

Issues Paper
Gender mainstreaming in the work of
United Nations system intergovernmental bodies
22 June 2004
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
ECOSOC Chamber

Introduction

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) endorsed gender mainstreaming as a major strategy for the promotion of gender equality. Two years later, the Economic and Social Council adopted agreed conclusions 1997/2 on “Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system”. In those agreed conclusions, ECOSOC defined gender mainstreaming as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels, as 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 social spheres.

Gender mainstreaming in intergovernmental bodies

The policy directives/decisions adopted by the intergovernmental bodies help guide the actions of the entire United Nations system. Mainstreaming gender perspectives into every aspect of the work of these entities is therefore vital, both for achieving gender equality and for the general success of United Nations activities.

Since 1997, ECOSOC has addressed the issue of gender mainstreaming in the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields. The functional commissions have likewise taken up gender mainstreaming as a topic for dialogue, some highlighting gender equality as a cross-cutting issue and many incorporating gender perspectives into their general programme of work. The Commission on the Status of Women has continued to play a catalytic role, according to its mandate, in advancing gender equality and sharing expertise on gender mainstreaming in the work of ECOSOC, its other functional commissions, and entities of the United Nations system at large.

The Security Council has also taken steps to integrate gender perspectives into its work, evidenced by Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. Resolution 1325 provides an instrument through which the Security Council can shape and evaluate peace operations, and it has furthered efforts to encourage women’s full involvement in the peace building and reconstruction processes.

The General Assembly has adopted a variety of resolutions since 1997 that include gender perspectives on issues such as assistance to individual States; humanitarian efforts; education; maternal mortality; combating poverty, hunger and disease; sustainable development; and, in particular, cooperation between the United Nations and other international and regional organizations. The Assembly’s Main Committees have focused on gender perspectives, to varying degrees, in a number of sectors. The First Committee has asserted the need to consider gender equality issues in United Nations disarmament services. The Fourth Committee addressed women’s issues in a resolution on public information, and the Fifth Committee has requested the development of a gender mainstreaming programme in the context of financing United Nations peacekeeping operations. The Second and Third Committees have given relatively more attention

to the issues of gender mainstreaming and gender equality than any of the other Committees. Despite these developments, progress in mainstreaming gender perspectives in the work of the General Assembly has been slow and uneven.

Gaps and Challenges

There are still many areas that can be improved further. Gender equality is often seen as a purely social issue, a perception that has not allowed it to be recognized as an essential aspect of the economic, financial, environmental, and peace and security sectors. Financing for development, trade, technology, and investment issues have major gender components, which have generally been ignored or overlooked. The outcomes of the intergovernmental deliberations have not adequately addressed gender dimensions of these issues.

Not all the Main Committees of the General Assembly have systematically incorporated gender perspectives into their outcomes. The First, Fourth, and Fifth Committees have made little reference to the issue in their work as a whole, and the Sixth Committee has made no reference at all. Likewise, ECOSOC and its functional commissions have not fully implemented the gender mainstreaming strategy. Increased collaboration and sharing of best practices among the various commissions would facilitate further implementation.

Moreover, the inputs for the sessions of the functional commissions have provided insufficient guidance on gender mainstreaming. An analysis of 264 Secretary-General's reports issued from January 2000 to September 2003 found that two-thirds made one or no mention of women's or gender concerns. And an analysis of resolutions adopted by the Security Council between January 2000 and March 2004 revealed that only 14.2 percent included language on women or gender issues.

Issues for Consideration

Panelists are invited to consider ways to bridge the gap between policy and implementation, and to share strategies for mainstreaming gender perspectives throughout the United Nations system, beyond the gender focal points and into the highest echelons of its entities. What measures should the General Assembly take to ensure that gender perspectives are adequately incorporated in its outcome documents? What further steps are required by the Security Council to fulfill the mandate of Resolution 1325? How can ECOSOC provide further guidance to its subsidiary bodies on mainstreaming gender perspectives? How can intergovernmental bodies foster collaboration and cooperation on this issue? How can the intergovernmental bodies help in establishing effective monitoring and accountability for gender mainstreaming?