



Check against Delivery

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Implementation and Accountability

Ines Alberdi
Executive Director, UNIFEM

63rd Session of the UN General Assembly
Third Committee, 13 October 2008
Agenda item 63(a): Advancement of Women

Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues and Friends,

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chairperson, and other members of the bureau on your election to this committee.

I thank you for this opportunity to present the Note by the Secretary-General on the Activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). I also want to thank UNIFEM Consultative Committee members, from Estonia, Chile, Korea, Norway and Sudan, for their guidance and support over the past year, together with Jordan and Mexico, who rotated off the Committee in 2007.

UNIFEM's work is guided by four-year strategic plans. The report before you (A/63/205) reviews results achieved in supporting countries to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of UNIFEM's multi-year funding framework 2004-2007. It focuses on the four goal areas that frame our plan – reducing feminized poverty and exclusion; promoting gender equality in democratic governance and post-conflict reconstruction; ending violence against women; and halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Mid-way to the target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in 2015, efforts to achieve gender equality are at a cross-roads, marked by the recently concluded High Level Event on the Millennium Development Goals. We are also mid-way between the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra and the Follow-up Conference on Financing for Development in Doha. The extent of actions and resources mobilized to advance gender equality are a key indicator of accountability for commitments made. Today I will highlight progress in the four results that frame UNIFEM's multi-year plan, taking into account the challenges and opportunities for advancing gender equality posed by new commitments to achieve the MDGs as well as by the aid effectiveness and financing for development processes,

I. National plans and legislation for women's human rights and gender equality

The first result area tracks the extent to which gender equality and women's human rights are incorporated in national development strategies and legislation. UNIFEM supports countries to strengthen legal and planning mechanisms that empower women, including laws and policies related to reducing feminized poverty, ending violence against women, and strengthening

democratic governance. Over the past four years, UNIFEM has helped national machineries for women develop expertise to draft gender equality laws, as in DRC, Liberia and Mauritania. UNIFEM also focuses on efforts to strengthen implementation of existing laws, as in Viet Nam, where we support capacity development for national assembly members and chief justices of provincial courts to implement the gender equality law that came into effect in 2007. In 2007, in addition to assisting efforts at the national level, UNIFEM supported the formulation of a regional gender policy for the Southern African Development Community.

For the past three years, UNIFEM has been supporting countries to develop a systematic approach to mainstream gender equality priorities into national development strategies. This involves facilitating multi-stakeholder technical teams to align national commitments under the Millennium Development Goals, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action into a consolidated set of indicators and priorities; and sharpening advocacy and lobbying skills. The national development strategy of Tajikistan, for example, commits the Government to ensure men and women's equal access to economic resources and to implement the Presidential Decree on a quota for higher education for rural girls and boys. The Kyrgyzstan national development strategy supports temporary special measures to increase political representation of women, and commits the Government to implement measures to end violence against women; and the Georgia Economic Recovery and Poverty Reduction Paper includes a commitment to improve the gender-responsiveness of labour legislation, reduce family violence and implement a four-year plan to advance gender equality.

II. Mainstream institutions show accountability for delivering on gender equality

The second result area tracks the extent to which mainstream institutions enhance their accountability for gender equality. We support mainstream institutions to generate policies and services needed to strengthen their own capacity to deliver for women and girls. At the heart of effective gender mainstreaming in any institution is the reshaping of incentive systems to support better responses to women's needs; changing performance measures so that services to meet women's needs are recorded and rewarded; incorporating gender-responsive budgeting; and institutionalizing effective leadership to champion gender equality and women's rights.

UNIFEM supports the long-term process of institutional change by strengthening the capacities of regional, national and local partners to institutionalize the use of sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive budgets. In 2007, UNIFEM contributed to positive institutional changes with a broader range of national and regional partners, including ministries of finance, planning, labour, and justice; law enforcement; parliaments; national AIDS councils; regional organizations; municipalities; and private-sector partners. Results can be seen for example in Morocco, where budget call circulars include provisions to mainstream gender in plans, budgets and performance monitoring indicators; in Ecuador, where the Ministry of Finance has introduced a specific budget line to track sectoral investments in implementing the equal opportunity plan, and Bolivia, where municipal budget guidelines now require municipalities to allocate resources to programmes that promote gender equality and provide services for women survivors of violence.

Building on the success of gender-responsive budgeting as a tool for monitoring and tracking resources for gender equality, in 2007 UNIFEM began advocating for its use to track internal and external resource flows within the aid effectiveness agenda, and is partnering with the European Commission to promote the use of gender responsive budgeting as a tool to build greater accountability for achieving results for gender equality and development.

A hallmark of progress in terms of institutional accountability is that in 2008, there are many more mainstream institutions – from Ministries of Finance to private sector partners, from UN

Country Teams to multilateral development banks, from UN governing councils to the UN Security Council – that have placed gender equality and women’s rights higher on their action agendas. An example is the adoption of Security Council resolution 1820 to end to end sexual violence in conflict in June 2008. The Council now has a clear mandate to intervene to prevent sexual violence, including through sanctions and empowering field staff. It also requests a comprehensive report from the Secretary-General on implementation and strategies for improving information flow to the Council, which means better data to inform better responses.

On behalf of the UN system, UNIFEM manages the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. The General Assembly resolutions on Intensification of Efforts to Eliminate all Forms of Violence against Women, adopted in 2006 and 2007 (61/143 and 62/133) have called for more concentrated action to address violence against women, including through greater attention and resources for the Trust Fund. We are pleased to report that Trust Fund contributions quadrupled between 2006 and 2008, reaching nearly \$16 million by the end of 2007. This is enabling the UN Trust Fund to increase the size of grants to governments and civil society organizations, as well as to support stronger collaboration between national partners and UN Country Teams in efforts to address violence against women. The Trust Fund continues to rely on broad-based input and guidance of its UN Inter-Agency Programme Appraisal Committee (PAC) which involves more than 16 UN organizations and independent experts in policy- and grantmaking decisions.

III. Gender equality advocates able to influence policies, programmes and resources

In a third result area, UNIFEM supports enhanced capacities of national and regional networks of gender equality advocates to secure more gender-equitable policies, programmes and resource allocations. UNIFEM supports Ministries of Women’s Affairs, women legislators, and specialized groups, such as networks on HIV and women, migrant women, indigenous and rural women, and others. From 2004 to 2007 UNIFEM provided support or technical assistance to over 90 ministries of gender equality or women’s affairs and contributed to the creation or strengthening of more than 100 national and regional non-governmental women’s networks and organizations.

The most intensive UNIFEM programme of support to national women’s machineries has been in Afghanistan, where it led to the establishment of an institutional capacity-building team within the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. The team has focused on enhancing the capacity of the office of the Technical Deputy Minister and the Planning Department of the Ministry, and backstopping senior staff to enable the Planning Department to maintain a more effective balance between providing technical assistance and working on behalf of the Ministry.

In 2007, UNIFEM initiated a cross-regional programme to promote gender equality in the financing for development and aid effectiveness debates, focusing on building the capacity of gender equality advocates to navigate within the new frameworks. Regional consultations on gender equality and aid effectiveness in Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Commonwealth of Independent States and Latin America and the Caribbean designed to build partnerships and devise strategies for ensuring attention to gender equality in national development plans and poverty reduction strategies have generated a broader knowledge base on gender equality and aid effectiveness. Together with the European Commission and the International Labour Organization International Training Centre, UNIFEM launched the EC-UN Partnership on Gender Equality for Development and Peace, commissioning national mapping studies on the gender equality impact of the aid effectiveness agenda in 12 countries. Findings and recommendations fed into the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, and informed the development of suggested indicators and country-specific strategies to monitor the ongoing impact of new aid modalities on gender equality.

The increasing shift to programme-based approaches within the aid effectiveness agenda provides new mechanisms to support gender equality priorities. In Kenya, UNIFEM manages a “basket fund on gender and governance”, which reached total contributions of over \$9.5 million in 2007. The goal is to transform leadership and governance at all levels in Kenya in order to deliver on poverty reduction, access to basic needs and equality between and among persons. In 2007, it focused on supporting women’s political aspirations towards the general elections of December 2007, assisting 35 organizations in strengthening women’s leadership and gender balance in governance at different levels in nearly 200 out of the 210 constituencies.

IV. Moving forward

In the coming months, UNIFEM will continue to support gender equality advocates—in government, civil society and UN partner organizations—to enhance implementation and accountability for gender equality commitments in the context of Financing for Development, building on the outcome of the High Level Forum of Aid Effectiveness, which requests the UN to provide capacity building to governments and civil society; the High Level Event on the MDGs and the Agreed conclusions of the 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women. As Member States stated in the Agreed Conclusions: “investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth and increasing women’s economic empowerment is central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.” The extent of these investments is a key indicator of accountability for gender equality, the theme of UNIFEM’s bi-annual publication, Progress of the World’s Women, which we launched last month.

In support of the Secretary-General’s UNite! Campaign to End Violence against Women, UNIFEM is mobilizing for ending violence against women to be recognized as an essential part of progress on the MDGs, including reducing poverty and hunger, improving employment opportunities, and reversing the spread of HIV and AIDS. The Say No! to Violence against Women campaign provides an interactive internet platform for government leaders as well as hundreds of thousands of citizens worldwide to become engaged. On 25th November, the International Day against Violence against Women, UNIFEM will present these signatures to the UN Secretary-General to show our support for his UNite! Campaign to End Violence against Women by 2015.

Finally, partnerships and coordination remain critical: within and among countries and regions and among UN organizations. As the UN intensifies its efforts to bring countries together to achieve the MDGs, greater coherence and coordination is needed to enable it to continue to provide holistic and coordinated support to countries to deliver on national priorities for development and gender equality. Member states have welcomed the Deputy Secretary-General’s paper of 23 July 2008 on Institutional options to strengthen the UN work on gender equality and women’s empowerment, and have requested the Secretary-General to provide a detailed modalities paper in respect of these options, focusing in particular on the ‘composite entity’ option.

We appreciate the partnership and support we have received from UN Member States and look forward to continuing to work together to implement commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment and assist all countries to achieve the MDGs.

We thank you for your attention.