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**Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation**

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## I. Introduction

1. By decision 1997/319, the Economic and Social Council decided that the high-level meeting of the operational activities segment of its substantive session of 1998 would be devoted to the theme "Advancement of women: implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the role of operational activities in promoting, in particular, capacity-building and resource mobilization for enhancing the participation of women in development". Consideration of the matter follows the in-depth review of gender mainstreaming by the Council in 1997 and the adoption of its agreed conclusions 1997/2.<sup>1</sup>

2. At the informal meeting held with delegations prior to the C8 that the h12 TDconr tistio 199bodng,,ion oTj sulto the 385the 4/23/1998. 23d C. T. 0.071 Tc 0.15821835 Tw (t.34

programmes (and possibly the entire United Nations system), opens the way for intersectoral themes, such as gender equality, to be reflected as part of the strategic framework.

8. As suggested in the provisional guidelines on UNDAF, the United Nations country team is expected to form or use existing intersectoral theme groups, including on gender issues, at the country level for follow-up to global conferences, taking into account national priorities. UNDAF, as opposed to the country strategy note (CSN), was initially conceived for use by the funds and programmes. The Secretary-General subsequently invited specialized agencies to associate themselves with the process, and consultations with the Bretton Woods institutions are envisaged.

9. The consolidation of Secretariat departments in the economic and social fields should facilitate increasing coherence and linkage between policy, normative and operational activities, and efforts are being made toward greater harmonization of competencies between the regional commissions and global bodies. These measures provide an enhanced *modus operandi* for optimizing and coordinating development cooperation and potentially for integrating such cross-sectoral concerns as gender.

10. Despite the increasing specificity of policy guidance, checklists and guidelines, and training and evaluation requirements, the assessment of the impact of these tools and procedures on field-level activities remains to be carried out systematically. This need was recognized by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session, in March 1998, when it requested a comparative report on how different categories of projects and programmes of United Nations organizations include women's interests and gender mainstreaming issues and on resources allocated in this regard.<sup>3</sup>

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## **A. Institutional structure**

15. Gender mainstreaming as a cross-sectoral issue is expected to be reflected fully in the four Executive Committees created by the Secretary-General. The United Nations Development Group has discussed the question of gender mainstreaming and has established a Subgroup on Gender and Development, which will be chaired by UNIFEM, and a work programme. The Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs recently held a discussion on the gender dimension of its work. The Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs adopted recommendations for a principle-centred approach to guide United Nations operations in Afghanistan and welcomed the establishment of an ad hoc Inter-Agency Task

**women's empowerment and the elimination of violence against women.**

## **B. Guidelines and checklists**

22. Within the ACC machinery, CCPOQ guidelines on a number of mechanisms and modalities either exist or are being finalized, covering a variety of issues (such as the resident coordinator system, the programme approach, CSN, monitoring and evaluation, national execution), which define the functioning of the United Nations system at the country level. Many of these guidelines explicitly support ways of mainstreaming gender issues.

23. Moreover, most United Nations organizations and bodies have developed policies, guidelines, checklists and, in some cases, handbooks for gender mainstreaming (for example, UNICEF, United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) (UNCHS), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)).

24. Two United Nations bodies have issued directives: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The UNDP Administrator's Direct Line No. 11 on gender equality and the advancement of women, addressed to all resident representatives, lays out the commitment of UNDP to supporting gender equality and the advancement of women. The directive issued by the Executive Director of UNFPA in November 1997 draws the attention of staff to their individual responsibility for ensuring that a gender perspective is successfully mainstreamed in all policies and programmes. These two initiatives are in line with Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2, in which the Council called upon agencies to develop institutional directives rather than discretionary guidelines for gender mainstreaming.

25. The priority attached to women's advancement at the field level is signalled by national/regional action plans. These give some insight into the institutions and processes being

21. The third session of IACWGE, held in March 1998, covered a broad range of activities, including guidelines for the compilation of good practices in the implementation of the Platform for Action and gender mainstreaming, and established a timetable for their collection. Work is under way to develop guidelines in other areas as well, such as on performance indicators.

used to maintain the momentum generated by Beijing. Information on implementation strategies can be found in the synthesized report of the Secretary-General on national action plans and strategies for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (E/CN.6/1998/6), which examines plans provided to the Secretariat by 90 Governments, five subregional entities and one observer.

**Recommendation: In keeping with its agreed conclusions 1997/2, the Council may wish to further encourage agencies to pursue the development of institutional directives for gender mainstreaming and women's equality.**

## **C. Focal points**

26. There is general agreement that the catalytic role of gender and women in development focal points is essential to gender mainstreaming, but questions remain about how best to institutionalize this role, so that attention to gender becomes irreversible.

27. At present, all UNDP country offices have designated gender focal points, as have UNDP headquarters regional bureaux, the UNDP Office of Human Resources, the Bureau for Resources and External Affairs, and each of the bureaux for policy development responsible for poverty, environment and governance. All UNDP headquarters gender focal points meet on a monthly basis as a Gender Advisory Committee to UNDP.

28. At UNESCO, the Unit for the Promotion of the Status of Women and Gender Equality, created in 1996, is the overall focal point responsible both internally and externally. The Unit works foremost through a network of focal points that have been assigned in each of the prominent units (sectors). Field offices and national commissions are being encouraged to assign gender in development (GID) focal points to the extent

possible, and to cooperate on GID matters with other United Nations agencies.

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Moreover, there were neither clear agency policies nor adequate budgetary allocations. The involvement of gender advisers in inter-agency mechanisms was therefore guided by the use of discretionary guidelines rather than institutional directives for coordination of gender mainstreaming.

39. The high turnover rate of gender focal points, inadequate substantive knowledge of gender analysis and programming skills and unrealistic job descriptions had aggravated the situation. Most gender focal points had their “regular” duties in addition to focal point responsibilities, which involved: coordinating work on gender mainstreaming; facilitating the work of others; collecting and disseminating information; acting as catalysts; linking people to integrate gender in different areas of responsibility. A number were also volunteers or had been recruited without any training or preparation.

40. Therefore, as efforts to use this modality for gender mainstreaming continue to grow, greater attention will need to be paid both to capacity-building to strengthen the expertise available through the gender focal point system and to ensuring that the effectiveness of their role is seen as part of senior management’s responsibility.

41. In addition, more systematic analysis is needed of the current situation with respect to gender focal points. As a result of the decisions taken in March 1998, IACWGE will seek resources to conduct a review of the women in development (WID)/gender focal point function in the United Nations system, with a view to making recommendations on a core set of criteria to guide the system in relation to such focal points.

**Recommendation: The Council may wish to reiterate the need for a study of the role of gender units and focal points, including a focus on the extent to which focal points have support from and access to the highest levels of decision-making.**

#### **D. Strategic frameworks and programming**

42. As in the case of development assistance in other areas, a national policy environment for the advancement of women is of crucial importance in order for United Nations system support to be possible. The feedback obtained from a review

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of identifying the top theme priorities is left to the United Nations country team and/or the representatives of the host Government and other national entities. Nevertheless, since the process of formulating both CSN and UNDAF derives from a consultation process at the country level for the implementation of global conferences and other international agendas, these mechanisms should necessarily stress gender issues as a key cross-sectoral topic that has been highlighted in the various platforms and agendas. The experience in the 32 countries where CSN has already been adopted confirms the relevance of gender issues as a principal priority for those CSNs. The pilot phase of UNDAF, now in the process of its completion, will show the extent to which gender issues have played a major role in defining the priorities for United Nations system collaborative programming.

53. In the preparation of UNDAF, an important step is the common country assessment, which requires collaborative action through the collection of data and information required to assess the priority orientation of the development cooperation programmes of the United Nations funds and programmes or of the system, if other components participate

UNDAF Experience in Mozambique

Based on the country strategy note of 1995, of the Government of Mozambique and other assessments and directives, UNDAF/Mozambique aimed at coordination at three levels: inter-agency programming; joint resources; and coordination with donor efforts. Gender and Development was identified as one of the 11 common areas of development assistance. The Gender Theme Group participants are UNIFEM, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the World Bank. Gender-specific programmes total \$1.842 million, representing 0.31 per cent of the total planned or estimated budget for the period 1998-2001. In addition, the intersectoral nature of gender has been fully taken into account and mainstreamed into other themes, such as education, health and governance.

examined in this assessment will be the suitability of this instrument to enhance inter-agency coordination and promote collaborative programming, since the mechanism was conceived initially as limited to the United Nations funds and programmes. One of the aspects foreseen in the pilot assessment is the suitability of UNDAF as a tool to assist in the implementation of the Beijing Conference.

56. However, ensuring that the new framework and its implementation proceed with full attention to the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women and gender mainstreaming is a collective responsibility of the United Nations system, including IACWGE. This is especially important as the system moves to undertake the review and

in UNDAF. In the pilot phase, a tentative selection of indicators was suggested in the appendix to the provisional guidelines of UNDAF, which identifies eight distinct areas: (i) population, (ii) mortality and fertility, (iii) health, (iv) education, (v) income and employment, (vi) habitat and infrastructure, (vii) environment and (viii) human security and social justice.

54. Although gender is not among the eight components, a closer examination reveals that most of the indicators have been gender disaggregated. This proposal builds on the experience with the common country assessment piloted by the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) and is now incorporated in the UNDAF process.

55. UNDAF is now being piloted in 18 countries. The pilot phase is to be assessed during 1998 and UNDG will submit a report on the experience to the Secretary-General by the end of the year, with possible conclusions and recommendations about the suitability of the new framework for larger-scale application. One of the issues that will be

appraisal of progress towards gender mainstreaming and the identification of further actions and initiatives required to ensure its implementation. At the same time, given that UNDAF is still in a pilot stage, due attention should be paid to ensuring that a gender equality perspective is fully reflected in other planning frameworks for cooperation currently being implemented.

57. As gender mainstreaming is integrated cross-sectorally, systems for tracking resources devoted to gender must be put in place to enable review and assessment of these activities. The early experience with UNDAF in Mozambique, a pilot in 1997 that has yielded encouraging results, suggests the potential of this framework for integrating gender into a



of technical contributions from agencies not represented in the field.

(ii) The Council may wish to emphasize that United Nations organizations should undertake gender analysis in preparing CSNs and CCAs and in formulating UNDAFs, including those for countries in crisis, to ensure that strategies for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment are incorporated.

(iii) The Council may wish to emphasize the importance of combining sex-disaggregated data and research available through the CCA and the CSN processes to ensure that programmes are formulated with a clear understanding of the differential impacts and opportunities that they will have for men and women;

(iv) The Council may consider recommending that support be given on a priority basis to the collection by Governments of information disaggregated by sex on the 15 indicators in the Minimum National Social Data

64. Overall, a new management culture is being promoted in organizations of the United Nations system that puts greater responsibility and accountability on staff at various levels. This presents many opportunities to strengthen attention to gender issues. Notably, in April 1998 the heads of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes that constitute ACC adopted a mission or advocacy statement for the United Nations system as a whole on gender equality and mainstreaming. In addition, following the Beijing Conference, most United Nations entities have a policy on gender mainstreaming.

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set agreed by the Statistical Commission in view of the importance of data for gender mainstreaming.

(v) The Council may wish to endorse the proposal to convene field-level inter-agency thematic groups on gender, while at the same time making it clear that all inter-agency thematic or working groups should incorporate gender analysis into their work.

(vi) The Council may wish to reiterate the importance of promoting and supporting ratification, compliance with and reporting on, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women through the resident coordinator in view of the importance of the Convention as a framework for gender equality.

### E. Accountability and evaluation

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68. At UNICEF, evaluations of gender mainstreaming are included in the mid-term review of the country programme and provide an assessment of progress with respect to the goals of the country programme and UNICEF. Regional focal points periodically assess regional progress by organizing specific meetings, visits to country offices and consultations. A global synthesis and analysis of programme experience is prepared annually and included in the annual report of the Executive Director to the Executive Board. UNICEF follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, including implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, is incorporated in the annual report of the Executive Director to the Economic and Social Council. Nevertheless, mainstreaming gender does not receive attent



mainstreaming. Through Direct Line No. 11, a communication from the Administrator of UNDP to all country offices, UNDP resident representatives have been encouraged to consult with Governments, with a view to allocating 20 per cent of UNDP core resources to gender mainstreaming and the advancement of women. GIDP is working with all units to develop indicators and tracking mechanisms. Initial responses

**cutting theme and that programme staff are consulted in the development of new budget and classification schemes.**

*Notes*

<sup>1</sup> A/52/3, chap. IV, para. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

<sup>3</sup> *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1998, Supplement No. 7 (E/1998/27)*, chap. I, sect. A (Draft resolution to be recommended by the Council at its organizational session for 1998 for adoption by the General Assembly). See Council resolution 1998/2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, *Supplement No. 7 (E/1998/27)*, chap. I, sect. B, draft resolution III.

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