

## OSCE Gender Equality Review Conference, Vienna, 10-11 July 2014

### Session V

#### **Strengthening Institutional Mechanisms for Gender Mainstreaming – Challenges and Perspectives**

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Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, gender mainstreaming has become an endorsed strategy for the achievement of gender equality and women's human rights. We all, governments, donor agencies, civil society organisations, women's movements, the UN, the OSCE and many other international and national actors in development have worked towards converting the commitment to gender mainstreaming into reality. However, despite the sustained investments in mainstreaming and some progress in terms of enabling policy frameworks, there **is general agreement that translating gender mainstreaming policy objectives into real-life outcomes is fraught with challenges and contradictions.**

In my intervention I would like to use the Secretary-General's report to the ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) in April 2012 as a starting point, where we actually look at ourselves, the UN system. Back then he spoke exactly about our topic today - mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations System.

In his report he presented the System-wide action plan (Swap) on gender equality and empowerment of women, which is an accountability framework that is used throughout the entire UN. **UN Women was tasked with leading, coordinating and promoting the accountability of the UN system in its work on gender equality.**

Actually the establishment of our organization - UN Women - is a reflection of the commitment of the UN system to more coherent and comprehensive gender mainstreaming in all activities. Here I would like to highlight one specific part of our mandate, which is the coordination and promotion of the accountability of the UN system in the gender sphere. However, our founding resolution is also explicit that the creation of UN Women **does not relieve other entities from their own responsibility** to mainstream gender in their activities within their own mandates.

If we turn from the **global level** to the country level, we see how relevant this is in practice. For example Kyrgyzstan, where I work, hosts in addition to an OSCE Centre also quite a big UN country team that consists of 21 AFPs. We, as UN Women, are not only involved in our programmatic work in the country, but also actively promote the inclusion of a gender perspective in the work of all other AFPs. As part of the UN country team in Kyrgyzstan, UN Women leads and coordinates work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. In our country context the donor community (we call it the Development Partners' Coordination Council) has a number of subgroups that work on different issues. One of those subgroups is led by us, it is the extended Gender Theme Group which comprises in addition to UN entities on the ground also all interested development partners including the OSCE, the World Bank, ADB, bilateral aid organisations and many others. We understand that we need to jointly address some of the challenges we face on a daily basis. Only if we work together and if all actors on the ground put on a **"gender lens" when programmes are designed and implemented** progress is feasible. And - we still have quite a lot of work ahead of us, as for several years now the slow pace of progress on gender mainstreaming has been a concern across the UN system.

Now let's have a brief look at the **challenges**: To name just a few - and I believe to everybody here in the audience they sound unfortunately very familiar:

- 1) lack of a common vision
- 2) gaps in internal oversight mechanisms
- 3) weak management responses to evaluation findings;
- 4) lack of data and tools
- 5) lack of systematic follow-up of capacity-building events and
- 6) poor coordination with each other.

Disjunctures are visible at several points. At the **conceptual level**, gender mainstreaming is defined differently by different actors across the UN System and beyond. **Interpretations** range from increasing women's participation, to integration of gender concerns within existing interventions, to women-focused programmes. Those interpretations however do **not necessarily recognize transformation of gender relations in society as the ultimate goal**. Moreover, although gender mainstreaming uniformly recognized as a means towards gender equality, the understanding of **what** constitutes equality varies widely and is not always clearly distinguished from equity.

**How do we overcome those challenges and strengthen institutional mechanism for gender mainstreaming?**

In the SG's report he highlighted the need for a **comprehensive framework for gender mainstreaming** comprising **quality standards, accountability mechanisms, methodologies to measure staff performance, incentives for organizational learning and adequate budgets**.

Those points capture in a nutshell of **what is needed to improve our performance in this area**. The UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality hosts a repository of gender mainstreaming policies from organizations across the UN system as well as tools and other resources to help develop capacities to implement gender mainstreaming. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/gender-mainstreaming#sthash.Qmo22ghu.dpuf>

In UN Women we believe that, now when evaluating and reflecting on what has happened over the last 20 years since the Beijing Platform for Action all over the world, there is a great opportunity of bringing the significance of gender mainstreaming again to the fore. This involves not only all international organizations, but also the national gender machineries. It seems to me that **accountability mechanism and staff performance in this area are of critical importance**.

One good **example** of an innovative initiative is of our sister agency UNDP: the Gender Equality Seal. This is a professional gender certification of offices which ensure a comprehensive corporative framework for gender mainstreaming. And it is not enough to set it up, but it also needs to be monitored. If each agency were to set up its own corporative framework, a clear strategy and an internal gender architecture as well as annual investment in building staff capacity this would certainly help to build a functioning accountability mechanism and M&E of achieving substantial gender goals.

In addition **regular assessments** of implementation of gender goals - programmatic and institutional - should be scheduled (a bit like an audit). This could also help holding everybody accountable to reach certain goals.

And last but not least, it should also pointed out again, that the **responsibility to gender mainstream** within any organization is **at the highest level**. There has to be a genuine will at highest level and a clear message to be sent from there to all parts of the organization. It is not enough to ensure that we have

technical knowledge at the middle management or junior level. Senior management has to walk the talk, otherwise all efforts remain in vain.

*What we heard in the last two days in the discussion around the OSCE Gender Action Plan is of vital importance to be translated into reality. We can learn from best practices and shared information of what works and what does not.*