

# **Supporting gender mainstreaming**

## **The work of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women**

The Platform for Action established gender mainstreaming as the major global strategy for ensuring the incorporation of gender perspectives in all areas of societal development and the promotion of gender equality. The ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2 established some important overall principles for gender mainstreaming and the letter of the Secretary General (13 October 1997) provided further concrete directives to heads of all United Nations entities. The recent General Assembly special session to follow-up implementation of the Platform for Action (June 2000) enhanced the mainstreaming mandate within the United Nations.

As part of follow-up to the Platform for Action and the ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2, the Secretary-General has held periodical discussions on gender mainstreaming at senior management level

(cabinet level). The Secretary-General has also chaired discussions of gender mainstreaming in the ACC (Administrative Committee on Coordination).

A strong, continued commitment to gender mainstreaming is one of the most effective means for the United Nations to support promotion of gender equality at all levels - in research, legislation, policy development and in activities on the ground, and to ensure that women as well as men can influence, participate in and benefit from development efforts. 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.

### **Supporting gender mainstreaming within the United Nations**

The Special Adviser has the mandate to promote, facilitate and monitor the gender mainstreaming efforts of the entire United Nations system. Since 1997 the Office of the Special Adviser has systematically encouraged and supported the departments in the Secretariat, the regional commissions and the United Nations Offices in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, as well as other parts of the United Nations system, to increase attention to gender perspectives in their substantive work. The Special Adviser holds meetings on gender mainstreaming with

senior management in United Nations entities whenever the opportunity arises. Assessments, consultation and advice and support on request have been an important part of the process of collaboration. With the additional resource of a Principal Officer to support the Special Adviser on gender mainstreaming (from September 1999) it has been possible to initiate more in-depth processes of consultation with senior managers and direct collaboration with different parts of the United Nations.

Within the United Nations Secretariat, including the regional commissions, the work of the Office of the Special Adviser has focused on advocacy, providing briefings and advice to senior management to promote a greater understanding of gender mainstreaming; developing methodologies and tools, including concept notes and briefing notes on gender perspectives in different sectors and issues; developing competencies and a resource base of consultants to support training on gender mainstreaming; working with institutional arrangements to develop a conducive environment; and establishing contacts and partnerships with entities in the United Nations system, Member States' delegations, NGOs and academics.

Initial analysis of the obstacles and constraints to gender mainstreaming in the Secretariat, including the regional commissions, identified considerable confusion around concepts, in particular the equating of gender mainstreaming with gender balance in the Organization: lack of understanding of what gender mainstreaming entails in practical terms; and lack of access to support mechanisms. Unlike other parts of the United Nations system which have had relatively well established gender units or specialist

positions for some time, most departments in the Secretariat have not had access to consistent specialist support. Some departments do have Gender Focal Points but such focal points need training and systematic back-up to be effective resources in the departments. Most of the regional commissions do, however, have gender units<sup>i</sup>, although the location and level of resources varies between the commissions.

Most departments in the Secretariat have not received any gender training. The Office of Human Resources Management recently provided training on gender sensitivity and gender mainstreaming to two departments in the Secretariat, the Department of Political Affairs (1998) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (1999) and to the United Nations office in Vienna (1999). A competence development programme focussed specifically on gender mainstreaming was initiated in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 2000. The regional commissions and other parts of the United Nations, such as UNCHS, have also organized their own internal training programmes. The Office of Human Resources Management supported a training programme on gender sensitivity and gender mainstreaming in ESCWA (1999).

### **Specific examples of collaboration**

Consultation has been initiated with individual senior managers in seven of the twelve departments in the Secretariat<sup>ii</sup> and in three of five regional commissions (ESCAP, ESCWA and ECE). Detailed reports containing assessments of potential for gender mainstreaming and concrete recommendations for moving forward have been prepared for the regional commissions visited. Within the Secretariat there has been

a strong focus on concrete follow-up to the consultations through identifying activities which could provide opportunities for reaching all staff in the departments and developing greater awareness, commitment and capacity. These can include competence development programmes, documentation of good practice or preparation of briefing notes to clarify the gender perspectives on particular sectors or issues. The approach

taken varies from department to department, because of differing stages of awareness, commitment and specific priorities of senior management.

In the Department for Disarmament Affairs, for example, since there was limited awareness of the linkages and synergies between gender and disarmament, the approach taken was to develop briefing notes on gender in relation to small arms, landmines, weapons of mass destruction, DDR (disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation), disarmament initiatives for development and women's advocacy roles in disarmament. The department plans to disseminate the briefing notes broadly and to use them in fellowship programmes and as a resource in a planned competence development programme on gender mainstreaming for professional staff in the department.

As part of the collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, inputs have been provided, on request, through development of job descriptions for the Gender Units in Kosovo and East Timor and provision of back-up support to staff in these units, and development of a job description for a Gender Unit in the department itself. There has also been collaboration on a project on gender and peacekeeping with the Lessons Learned Unit in the department. The Mines Action Service was actively involved in the development of the briefing note on gender and land-mines, in collaboration with the Department for Disarmament Affairs. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is playing an active role in preparing the interagency action plan for the implementation of the Security Council resolution 1325 and in the preparation of the Secretary General's report on women, peace and security.

Discussions have been held with the Office of Programme Planning, Budgets and Accounts on ways and means of promoting greater attention to gender perspectives in the instructions for the preparation of Medium-term Plans and Programme Budgets, and more effective follow-up on implementation of intentions at the level of programme activities. Excellent work has been done by the Programme Planning and Budget Division on providing clear instructions on gender mainstreaming in the budget instructions. Concerted efforts have been made by all parts of the United Nations to comply with the guidelines and incorporate gender perspectives in at least one sub-programme, with accompanying indicators of achievement. This increased focus on gender perspectives should be of interest to the Committee on Programme and Coordination (CPC) when it takes up the proposed programme budget, 2002-2003. It is hoped that further collaboration with the Programme Planning and Budget Division will lead to the development of more detailed guidelines and good practice examples to increase the focus on gender mainstreaming in programme budgets in the future.

Specific consultations have been held with the Department of Political Affairs and the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs on mainstreaming gender perspectives into programme budgets. Discussions have recently been initiated with the Office of Internal Oversight Services on ways and means of following up implementation of gender mainstreaming in the programme budget. Briefings on gender mainstreaming will be provided by the Special Adviser to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the

Committee on Programme and Coordination (CPC).

The Office has provided briefings on gender mainstreaming for Member State delegations, and has responded to individual requests from representatives of Member

States for information and materials. Contact has also been established with NGOs and academics, particularly through the collaboration with the Department of Disarmament Affairs on disarmament and in the areas of peace support.

## **Development of methods and tools to support gender mainstreaming**

Follow-up of the consultations with senior managers in ESCAP, ESCWA and ECE by the Office of the Special Adviser has focused on development of briefing notes to cover some of the areas where managers indicated that there was a lack of knowledge and capacity. These include a series of briefing notes on *trade, macro-economics* and *statistics* as well as individual notes on specific sectors areas such as *energy, governance, water resources management, social development* and *public administration*. The briefing notes are four pages long and contain three sections. The first section introduces the linkages between gender perspectives and the issue being discussed; the second section provides some ideas on what might need to be done differently as a result of understanding these linkages; and the third section provides a resource listing with good references, websites, etc., to assist in developing a deeper understanding of how to bring gender perspectives to the centre of attention in relation to the issue/sector under discussion. These notes will be made available to all regional commissions and to other relevant parts of the United Nations, such as UNCHS, UNCTAD and the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention.

Close collaboration has also been developed with the Office of Human Resources Management within the

Secretariat in developing a framework for competence development on gender mainstreaming and identifying suitable facilitators for each sector or issue covered. To move away from the one-off training workshop approach, a four-pronged approach has been developed. The programme is carried out division by division to ensure an adequate focus on the specific work programme of each division. An introductory meeting for the whole division, led by the Director, introduces the programmes, its aims and processes, and the commitment required from staff.

In the second stage working group sessions are held with smaller groups of professionals, usually by branch, in which the work programme is discussed in more detail, as well as the extent to which gender perspectives have been brought into account in their work. These sessions serve to provide a greater understanding for the consultants on the work of the professionals, their knowledge of gender perspectives and the constraints they face. It also provides an opportunity for the professional staff to start considering gender perspectives in their work.

The third stage is a one-day workshop for groups of no more than 20-25 professional staff where there is opportunity for discussion of concepts, analysis of case studies to further develop understanding of the linkages between gender and the areas of

work of the division, and work on developing capacity for integrating gender perspectives. The participants are encouraged to arrive at concrete steps which could be taken in their work to better incorporate gender perspectives. Once all divisions in the department have participated in the programme, a "town-hall meeting" of the entire department is organized, led by the Under Secretary-General, where all Directors of divisions are required to present their plans for bringing greater attention to gender perspectives in their work programmes.

The competence development framework is being tested in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and will be refined, if necessary, on the basis of the experience gained. The programme covers around 350 professional staff in the department and is being carried out between October 2000 and September 2001. Development of a resource-base of gender mainstreaming facilitators has been initiated and plans are being made for a briefing/training programme for facilitators, in order to develop a core resource-base of good facilitators who can carry out competence development programmes and train other facilitators for use in the United Nations system. A short one-day training was provided for the Gender Focal Points in ESCWA in April 2000 and competence development will be provided for Gender Focal Points in the Secretariat and possibly also in other regional commissions.

A framework for monitoring is under development by the Office of the Special Adviser to facilitate the reviewing of progress in gender mainstreaming, based on the recommendations of the ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2, and the letter of

the Secretary-General of October 1997. Using the indicators identified, a survey is being carried out on gender mainstreaming throughout the United Nations system to provide a benchmark for assessing progress towards gender mainstreaming in the future. The survey is based on information collected through the triannual "rolling" reports to the Commission on the Status of Women, ECOSOC and the General Assembly, the review of the System-wide Medium-term Plan and information contained in reports and on websites. The members of the ACC Interagency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality have also been requested to confirm and complement the information gathered before the survey is finalized.

To address the lack of understanding of concepts, three short two-page notes on gender mainstreaming have been prepared which specifically address concepts. One provides a historic background to the development of gender mainstreaming; the second provides more specific discussion on the different concepts underlying gender mainstreaming; and the third introduces the basic concepts in a discussion of mandates for gender mainstreaming. Apart from the series of briefing notes on trade, macro-economics, statistics and other areas of the work of the regional commissions mentioned above, other basic user-friendly materials are under development, including a short paper introducing the gender mainstreaming strategy, which will be complemented in the coming year with a more operationally-focussed paper addressing approaches and methods for gender mainstreaming. All materials will be made available on WomenWatch ([www.un.org/womenwatch](http://www.un.org/womenwatch)).

## Promoting gender mainstreaming through interagency collaboration

The Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women chairs the ACC Interagency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality<sup>iii</sup> which has worked consistently to ensure greater collaboration and coordination in promoting gender mainstreaming. The work of the interagency group is organized through taskforces which have focused on inventories of good practices in gender mainstreaming, gender focal points and training materials; development of methods to incorporate gender perspectives in programme budgets; and collaborative efforts to influence processes such as CCA/UNDAF, the implementation of the Security Council resolution 1325 and preparations for the international conference on financing for development.

The Special Adviser chairs the interagency taskforce on Women, Peace and Security. The taskforce is preparing an action plan to ensure the collaborative implementation of the Security Council resolution 1325 and is coordinating the preparation of the Secretary General's report on women, peace and security, based on the inputs of all relevant parts of the United Nations system. The Office of the Special Adviser plays an active role in the taskforces on CCA/UNDAF and Financing for Development.

The Office also acts as task manager for the taskforce on Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Budget Processes. This taskforce carried out a project: "Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Budgets in the United Nations System" between

December 1999 and June 2000. In addition to an overview of the efforts of all entities in the system to incorporate gender perspectives into programme budgets, the project included case studies in five entities: UNFPA, DPA, WHO, ILO and ESCAP. A follow-up project is being carried out covering five additional entities: UNICEF, OCHA, UNCTAD, FAO and ESCWA (February - June 2001). On the completion of the case studies in these five entities, a short document will summarize the findings of the two projects and provide some general recommendations or guidelines which could apply throughout the system. Many entities have reported that the process has been extremely beneficial in raising awareness of why and how gender perspectives could be incorporated in programme planning. Members of the interagency group have therefore requested that further case studies are carried out.

At its most recent meeting in February 2001, the interagency group organized a one-day workshop to provide an opportunity for exchange of experiences on approaches and methodologies for gender mainstreaming. The workshop revealed that considerable advances have been made within the United Nations system since the ECOSOC agreed conclusions in 1997 and that the interagency group itself is crucial for providing stimulus, support and learning opportunities to enhance the capacity of individual entities for gender mainstreaming. A report on the workshop will be prepared.

## Conclusions

Promoting gender mainstreaming is a long, slow process, requiring inputs on many fronts over a long period of time, including advocacy, advice and support, competence development, development of methods and tools and vigilance in following up and evaluating progress. Advances made in incorporating gender perspectives in the work of the United Nations need to be recognized and shared across the system through documentation of good practices.

Monitoring and reporting needs to be made more systematic and effective. Further encouragement and support will be systematically provided to the United Nations, including the regional commissions, by the Office of the Special Adviser through regular dialogue and consultation with senior management, support to the gender focal points, further development of methods and tools, and provision of advice and back up on request.

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<sup>i</sup> ECE does not have a full-time gender specialist. ECE has, however, requested one position in its current programme budget submission.

<sup>ii</sup> Department of Disarmament, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Department of Political Affairs, Office of Legal Affairs, Office of Internal Oversight Services, Department of Management - Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Office of Programme Planning, Budgets and Accounts.

<sup>iii</sup> The Interagency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality is a standing committee of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (currently under review and reorganization). There are 67 members of the Interagency Meeting representing 25 entities, with the Secretariat counted as one entity, although there are representatives from departments in the Secretariat, the regional commissions, and UNCTAD, UNEP, OHCHR and UNCHS.