

United Nations  Nations Unies

**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-second session
New York, 25 February – 7 March 2008**

INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Key policy initiatives on financing for gender equality
and the empowerment of women**

KEY POLICY INITIATIVES ON FINANCING FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Overview

There have been a number of international commitments on financing for gender equality and empowerment of women. The most comprehensive set of initiatives, The Beijing Platform for Action, emphasized that funding had to be identified and mobilized from all sources and across all sectors. Sufficient resources it was agreed, need to be allocated to national machineries for the advancement of women and all institutions that contribute to the implementation and monitoring of commitments to gender equality. Adequate financial resources for the implementation of the Platform in developing countries were also called for, and countries involved in development cooperation were requested to conduct analysis of their assistance programmes from a gender perspective to enable improvements in the quality and effectiveness of aid.

In Beijing, governments also committed to systematically reviewing how women benefit from public sector expenditures; adjusting budgets to ensure women's equal access and achieving the gender-related commitments made in United Nations summits and conferences. They also committed to creating a supportive environment for the mobilization of resources by non-governmental organizations, particularly women's organizations and networks, feminist groups, the private sector and other actors of civil society, to enable them to work towards the full implementation of the Platform for Action.

It's clear from statistics that there remains a crucial need for resources in order to improve women's lives and eliminate gender gaps in quality of life and life chances. For example, a majority of the world's absolute poor are female and women on average earn slightly more than 50 % of what men are earning. Violence against women remains a major cause of death and disability for women 16-44 years of age, as does maternal mortality.

Gender Aspects of the Monterrey Consensus

As Joseph Stiglitz has pointed out, the Monterrey Consensus represents an important recognition that financing for development has implications not just for financial markets but for all *people* in a society.

liberalization and other economic policies referred to in paragraph 11 of the Consensus are not considered from a gender equality perspective.

This has led to a number of gender-sensitive experts and advocates to conclude that a key shortfall of the Monterrey Consensus in terms of financing for gender equality concerns the *lack of coherence* between *economic policies* that emphasize low inflation and mobility of capital on the one hand, and the *social commitments* to poverty reduction, human rights and gender equality on the other. The latter commitments often require public spending to support social provisioning and to stabilize the social imbalances that result from deflationary policies, the very spending that may be downgraded as external debt and debt servicing payments get prioritized.

There is no doubt that macroeconomic policies have important implications for financing for gender equality. There is indeed a growing body of evidence demonstrating that gender inequality is bad economics. According to the 2007 Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific, for example, gender inequality costs the region 80 billion USD a year. The region loses up to 47 billion USD a year because of restrictions on women's access to employment, and up to 30 billion USD because of gender gaps in education.²

What has happened in the Follow-up to the Monterrey Consensus?

Unfortunately, gender equality and the empowerment of women have received limited attention in the follow up processes to Monterrey to date. In the General Assembly only one of the eight ministerial roundtables during the first High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development in 2003 addressed gender equality and made specific proposals, such as integrating women's issues and rights into the other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). During the 2005 High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, participants emphasized that domestic resource mobilization policies *should* incorporate the international commitment to gender equality and recommended using gender-responsive budgeting to ensure that the relevant commitments are resourced, to upgrade the employment of women in the value chain and to increase women's access to assets and property rights.

Similarly, the annual Special High-level Meetings of the Economic and Social Council with the Bretton Woods Institutions and the World Trade Organization have paid limited attention to gender perspectives.

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness acknowledges that harmonization efforts are needed on cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality and other thematic issues including those financed by dedicated funds. Some have identified the Declaration as a potential further opportunity to embed gender equality and women's empowerment into the reform of aid delivery and effectiveness if the design of reforms and the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Declaration incorporate gender equality and women's empowerment as cornerstones.

development of effective tracking, monitoring and evaluation tools to establish what is being done and its impact on gender equality goals, are key mechanisms for discussion and elaboration at the preparatory processes leading up to the 2008 review in Doha.

Here the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on “Finan

- women's empowerment and gender equality be scaled up to reach 10% by 2010 and 20% by 2015 of all ODA. The tracking of ODA directed to gender equality and women's empowerment can be improved by having bilateral donors build on existing efforts to improve tracking and reporting on programme focused on gender equality and women's empowerment through for example, using the OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker when reporting aid statistics.
- v. Ensuring that direct funding goes to support women's organizations in different regions, and not only through national government channels, to advance the autonomy and independence of women's organization was another suggested strategy. The EGM recommended that donors to the women's movement should develop a *Sustainability Compact*. This compact would work towards the goal of making women's organizations sustainable, in holistic terms, beyond donor funding
 - vi. Women's Funds—autonomous social change grant making organizations set up by women—, were identified as important new vehicles for funding and these should receive significant investments to build on their potential to deliver financial support to women's rights organizations and movements.
 - vii. Finally, in terms of content, the EGM reinforced the importance of weighting macroeconomic goals and targets equally with social policy; indeed, the participants underscored that *all* macroeconomic policies are in fact social policies with their resulting distributive implications of benefits and burdens. Participants also reaffirmed the importance of national policy space for pursuing a more pluralist approach to macroeconomic management that recognizes and respects the varying political economies and cultures of UN member states.

Gaps and Challenges

The Follow-up Process in the last year has yielded some results in terms of changes in the discourse around gender, employment, gender-sensitive public expenditure and microfinance. The challenge now will be to make conceptual advances in the other action areas of the Monterrey Consensus (MC), particularly those not usually linked in mainstream analysis to gender equality goals. In other words, so far gender equality is written out of the commanding heights of economic policy (for example, trade, debt and foreign direct investment) in strategic United Nations documents – gender equality may be viewed as no more than a tactical or supplementary set of goals and problems. Gender equality and women's empowerment are only key factors in specific reports on gender equality such as the Report of the Secretary-General on Progress in Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Development, Implementation and Evaluation of National Policies and Programme. The key will be to make progress on integrating gender equality into other strategic documents since these will likely be taken more seriously by governments and ministries of finance.

Hence different types of measures of progress need to be developed based on the goals of measurement and the sites of policy intervention. For instance, at the international high-level forums set to unfold this year, a combination of content and discourse analysis can be used to affect the final wording of strategic documents and resolutions. A discourse analysis for instance, considers how gender equality and women's empowerment are (or not) articulated and understood in official Financing for Development documents.

So we can ask: how is gender equality and women's empowerment understood? In the Monterrey Consensus, are links made between non-traditional areas of gender-based analysis such as trade and debt and gender equality outcomes? Are women clustered together with other 'vulnerable groups' in a 'basket case' approach?

We can supplement the above with a quantitative application and analysis of indicators to be applied nationally to help us understand whether resources are supporting gender equality commitments. These would build on the expanded understanding of financing for gender equality advanced in the Follow-up texts. A series of gender-sensitive indicators need to be generated for each of the 6 action areas to measure progress in financing for gender equality. For example, in the area of Trade we can ask: "What is the Percentage of trade negotiation mandates that proactively include gender sensitive frameworks for each sectoral area negotiated?"

Or in the area of International Capital Flows, it's been suggested that reductions in required foreign exchange reserves would free up domestic resources. Here we can ask: "What percentage of resources freed up from foreign exchange reserves support commitments to gender equality?"