists are no longer required. The need for specialist support can be increased with the implementation of the mainstreaming strategy, particularly during initial periods. Gender specialists should, however, have new roles – catalysing, advising and supporting the efforts of others rather than doing mainstreaming themselves. Effective roles for gender specialists requires adequate allocation of resources, clear mandates and strategic location within organizations. Specialists require the strong support of, and direct access to, senior management levels.

How is gender mainstreaming done?

The first step required is an assessment of the *linkages between gender equality and the issue or sector being worked on*, that is, to identify the gender implications of working on, for example, environment, poverty elimination, health development, and all other areas of development. This involves understanding why promotion of gender equality is important for securing human rights / social justice for both women and men, as well as for achievement of development goals. Secondly the *opportunities for introducing gender perspectives* need to be identified in the work tasks undertaken. These opportunities or entry-points can be found in research and analysis, policy development, use of statistics, training events and workshops/conferences, as well as in planning and implementing 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 outcomes. This could include, for example, giving attention to gender perspectives and t

he goal of gender equality in terms or reference and job descriptions. *Institutional development*, in terms of developing guidelines, utilizing gender specialists, providing competence development for all personnel, etc., is also required to support gender mainstreaming.

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(CH rev. August 2001)