



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

28 July 2008

Excellency,

I have the honour to bring to your attention the attached letter from the Deputy Secretary-General dated 23 July 2008 on the issue of System-wide Coherence and the United Nations' work on gender equality and women's empowerment.

On 19 June 2008, I wrote to the Secretary-General following a letter by the Co-Chairs on system-wide coherence requesting a document setting out the institutional options for strengthening United Nations' work on gender equality and women's empowerment.

In this regard, this document is enclosed herewith for your further consideration as part of our ongoing consultation process.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Srgjan Kerim'.

Srgjan Kerim

All Permanent Representatives and  
Permanent Observers to the United Nations  
New York



THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

23 July 2008

Dear Mr. President,

In response to your letter to the Secretary-General dated 19 June 2008 on the issue of System-wide coherence and the United Nations' work on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, I have the honor to submit to your attention the attached document setting out the institutional options for strengthening the United Nations work in this critical area.

The document aims to address Member States' concerns raised during the intergovernmental consultations carried out by your two Co-chairs, Ambassador Mahiga, Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania and Ambassador Kavanagh, Permanent Representative of Ireland. It also builds upon the Secretariat's earlier contributions to the General Assembly, by briefly outlining the gaps and challenges acknowledged by Member States and the United Nations system alike.

In addition to the current institutional arrangement, the document contains three non-prescriptive options, which could facilitate Members States' consultations on enhancing the United Nations' performance on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

I wish to take this opportunity to once again convey to you, Mr. President, my sincere appreciation for your leadership, and through you, to your two Co-chairs for their commitment and skilful conduct of the intergovernmental consultations on System-wide Coherence, which remains an essential aspect of the overall reform of the United Nations.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asha-Rose Migiro', written in a cursive style.

Asha-Rose Migiro

His Excellency  
Mr. Srgjan Kerim  
President of the General Assembly  
New York

23 July 2008

## **Institutional Options to Strengthen United Nations Work on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women**

### **A. Introduction**

1. The strengthening of the work of the United Nations on gender equality and empowerment of women has been the subject of informal consultations among Member States held on 16 May and 16 June 2008. Having discussed substantive and programmatic aspects of UN support to countries set forth in the related Note of the Secretary-General dated 5 June 2008, Member States agreed that the key gaps and challenges faced by the UN system in its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women should be effectively addressed. Member States agreed that the primary goal of this process should be to strengthen the assistance the UN system gives to Member States towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment at the national level.

2. By a letter dated 19 June 2008, the President of the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a document setting out the institutional options to strengthen the United Nations work on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

### **B. Background**

3. Member States acknowledge that gender equality and women's empowerment are central to achieving development through internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, as well as peace and security. There has been noticeable progress made by Member States in translating international commitments into national strategies, policies and legislation, and 185 States are party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

4. Concurrently, there is also significant consensus that implementation of policies, strategies and plans are not keeping pace with commitments. As a result, gender inequalities still persist in both developing and developed countries. Women around the world continue to disproportionately bear the burden of poverty, to be subjected to gender-based violence and to bear the brunt of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. They also continue to have limited access to credit, land and new technologies, have fewer educational and employment opportunities than men, and remain marginalized in decision-making. Consequently, the ability of half of the world's population to contribute to and benefit from peace and development, and to fully enjoy their human rights, is undermined.

5. National Governments have the primary responsibility for achieving gender equality goals in line with their national strategies. At the grass-roots level, NGOs and civil society play an important role in promoting national implementation. The UN system supports Member States to advance gender equality, including through country gender-specific programmes, as such all UN entities are actively involved in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Inter-agency cooperation has also increased.



6. However, the UN system faces multiple challenges and gaps in its support to Member States as has been articulated by Member States and the UN system alike. Both acknowledged that the following gaps and weaknesses presented challenges to the effective support of national efforts toward gender equality and empowerment of women<sup>1</sup>:

- (a) coordination and coherence (weak linkages between intergovernmental decision and policy making and implementation on the ground, lack of a coherent and system-wide approach and a fragmented intergovernmental policy making);
- (b) authority and positioning (lack of a recognized driver to direct, support and strengthen accountability of the UN system for delivering results on the ground, and through systematic participation in the UN's high-level decision making at the global, regional and country level);
- (c) accountability (inconsistent and inadequate political will and support for gender equality from senior management, lack of system-wide standards and no consequences for non-performance);
- (d) resources (inadequate and unpredictable human and financial resources for gender equality, and limited ability of UN agencies or United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) to track their own resource allocations and expenditures at the country level);
- (e) inadequate country-level support (lack of adequate support for gender analysis, low levels of integration of gender perspectives in Common Country Assessments/United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (CCAs/UNDAFs), weak capacity and poor positioning of gender focal points; insufficient accountability and leadership for gender equality of Resident Coordinators and UNCTs, inadequate cooperative arrangements with sectoral entities at the country level);
- (f) insufficient emphasis on country-driven demands and ownership.

7. The UN system needs to be strengthened in order to overcome these challenges and close the gaps. To achieve sufficient implementation of commitments on the ground, a strengthened institutional arrangement should perform the following functions:<sup>2</sup>

- (a) lead innovative and catalytic country-driven programming, gender mainstreaming and capacity-building, and provide targeted technical cooperation and capacity-building in line with national strategies;
- (b) provide substantive support to UN bodies (Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), General Assembly and Security Council) where commitments, norms, and policy recommendations on gender equality and gender mainstreaming are discussed and agreed upon;
- (c) building on comparative advantage of UN actors, lead and coordinate the system's strategies, policies and actions on gender equality and women's empowerment, and promote effective system-wide gender mainstreaming;

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<sup>1</sup> As reflected in the Secretary-General's Note on the United Nations System Support to Member States on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, 5 June 2008

<sup>2</sup> Based on the Concept Paper on a Strengthened Architecture for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, August 2007

- (d) ensure accountability of the UN system, including through oversight, monitoring and reporting of system-wide performance;
  - (e) undertake global, regional and national advocacy efforts on issues critical to gender equality and women's empowerment to ensure that emerging, under-recognized and under-resourced issues receive national, regional and global attention;
  - (f) undertake new and consolidate existing research and analytical work, to support overall objectives, including acting as a clearing house for knowledge and experience on gender equality and empowerment of women from all parts of the UN system;
  - (g) monitor the implementation of the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Outcome Document of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Session of the General Assembly, and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000);
  - (h) monitor and report on system-wide compliance with intergovernmental mandates on gender balance including at senior/decision-making levels.
8. In addition, it is important that any new arrangement maintains and strengthens the existing close collaboration and synergies between Member States, the UN system and civil society in the pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment.

### **C. Current Intergovernmental and Institutional Arrangements**

#### *(a). Current intergovernmental processes*

9. The General Assembly, ECOSOC and CSW, in accordance with their respective mandates, constitute a three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism with the primary role in policymaking on gender equality and follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

10. The Third Committee of the General Assembly has two agenda items devoted specifically to gender equality and advancement of women, and the Second Committee of the General Assembly addresses issues concerning women in development on a biannual basis. Since 1997, ECOSOC and its functional commissions have paid great attention to gender mainstreaming in follow-up to its agreed conclusions 1997/2.<sup>3</sup> CSW plays a central role in monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and in promoting gender mainstreaming at the national level and within the United Nations system. Since 2000, the Security Council has held annual debates on women, peace and security, including on the overall implementation of its resolution 1325 (2000), and on violence against women in situations of armed conflict. At its open thematic debate of 19 June 2008, the Security Council adopted resolution 1820 (2008) on rape and other forms of sexual violence in armed conflict.

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<sup>3</sup> *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session; Supplement No. 3 (A/52/3/Rev.1), chap. IV, para. 4.*



11. Intergovernmental bodies for the Funds, Programmes and Specialized Agencies also play a role in decision-making on implementation of policies on gender equality and women's empowerment within their respective mandates.

*(b) Current gender institutional arrangements*

**(i) Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)**

12. This Office advises the Secretary-General on and advocates for gender equality within the United Nations and gender mainstreaming in the work of the entire Organization. It also has responsibility for the coordination of policy within the United Nations system, coordination of issues related to the nexus of women, peace and security, and monitoring of actions for the achievement of gender balance within the United Nations system.

**(ii) Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)**

13. The Division provides substantive servicing to CSW, ECOSOC and the Third Committee of the General Assembly and support for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

**(iii) United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)**

14. UNIFEM supports innovative activities benefiting women in line with national and regional priorities, promotes women's involvement in mainstream development; and plays an innovative and catalytic role in this regard.

**(iv) International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)**

15. The objectives of INSTRAW are to assist, through research, training and collection of information, the advancement of women and their integration in the development process both as participants and beneficiaries.

**(v) Gender units and focal points/experts in United Nations entities**

16. Specialized agencies and other entities of the United Nations system work on specific actions within their respective mandates by aligning priorities and directing resources to meet the global priorities of the Beijing Platform for Action. Other international institutions and organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions, work to ensure that investments and programmes benefit women and contribute to sustainable development. Most organizations have gender units and many have networks of gender focal points, though all of these vary in size and staffing.

17. Gender units have been set up in some of the peacekeeping missions to facilitate the integration of gender perspectives into the work of United Nations peace support missions, advise mission leadership on gender issues and maintain liaison with women's organizations and national machineries for women. Regional Commissions have established similar divisions, units, or focal points to support Member States in addressing gender equality issues from the regional and sub-regional perspectives.

**(vi) UNCTs and Gender Theme Groups**

18. UNCTs led by the Resident Coordinators, and a growing number of UN inter-agency Gender Theme Groups – often led by gender experts from the funds and programmes or from specialized agencies -- provide support to host country governments as they seek to integrate gender perspectives into their policies, programmes, legislation, budgets and data-collection mechanisms through such instruments as the Common Country Assessment (CCA), United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and the Consolidated Appeal process. In an increasing number of countries, Gender Theme Groups promote the importance of achieving gender equality through advocacy, technical support, capacity-building, and community interventions.

**(vii) Inter-agency mechanisms**

19. Coordinating mechanisms for policy and programme include the Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE), UNDG Task Team on Gender Equality, and other coordination mechanisms at the global, regional and national levels. The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and its High-level Committees on Programme, Management and the Development Group (HLCP, HLCM and UNDG), also play an increasingly important role in inter-agency coordination of gender-related policies at the level of Heads of UN entities.

**D. Institutional Options**

20. In dealing with institutional arrangements for gender equality within the UN system, there are two approaches: (i) maintain the system as it is currently and (ii) strengthen the existing institutional arrangements through consolidation of OSAGI, DAW, UNIFEM and INSTRAW. The second approach would entail establishing an entity along one of the following three possible organizational options: (a) a single autonomous fund/programme, (b) a department of the Secretariat, or (c) a composite entity.

21. The major similarities among the three options for consolidation are the following:



- Leadership would be at the level of Under-Secretary-General and the Secretary-General would continue to hold Executive Heads of UN entities accountable for incorporating gender equality and women's empowerment into their programmes of work;
- Authority for gender mainstreaming programmes and budgets would reside with the Executive Heads;
- Policy coherence and coordination would be achieved through the inter-agency coordination machinery for all options. At the country level however, this would be achieved through participation in the UNCTs, where these exist, under the Resident Coordinator system;
- Increased resources to adequately support gender equality work at both the country and regional levels would be required;
- Country level presence would be achieved.

22. The major differences among the three options requiring consolidation are:

- Governance would be different. The autonomous fund/programme would have an Executive Board while the Department would report, through the Secretary-General, to CSW, ECOSOC, the General Assembly and the Security Council. The "composite" would have a new governing body for policy and programmes. This body would report to either ECOSOC, or the General Assembly and to the Security Council on women, peace and security.
- Interface between operational and normative dimensions: the fund/programme would not fulfill the Charter requirement of provision of substantive servicing of ECOSOC and other Organs, but the fund/programme, the department and the "composite" would provide for interface between normative and operational work.
- The autonomous fund/programme would be financed solely from voluntary contribution; the department would be mostly funded through assessed contributions, and the "composite" would require a combination of voluntary and assessed contributions.
- The department would have a country level presence through advisers, while the fund/programme and the "composite" would also have country representatives stationed at the UNCT offices, or working with any other UN structure or with national women's machineries where there are no UN structures.

23. Below is a comparative analysis of each of the four options and their implications for the strengthening of the UN system with regard to gender equality and women empowerment.

#### **Option A – Status quo**

24. This option would not entail any structural changes in the current institutional arrangements detailed in paragraphs 12–19. If the Member States significantly increased contributions to the four entities and greater collaboration within the UN system was achieved, this could strengthen support for gender equality and women's empowerment. It could also increase the capacity of the four women-specific entities to more strategically leverage their complementary functions through joint actions and cost-sharing arrangements, where possible.



For instance, by building on the model established by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Programme and United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, in the "Working Together" programme, the four entities could better drive coordinated action, comprehensive information dissemination, and link the normative and operational work. The current institutional arrangements would also benefit from on-going reforms under the system-wide coherence. However, the gaps, challenges and weaknesses set out in paragraph 6 above would remain.

#### **Option B – Autonomous Fund/Programme**

25. This option would involve the establishment of an autonomous fund/programme that would consolidate the entities described in paragraphs 12 – 15 into a single entity, and perform the functions set out in paragraph 7.

26. **Governance.** The fund/programme would report to an Executive Board and ECOSOC. The Executive Head of the fund/programme would report to the Secretary-General and would be at the Under-Secretary-General level. The Executive Head would be the spokesperson and voice of the UN system on gender issues. This option would provide central **leadership and authority** for gender equality and women's empowerment as a thematic priority in the UN system through a governing body that would focus on the implementation of the mandates and resolutions on gender equality and women's empowerment.

27. **Country-level Presence and Impact.** The autonomous fund/programme would deploy Representatives to countries with the agreement of the government and with sufficient authority to formulate and implement programmes, provide guidance to the UNCT and advise the Resident Coordinator. Coordination with other UN entities would work through the Resident Coordinator system. The fund/programme representative would be a full member of the UNCT and would have the authority to speak on gender equality and women's empowerment at the country level. In countries where there is no UN presence; the fund/programme would work with national women's machineries. As an autonomous fund/programme, with a focus on catalytic programming to support Member States to manage national strategies for gender equality and women's empowerment, the fund/programme would need to have systems that permit sufficient operational flexibility within the UN Financial Rules and Regulations to function effectively at the country level. This option would directly impact on country-level activities with a mix of international and locally hired expertise and would strengthen the collaboration with other UN entities at the country level.

28. **Inter-Agency Coordination on Policy and Programme.** The Head of the autonomous fund/programme would be a full member of the CEB and its committees, including UNDG, and would chair IANGWE. Participation at this policy level would enable the head of the fund/programme to influence decision-making of other Executive Heads and to act as a **strong driver** for gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

29. **Funding.** This model would be fully funded from voluntary contributions.

30. **Analysis.** This option would deliver innovative and catalytic country-driven programmes, provide targeted technical assistance and capacity-building. It offers the opportunity for



coordination with other UN entities through the CEB and IANWGE at the policy level and through the Resident Coordinator system at the country level. In both forums, the fund/programme would participate equally with other agency heads/representatives. As a fund/programme, this entity would need to have a strong resource mobilization function to support its activities at Headquarters and in the field. The potential exists for the fund/programme to broaden its resource base and increase the voluntary contributions significantly. At the same time, dependency on voluntary contributions might drive programme priorities, particularly if some funding would be earmarked. The unpredictable nature of voluntary funding might impact on the effective delivery of support to countries. This fund/programme would not provide substantive servicing to CSW, ECOSOC and the General Assembly as required by Article 101 (2) of the Charter.<sup>4</sup> However, those aspects of the normative work that involve servicing and support to CSW, ECOSOC and the General Assembly would remain the responsibility of the UN Secretariat in accordance with the UN Charter. This would sustain the existing gap between intergovernmental policy and operational activities.

### Option C – Department

31. In this option, a Department would be established within the UN Secretariat to perform all the functions that are required under paragraph 7.
32. **Governance.** The Department would be headed by an Under-Secretary-General and would report to the Secretary-General. The relationship between the Department and the intergovernmental bodies, including the CSW would not change.
33. **Country-level presence and impact.** The Department would have some presence at the country level as is normally done by UN Departments through the deployment of advisers to implement technical assistance programmes in some countries. In this case, the Department would assign Gender Advisers at a senior level to work with governments. However, this Department would probably not have sufficient operational capacity to respond to the growing demands of many countries.
34. **Inter-Agency Coordination.** Coordination would take place through the Chief Executives Board and its subsidiary bodies. While the Head of Department would not be a member of CEB, he/she would participate as a member of the UN Team. The Head of Department would chair IANWGE and would also participate in the UNDG.
35. **Funding.** The work of the Department would be mostly funded through assessed contributions as approved by the General Assembly. The Department would receive extra-budgetary funding through voluntary contributions for its work at the country level.
36. **Analysis.** This model would alter the governance structure of the UN gender specific operational work and replace it with the existing governance structures of UN gender specific

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<sup>4</sup> Article 101 (2) – Appropriate staffs shall be permanently assigned to the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, and, as required to other organs of the United Nations. These staffs shall form a part of the Secretariat.



normative support through which the Department would be the primary initiator of policy guidance to the UN system on gender equality and women's empowerment. It would be an effective channel through which information on intergovernmental decisions and recommendations would flow to other entities. By consolidating the four women-specific entities into a Department, coordination and coherence would be improved and gender equality work would become more visible.

37. With an established country presence, the Department could also link the normative work with implementation on the ground. However, it would not have the operational effectiveness and administrative flexibility to attract large amounts of extra-budgetary funds required to coordinate large multi-sectoral country-level programmes. The advisors fielded to countries for technical support would most likely have no or a limited voice in UN Country Teams and lack of the influence of the ExComm or specialized agencies.

38. Under this option **authority and leadership** for gender equality and women's empowerment would remain vested in the Secretary-General, who would hold Executive Heads accountable.

39. This option would have implications for in the regular budget of the UN Secretariat in order to support all the functions that would be brought together into the Departmental structure.

#### **Option D – “Composite” Entity**

40. This would entail combining normative and operational work on gender equality and women's empowerment. The entity would be based on a governance arrangement that strengthen links between normative and operational policies. At the operational level, the “composite entity” would have a structure that would be characterized by close coordination between UN agencies in planning and implementation of country-driven activities. At present this type of structure does not exist in any single UN entity that was reviewed as part of this exercise.

41. **Governance.** Under this option, the Executive Head, who would be at the Under-Secretary-General level, would report to an intergovernmental governing body which would combine policy and programme responsibilities and report either to ECOSOC or the General Assembly. The “composite” would be the policy driver for the UN system for gender equality and women's empowerment. The Executive Head would have delegated authority for financial and administrative matters from the UN Secretary-General in order to give the entity the ability to act with some flexibility especially in its activities at the country level.

42. **Country-level presence and impact.** The entity would provide support to Member States in cooperation with other UN entities and in line with national strategies for gender equality. Operational capacity would be established to enhance country ownership. The entity would work in collaboration with the Resident Coordinator and with women's national machineries where there would be no UN presence. However, the form of country presence would differ in accordance with the needs of countries. This could include country or regional representation and a mix of international and locally hired expertise.



43. **Inter-agency Coordination.** Inter-agency coordination mechanisms in this option would not differ from those described for the autonomous fund/programme and the department.

44. **Funding.** The "composite" would be funded from the regular budget of the UN Secretariat for its normative work; and through voluntary contributions for operational activities. Enhanced fund-raising capacity would be required to establish and maintain the fund. Under this option, a Fund for the purpose of supporting the country-driven demands of Member States directly or through UN entities would be established.

45. **Analysis.** This option would provide a coherent governance structure combining policy and implementation work on gender equality and women's empowerment. The positioning of the Executive Head of this entity would provide leadership and advocacy at the global level for the issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment. However, this option would not replace the authority of the Secretary-General to hold Executive Heads accountable for gender mainstreaming. This option could enhance policy coordination and coherence through existing and strengthened mechanisms. At the country level, the ability to lead innovative and catalytic country-driven programming and engage in joint programming with other entities, could also encourage greater coherence and coordination. The link between policy and operational activities would be strengthened as the entity would have responsibility for normative work through its governing body and for operational activities. It would, therefore,

be able to translate intergovernmental decisions and recommendations into operational activities in conjunction with other UN entities at the country level and through decisions taken at the CEB.

46. Reliance on voluntary funding would require a strong resource mobilization function to ensure predictable and sustainable support to Member States. This option would entail changes in governance.

## **E. Conclusions**

47. The growing demands of Member States for technical advice and assistance to respond to new and emerging issues that affect both men and women in developed and developing countries have led to the need to examine how the UN system can improve the way it delivers support. In order to provide more effective and relevant responses to these demands the UN system should be able to better link its normative and operational work, enhance the quality of technical expertise deployed to countries, and increase access to the vast knowledge and information resources of the UN system. A strong UN system that is prompt to respond effectively and efficiently, and in a co-coordinated, coherent and flexible way is vital.

48. This vision promises to bring about new institutional arrangements for gender equality and women's empowerment that deliver implementation at the country level. These organizational arrangements could serve to stimulate the momentum towards the attainment of these goals. A strong commitment to improving the UN's capacity for gender equality and women's empowerment should be accompanied by decisive action.



49. Building upon the extensive intergovernmental consultations initiated by the President of the General Assembly assisted by his two able Co-chairs, Ambassador Augustine Mahiga, Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania and Ambassador Paul Kavanagh, Permanent Representative of Ireland, Member States may wish to consider the options outlined above with a view to improving the current United Nations gender institutional arrangements. Decisive action by Member States will be critical to achieving progress in gender equality and women's empowerment.