

**United Nations Gender Mainstreaming Strategy: Achievements and Challenges  
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## **Background**

I would like to begin by congratulating the Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI) on the organization of this symposium and its consistent support to gender mainstreaming in Korea. I hope that the sharing of information on the work of the United Nations will be useful in this context.

Gender mainstreaming was established as a global strategy for promoting gender equality because previous strategies had not been successful. Lessons learned from implementation of special projects for women in the 1970s and 1980s illustrated that, while such activities are essential for women's empowerment, by themselves they could not bring about the required changes in equality between women and men. Activities focused exclusively on women tended to be marginalized and did not always increase women's access to critical resources and decision-making processes. The integration strategy of the 1980s attempted to address these failings by incorporating women's perspectives into project design and implementation. However women's perspectives' were usually perceived as additional components or 'add-ons' and were incorporated too late in processes to have any real impact. The attention to women often came after major decisions on policies, strategies and resource allocations had already been made.

Awareness of these fundamental constraints led to the development of the gender mainstreaming strategy in the early 1990s. There was a shift from attempting to 'integrate' women into the existing development agenda to changing or transforming the agenda, so that it adequately responded to the priorities, needs and contributions of both women and men. The term 'gender mainstreaming' came from the objective to bring gender perspectives into the centre of attention or the mainstream of policy and programme development. The strategy was endorsed by Member States of the United Nations in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. Further principles and guidelines were developed in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) agreed conclusions 1997/2.

The strategy is defined by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) 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.*'

Critical principles established for gender mainstreaming included that responsibility for implementing the strategy rests at the highest levels within organizations and adequate accountability mechanisms for monitoring progress need to be established. It was also emphasized that the initial definitions of issues/problems across all areas of activity should be done in a manner which allowed for the identification of gender differences and inequalities. Assumptions that issues/problems are neutral from a gender equality perspective should never be made.

Gender analysis should always be carried out, separately or as part of existing analyses. The ECOSOC agreed conclusions called for clear political will and allocation of adequate resources for mainstreaming, including, if necessary, additional financial and human resources. Finally, it was highlighted that mainstreaming does not replace the need for targeted, women-specific policies and programmes, and positive legislation; nor does it do away with the need for gender units or focal points.

### **Achievements in the United Nations**

Gender mainstreaming is utilized to promote gender equality as an integral part of all substantive work of the United Nations. This entails bringing gender perspectives to the centre of attention in all areas – social, economic, political - and in all types of activities, such as data collection and research, analysis, legislation, policy development, development of projects and programmes, as well as in training and other institutional development activities. The United Nations uses the dual strategy called for in the Platform for Action - gender mainstreaming complemented with activities specifically targeted at women and gender equality.

Mainstreaming can require changes in goals, strategies and activities to ensure that both women and men can influence, participate in and benefit from development processes. It can require changes in organizations – in structures, procedures and organizational cultures – to create organizational environments which are conducive to the promotion of gender equality. Development of awareness, knowledge, commitment and capacity of all staff, promoted and facilitated by strong management commitment, is essential.

There have been many achievements since consistent efforts to implement gender mainstreaming began in the United Nations in the mid 1990s but large gaps in implementation remain. Assessment of progress in implementation within the United Nations requires a focus on both the inter-governmental level where global policy is made and monitored and on the efforts of individual entities within the United Nations systems.

#### Intergovernmental level

Policy recommendations on gender mainstreaming in inter-governmental processes – such as the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the General Assembly - provide the framework for efforts across the United Nations system. These recommendations do not, in and of themselves, ensure change. Considerable follow-up is required to ensure implementation. More effective methods and mechanisms for holding the United Nations entities accountable to these policy recommendations need to be developed.

Apart from the mandates contained in the Platform for Action and the outcomes of the Commission on the Status of Women, there are also many specific mandates on gender mainstreaming in relation to different areas of the work of the United Nations - for example, on population, rural development, statistics, human rights, governance, poverty reduction, and crime and drugs - contained in the resolutions and agreed conclusions of different United Nations bodies, such as the General Assembly and ECOSOC and its functional commissions. The Security Council has, in recent years, also brought gender perspectives into discussions of peace and security. While gender mainstreaming is not systematic in any of these processes, it is important to recognize the gains that have been made, and to build on the awareness raised and the concrete actions agreed upon.

Systematic monitoring of implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy has also been established in the intergovernmental processes. Since 1996, annual reports on implementation have been submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women, the ECOSOC and the General Assembly. The focus of these reports has changed over the years. Currently, the report to the Commission on the Status of Women focuses on gender mainstreaming in Member States; the report to ECOSOC outlines the efforts of the United Nations system; and the report to the General Assembly provides information on gender mainstreaming in the intergovernmental processes. Since 2001, the Security Council has also encouraged relevant United Nations entities to report on implementation of gender mainstreaming through specific action plans focused on Security Council resolution 1325..

Last month, the Commission on the Status of Women included attention to resources for gender mainstreaming in its discussion on the theme 'Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women'. One key finding was that gender equality policies, strategies and action plans are all too often established without assessment of the resources required to ensure implementation or of potential funding sources. This was also true of the gender mainstreaming strategy. It was established that little effort has been made to assess allocation of resources to gender equality through the mainstreaming strategy. The agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission recommended that resources for gender mainstreaming be increased and that more effective and transparent methods be developed for monitoring the allocation and use of resources.

#### Within the United Nations system

Entities of the UN system have increasingly focused on implementation of gender mainstreaming at both policy and programme levels. This work has been supported by the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality which promotes sharing of information on the strategy, including through the web-portal, WomenWatch. In addition, the network organizes seminars on gender mainstreaming methodologies at its annual meetings to encourage sharing of experiences, lessons learned and good practices.

Recent innovations have included the development of a system-wide policy and strategy on gender equality and empowerment of women which is expected to strengthen on gender mainstreaming. This policy and strategy was endorsed by senior managers through the High-level Committee on Programming and the Chief Executives Board. Building on this achievement, a results framework on the UN system-wide policy and strategy is being developed.

In addition, creative inte-ragency work on operational work of country teams has led to increased attention to gender analysis and consultation with national machineries for women and women's groups and networks. Capacity-building on gender mainstreaming for country teams has been developed and a score-card to measure progress is being developed. Performance indicators for gender equality work in country teams are being developed.

Throughout the system, there has been a strong emphasis on development of policies for promoting gender equality with gender mainstreaming as the principal approach. These include overall organization policies on gender equality, as well as policies on gender equality in relation to specific sectors. Less has been done in terms of ensuring adequate attention to gender perspectives in existing mainstream sector policies, i.e. in policies on water, energy, entrepreneurship, poverty eradication and other areas. An important lesson learned is that policies on gender equality are only effective if implementation strategies or action plans are developed.

United Nations entities have continued to work at operational level to ensure that gender perspectives are taken up in the wide range of activities undertaken, including data collection, research, analyses, capacity-development and planning, implementation and monitoring of projects and programmes.

Considerable work has been done within United Nations entities on internal institutional development, such as capacity building including training, methodology development, and development of monitoring mechanisms. Progress has also been made in developing tools for gender mainstreaming, including guidelines, manuals, and checklists. There are manuals or guidelines for almost every area of work covered by the United Nations system today.

Almost all United Nations entities have gender experts or gender focal points (sometime regular staff who are assigned to spend part of their time on promoting and monitoring progress in gender mainstreaming). The mandates, access to decision-making processes, support from management levels and resource allocations of these experts and focal points vary considerably across the United Nations system, and impact significantly on the effectiveness of the experts and focal points.

Innovative work has also been carried out on monitoring and evaluation. ILO, for example, has carried out a number of audits which included a focus on gender mainstreaming and UNDP carried out an ambitious comprehensive evaluation of all gender mainstreaming efforts which provided important learnings. A three-phase process is currently underway in UNICEF which includes a self-assessment of UNICEF's Gender Policy Implementation in five country offices and one regional office; a global evaluation of gender policy implementation; and a consultative strategic planning process based on the evaluation results and the priorities for change that will be identified.

### **Remaining gaps and challenges**

Despite the knowledge gained and the efforts made, gender perspectives are still not seen as an integral routine part of policies and programmes in all areas in the United Nations. Gender perspectives are not as central to analyses, budget allocations and planning processes as they should be; gender analysis carried out is not consistently utilized in a systematic and

effective manner; and the results of specific studies on gender equality issues do not always have the full intended impact on policies and programmes.

The work on gender mainstreaming in the United Nations over the past decade has highlighted many gaps and challenges that need to be addressed. Some of the critical challenges faced include: creating a better understanding among all professional staff of the strategy and the direct implications for their work; strengthening management commitment to ensure top-level support is explicit and highly visible; linking gender equality policies to the broader goals of organizations; using gender analysis more consistently and systematically; developing more effective approaches in competence development which lead to concrete changes in attitudes and practices; facilitating more strategic roles and increased resources for gender specialists; and developing effective accountability mechanisms.

Let me elaborate further on some of ways to address these gaps and challenges identified in the United Nations efforts on gender mainstreaming.

### Gender equality policies

Experience within the United Nations – as in other international organizations and among Member States - has shown clearly that the existence of a specific policy on gender equality, which highlights the gender mainstreaming strategy and has built-in monitoring and reporting requirements, facilitates attention to gender perspectives throughout the work of organizations. Efforts to mainstream gender perspectives into programme budget processes has illustrated that the more explicit the commitment of the organization to gender equality, the greater the potential for including gender perspectives in policies, plans, budgets and operational activities. Gender equality policies need, however, to highlight goals and targets, give guidance on approaches and establish measures of good performance, thus providing critical impetus for professional staff to take on responsibility for incorporating gender perspectives in their day-to-day work.

A number of important lessons have been learned from past experience in developing policies on gender equality which facilitate effective gender mainstreaming. Gender equality policies and action plans can develop “separate lives” and become marginalized within organizations, with no clear relation to other important goals, policies and strategies. It is therefore important that the goal of gender equality is clearly placed in the context of the overall goals of the organization, outlining the linkages between gender perspectives and the work of the organization and highlighting the implications for policy and programme development. Priorities need to be established and the approach and methodology to be utilized in promoting gender equality as an integral part of the work of the organization explicitly outlined. The roles, responsibilities and accountability of management and other key categories of staff should be clearly described, as well as the institutional arrangements, including gender specialist resources and capacity building approaches. A concise “road-map” for gender equality should be further elaborated in an action plan which outlines clear measurable goals for all areas of activity with targets and time-frames, impact indicators for monitoring and evaluation and resource requirements and potential sources of funding.

An important element in the successful integration of a gender equality policy and action plan within an organization is the endorsement process by top management. Equally critical is the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation process, which actively involves top management. Some organizations have effectively utilized high-level gender equality

taskforces or advisory groups for monitoring implementation of gender equality policies and action plans and accountability across organizations.

### Gender analysis

Gender analysis concerns more than cataloguing the differences between women and men. It also involves identifying and documenting inequalities between women and men and requires attention to the relations between women and men and how these are likely to impact on, or be affected by, the planned interventions. Gender analysis does not always have to be carried out through a separate analysis process. Gender equality perspectives should be an integrated part of all existing analyses carried out as part of identification, preparation, implementation and monitoring of interventions, such as policy analyses, sector analyses and analyses carried out as the basis for development of country strategies or for assessment of implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategies and MDGs.

One of the most critical constraints in implementation of gender mainstreaming is the fact that gender perspectives are not included as an integral part of initial analyses of issues and problems. If gender perspectives are not dealt with explicitly and adequately in initial stages of analysis and planning, subsequent attempts to incorporate them can lead to resistance and to artificial “add-ons”.

Some organizations continue to base their work on the assumption that certain policy areas, for example macro-economics and technical areas, are in principle “gender-neutral” and, as a result, gender analysis is not carried out.

Even where gender analysis is carried out, it is not always utilized effectively. The significant gender analysis in different sectors and issues, for example through specific research and development of tools and resources, is not disseminated and utilized effectively. This can, for example, be seen in the work on CCA/UNDAFs and PRSPs. The level of analysis has improved significantly but the results are still not seen in the implementation plans. One of the reasons is the limited understanding of the important linkages between gender perspectives and the defined goals and targets of different sector areas. Gender perspectives are not seen as essential for achieving the goals of all policy areas.

### Competence development

Development of competence on gender mainstreaming within organizations – i.e. awareness, knowledge, commitment and capacity - is essential for successful implementation of the strategy. Training programmes should be more action-oriented, which implies more than simply tailoring to specific sectors. Capacity-building must be focused on what participants do on a day-to-day basis and assist them to understand how they need to work differently to give adequate attention to gender perspectives. Experience has also shown that competence development will only be successful if followed-up adequately.

Innovative approaches should be developed and utilized in addition to more traditional training programmes. Guidelines, tools and action plans or strategies on gender mainstreaming can be developed with active involvement of participants in a more hands-on approach.

### Gender specialists and gender focal points

The mainstreaming strategy requires a shift of responsibility for promoting gender equality from specialists to all personal, especially management levels. This does not, however, 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, focus on catalysing, advising and supporting the efforts of others. Effective roles for gender specialists require clear mandates, strategic location within organizations, the strong support of, and direct access to, senior management levels and adequate allocation of resources. The role of gender specialists should be seen as supporting senior managers to fulfill their management/leadership responsibilities for gender mainstreaming.

Despite the constraints identified, for example, in relation to seniority, resources and the multiple tasks assigned to them, gender focal points across the United Nations system have made significant efforts and strengthened attention to gender mainstreaming. There is potential for gender focal points to be even more powerful catalysts for promoting gender mainstreaming if sufficient attention is given in establishing gender focal point systems to mandates, location and linkages, resources, and support mechanisms.

#### Management commitment and accountability

There is increasing practical experience that explicit and sustained senior management commitment can provide powerful impetus to gender mainstreaming. Where senior managers are prepared to state clearly that gender equality – implemented through gender mainstreaming - is a priority for organizations, real progress can be made. On the other hand, in organizations where overall gender equality policies are prepared without explicit management support apart from an official endorsement – i.e. where there is no development of a plan of action; no clear message to staff on the importance of the policy, no capacity development linked to the policy, no specific allocation of resources; and no follow-up processes established – there is little real progress.

The challenge is to find ways of holding all categories and all levels of staff accountable for achieving the goal of gender equality and for the effective implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy. Accountability mechanisms highlighting specific reporting requirements, and establishing requirements for development of necessary competencies - including attention to how these competencies can be acquired, need to be developed within organizations. Links to performance appraisal systems - whereby promotion of gender equality through gender mainstreaming could be included in the “work contracts” negotiated between management and staff, with clear goals, actions, time-frames and reporting requirements – could be very useful. Specific monitoring and reporting processes need to be established and indicators of achievement, particularly related to outcomes, identified.

#### **Conclusions**

It must be recognized that gender mainstreaming is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Like any other strategy, it is only as good as its implementation. Nowhere in the United Nations has gender mainstreaming been fully implemented. No entity has committed the management leadership and human and financial resources needed for systematic and effective implementation.

Some important lessons have, however, been learned within the United Nations. Recent reviews have noted the achievements made but pointed to the many remaining challenges. While there are now many good policies and strategies in place, there remains a huge gap between policy and practice which must be addressed through development of concrete action plans, with clear time frames and adequate resource allocations. The good practice examples that have been identified can be replicated in different contexts, both within and outside the United Nations.

Gender mainstreaming requires an active approach - it will not happen by itself. There must be a clear objective to mainstream attention to gender equality into all interventions and systematic and sustained efforts to achieve this. The gender mainstreaming strategy requires that the attention to gender equality is explicit – the attention to gender equality issues must be highly visible and the critical links to important policies and processes made clear.

One further major failing which needs to be urgently addressed is the lack of measurement methodologies to assess the resources allocated to gender equality and empowerment of women through the gender mainstreaming strategy and the impacts of these investments. The Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality recently established a taskforce to look further into this important issue. The need for improved methodologies, accountability and transparency in measuring the allocation of and impact of resources through the gender mainstreaming strategy was also raised in the outcome of the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women last month.

Despite the many failings in implementation, gender mainstreaming remains a critical strategy in this new Millennium. Building on the many gains made and addressing the remaining challenges will require a significantly increased investment by all entities to ensure enhanced understanding of the strategy and the means to strengthen implementation. Above all, increased explicit commitment and follow-up by top level managers will be critical for success.