

Gender mainstreaming - a strategy for promoting gender equality: With particular focus on HIV/AIDs and racism

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Introduction

The 189 countries attending the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 endorsed gender mainstreaming as a key strategy for promoting equality between women and men. The United Nations and other international organizations were called upon to implement the strategy in their own work and support the efforts of Member Countries. In 1997 the Economic and Social Council provided concrete guidelines on how the United Nations should work to incorporate gender perspectives in its work programmes (ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2). The importance of the gender mainstreaming strategy was reinforced in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to follow-up the implementation of the Platform for Action (June 2000). Other intergovernmental bodies and events have also provided important mandates for gender mainstreaming in specific areas of work of the United Nations. For example, a major breakthrough on gender mainstreaming in the area of peace and security was achieved with the Security Council resolution 1325 (October 2000) which clearly states that there is an "urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations".

The strong focus on the advancement of women and gender equality within the United Nations over the past three decades has led to increased international recognition that there are important gender perspectives in relation the overall goals of the United Nations, such as poverty eradication, human rights, good governance, environmentally sustainable development and peace and security, as well as in all other areas of the work of the United Nations. These perspectives must be taken into account in data collection, analysis, policy making and planning, to ensure the achievement of gender equality, effective and sustainable development and peace and security.

Gender mainstreaming involves bringing the contributions, perspectives and priorities of both women and men to the centre of attention in all areas of societal development. Governments and the United Nations made commitments in the Platform for Action to consider the realities of women and men and the potential impact of planned activities on women and men before any decisions on goals, strategies, actions and resource allocations are made. Implementing the mainstreaming strategy within the United Nations system itself, and supporting the implementation of the strategy by Member

States, is one of the most important means for the United Nations to further the advancement of women and promote gender equality throughout the world.

Implementing gender mainstreaming

In the years since the establishment of gender mainstreaming as a key strategy in the Platform for Action, efforts have been made throughout the United Nations to develop the capacity to identify and address relevant gender perspectives in all areas of work, at both normative/policy and operational/programme level. Many organizations have established institutional arrangements to support gender mainstreaming, such as gender units and gender focal point systems, and capacity building initiatives are undertaken across the system. Gender perspectives are being incorporated into procedures and processes, such as planning, budgeting and reporting processes, and guidelines and other materials to support staff are being developed to ensure gender perspectives are taken into consideration in data collection and research, analysis, support to legislative change, policy development and monitoring and evaluation.

Organizations in the United Nations system support Governments to develop gender-sensitive policies and strategies and to take gender perspectives into consideration in planning, implementing and monitoring development interventions, in health, education, poverty eradication, agriculture, water development and all other areas of collaboration. Considerable support is given to capacity development. Non-governmental organizations and groups and networks in civil society are also supported to play critical advocacy roles in relation to gender mainstreaming and monitor the adherence to all commitments made by Governments. Efforts are also being taken to involve more men in promoting gender equality through gender mainstreaming.

Despite these efforts, there is still a long way to go before gender perspectives are routinely incorporated into all areas of development. While it is relatively easy to secure agreement that gender mainstreaming is an important strategy for promoting gender equality, implementation of the strategy has proven more difficult than originally anticipated. There is potential for gender perspectives to be routinely incorporated into all areas of work of the United Nations, but implementing gender mainstreaming can initially require significant changes in how business is done. Trying to bring the realities of both women and men - their contributions, perspectives, needs and priorities - to bear on data collection, analyses, policy development, planning, implementation and monitoring in all areas of development, requires specific knowledge and capacity. There can be need for changes in awareness (and in some cases even in terms of attitudes), in knowledge on gender issues and in methods and approaches. Ability to work with gender mainstreaming should be regarded as a professional competence required of all staff.

There are a number of key elements which must be in place to ensure successful gender mainstreaming. Firstly, there is need for a good understanding of the *concepts* underlying the gender mainstreaming strategy - gender, gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Secondly, there must be awareness of and acceptance of the *dual rationale* for giving

attention to gender perspectives and promoting gender equality - that it is not only necessary for securing human rights and social and economic justice for women, but that without attention to gender perspectives and gender equality the goals of development cannot be attained. Thirdly, there should be a sound knowledge of the general *mandates* on gender mainstreaming as well as the more specific mandates pertaining to particular areas of work. Fourthly, a good knowledge of the *relevant gender perspectives* in relation to the particular areas of work is required. And finally, *capacity* to effectively address these gender perspectives is necessary.

Gender mainstreaming in any sector/issue thus requires developing an understanding of the gender perspectives related to that area of work and identifying the entry-points in the methods and procedures of work for giving adequate attention to these gender perspectives. The Platform for Action established gender analysis as one of the most basic requirements for gender mainstreaming - ensuring that differences and inequalities between women and men are identified before any decisions are taken, including on establishment of goals, strategies, activities to be undertaken and allocation of resources.

Gender mainstreaming requires attention to what can be called the six basic Rs: the ROLES and RESPONSIBILITIES - i.e. the actual and potential contributions of women and men in the area concerned and the constraints and opportunities related to these; the RELATIONS between women and men and how these are reflected at household and community levels and sustain differences and inequalities between women and men; the RESOURCES and RIGHTS involved and the hindrances experienced by women, respectively men, in terms of access to and control over resources and the securing of human rights; and the REPRESENTATION of women and men in decision-making processes, both formal and informal, and the need to promote more equitable involvement of women in decision-making where inequalities are observed.

Gender mainstreaming in relation to HIV/Aids and racism

Gender mainstreaming in HIV/AIDs

It is well established today that there are important gender perspectives in relation to prevention of HIV/AIDs; the risks of infection; the social impact of infection on individuals at both household and community level; the socio-economic consequences of infection for individuals, households and communities and possible means of addressing these consequences; and access to and quality of care. There are clear gender differences and inequalities related to the factors identified as increasing vulnerability to infection, such as health and nutritional status and poverty. The risk of mother-to-child transmission is a particular feature of the HIV/AIDs epidemic, which also has gender dimensions.

It is important to understand and highlight the direct impact of the roles and relations of women and men on differences and inequalities between women and men in relation to vulnerability to HIV/AIDs, access to care, and responsibilities and burdens imposed by

infection of women or men themselves or of family members. It is important to be clear that the lack of control over their own bodies and sexual lives of women and girls, in the context of more general socio-economic and political inequality and subordination, is an critical factor in the vulnerable situation of women in many parts of the world in relation to HIV/AIDs. Issues of power, human rights and socio-cultural expectations of both women and men are critical elements in addressing HIV/AIDs from a gender perspective. As the report of the Expert Group Meeting on "The HIV/AIDS pandemic and its gender implications", held recently in Windhoek, clearly points out, the transformation of gender relations is fundamental to effectively addressing the epidemic.

It is equally important to identify the impact of globalization, in particular through increased trafficking of women, and situations of armed conflict on the spread of HIV/AIDs and the particularly vulnerable position of women and girls in these situations. The persistent poverty in many parts of the world also facilitates the spread of HIV/AIDs. The gender perspectives in terms of causes of poverty, impact of poverty and possible coping strategies, need to be considered. It should be kept in mind, however, that women must not be seen only as vulnerable. Women are also actors and change agents and the active mobilization of women and support to their efforts can both enhance the social, economic and political empowerment of women and support preventative strategies and strategies to address the consequences of HIV/AIDs.

Once all interlinkages between gender perspectives and HIV/AIDs have been established - the gender differences and inequalities in all the areas mentioned above - it is important to assess where in the processes and procedures around data collection, analysis, policy development and planning and implementation of activities, it is necessary and possible to pay attention to these gender perspectives.

One very basic requirement would be that all statistics related to HIV/AIDs - on infection rates, mortality rates, etc - should be sex-disaggregated. Similarly, any indicators developed should incorporate attention to gender perspectives. Research carried out on the impact of HIV/AIDs at all levels - individual, household, community, regional, national and global levels - should integrate relevant gender perspectives. There are gender perspectives which need to be taken into account in all types of studies - whether assessing the impacts of HIV/AIDs on overall economic development or in specific sectors such as agriculture, industry; identifying the impact of HIV/AIDs on development of the labour market, food security, or on education; or highlighting changes in family patterns or age structures as a result of HIV/AIDs. Ensuring gender perspectives are an integral part of all research requires that Terms of Reference for studies take up gender perspectives specifically; that researchers are briefed adequately on requirements for incorporating gender perspectives, including consultation with both women and men; and that wherever possible, gender specialists should be included on research teams. The conclusions and recommendations from any such research, or expert meetings and other critical policy-making or planning meetings, must reflect gender perspectives.

Activities such as education for HIV/AIDs prevention must take into account the realities of women and men and boys and girls, be adapted to their needs and accessible to all.

Disaster relief measures must be carefully planned to ensure that the needs of all groups, including both women and men, are taken into account. Policy development and planning in the provision of care must consider the roles and responsibilities of women and men, particularly in terms of the care provided in the home, and the impact of the burden of care on the survival of the rest of the family. Gender perspectives need to be identified in relation to access to different types of medical treatment and services. Development interventions to support households and communities suffering negative socio-economic impacts of the epidemic must consider the roles, responsibilities and needs of women as well as men, particularly in relation to extension services and credits.

Gender mainstreaming in racism

Factors such as age, disability, socio-economic position, membership of a particular ethnic, racial or religious group can lead to different forms of discrimination for women and men, boys and girls. There is increasing recognition that failure to address the differences between groups of women can obscure serious issues of double discrimination for some groups of women, including situations where women are denied normal means of redress and human rights protection. The notion of intersectionality in the discussion on discrimination seeks to capture the structural consequences of the intersection of two or more forms of discrimination or systems of subordination. Systems of discrimination or subordination often overlap and can create complex intersections. When such intersectional discrimination is simplified, or characterized as being only one form of discrimination - gender discrimination or racial discrimination rather than as a combination of both, there is a serious risk that the consequences remain inadequately addressed, including from a human rights perspective.

There is a growing consensus that gender discrimination can combine with other forms of discrimination to create particular obstacles for women. It is important to understand the complexity of situations of discrimination of women. Characterizing trafficking of women as solely an issue of gender discrimination, while ignoring the racial, ethnic and class dimensions of the problem, does women a disservice by ignoring essential elements in the analysis of causes and possible means of addressing the problem. Attention has to be paid to the groups of women who are more likely to be trafficked and greater understanding developed on the links between their vulnerability to trafficking and other aspects of their situation, such as race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, etc. Similarly, analysis of situations of domestic violence must take into account the total socio-cultural background of victims and the impact of other factors such as race, ethnic group or religious affiliation, if adequate preventative measures are to be developed and solutions found. On a very practical level, as the report from the Expert Meeting on "Gender and Racial Discrimination" clearly illustrates, the interaction of legislation relating to immigrant status and social benefits may leave immigrant women trapped in relationships where they are subjected to domestic violence.

In the same manner, in other situations the disadvantage and discrimination women face may be perceived as the result of racial discrimination only. The gendered nature of the discrimination may not be recognized. Racial discrimination does not affect women and

men in the same ways and there are circumstances where racial discrimination primarily (or solely) affects women. Abuses specifically targeted against women occur in contexts of armed conflict, for example.

The intersection of gender discrimination and race discrimination is particularly evident in relation to migration, trafficking, and violence against women, particularly in situations of armed conflict. In recent years women have been the victims of targeted ethnically-motivated forms of violence in many conflict situations. In the labour market women may be doubly discriminated against because of their race or ethnicity. In addition to the gender discrimination inherent in highly sex-segregated labour markets, these women may find themselves excluded from segments of the labour market open to women, or having access only to low-status / low-pay employment. Many marginalized women find jobs in the free trade zones or the unregulated informal sector where there is less protection of workers. Women who enter a country as domestic workers, or who enter illegally, are at greater risk of detention and are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Dependence on the employer, isolated working conditions, long working hours, social isolation, poor language skills and low pay create situations of vulnerability for migrant women workers. Implementation of restrictive immigration policies can reflect both racist and sexist sentiments.

Human rights issues are an integral part of the problem in forms of discrimination which involve issues of both gender and race. For example, the reproductive rights of minority women, particularly poor women, have been compromised through policies of sterilization, forced birth control and disincentives for childbearing. Policing policies and practices may also discriminate against racialized women, particularly incarcerated women who may be subjected to different forms of multiple discrimination in prison, including sexual abuse. Gender and race perspectives need to be mainstreamed into the work of all mechanisms of the human rights system, including treaty bodies, commissions and rapporteurs and working groups. As the report from the Expert Group Meeting points out, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination should ensure that a gender perspective is incorporated into its work under its early warning and urgent action procedures and in its general recommendations. Similarly the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women should acknowledge the intersection of gender and race discrimination and ensure that consideration of States parties' reports addresses this intersection.

All data collection, research, analysis, policy development and planning, implementation and monitoring of activities in these areas must give adequate consideration to both gender and race perspectives and the inter-linkages between them. Consideration of gender and race perspectives should pervade all policy and programme development on labour markets, immigration policies, health - in particular reproductive health, violence against women, policing and trafficking. Development of anti-racist policies, strategies and programmes must take gender perspectives into account. Gender-sensitive training must be provided to officials with greatest contact with marginalized women in order to eliminate sex and race stereotypes and develop greater gender sensitivity, for example for

the judiciary, police, and relevant government officials such as labour officials, teachers, health professionals, immigration authorities, police, and others.

The work of intergovernmental bodies should also be developed on the basis of adequate analyses of gender and race perspectives. For example, the work on social inclusion, as follow-up to the Social Summit, should give attention to the exclusion experienced on the basis of gender and race discrimination and develop policies, strategies and programmes to facilitate social inclusion for groups of women facing this double discrimination.

Conclusion

All organizations working with HIV/AIDs and racism in Governments, international organizations and NGOs, need to reassess their goals, strategies, actions and resource allocations from a gender perspective. There is no blueprint for gender mainstreaming. The specific organizational contexts offer both potentials and constraints for incorporating gender perspectives. Organizations need to develop strategies to build on the potentials and overcome constraints. Some form of institutional development - through the appointment of specialists to help develop strategies or development of capacity-building activities - is usually needed to introduce the gender mainstreaming strategy and enhance internal competence for implementing it.

An important element of gender mainstreaming in relation to HIV/AIDs and racism is to ensure that the forthcoming global conferences on these issues give explicit attention to gender perspectives in all themes covered and the conclusions and recommendations arrived at. NGOs and civil society groups can play a critical role in ensuring that this happens.

A strong, continued commitment to gender mainstreaming is one of the most effective means for the United Nations to support real change at all levels - in research, legislation, policy development and planning and in activities on the ground. Gender mainstreaming is essential to ensure that women as well as men can influence the direction of, participate in and benefit from development efforts in all areas, including in relation to HIV/AIDs and racism. There is a continued need, however, to complement the gender mainstreaming strategy with targeted interventions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly where there are glaring instances of persistent discrimination of women and inequality between women and men.