

**Gender mainstreaming:
A key strategy for promoting gender equality at national level**

**Presentation at a panel
Moving Beijing forward: Strategies and approaches for creating an
enabling environment.**

**at the
UN-ESCAP High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional
Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its Regional and Global
Outcomes, 7-10 September 2004**

**Carolyn Hannan, Director
Division for the Advancement of Women
Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

1. Background

Gender mainstreaming was established as a major strategy for the promotion of gender equality in the Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called for gender mainstreaming in all Critical Areas of Concern established at the Fourth World Conference: Poverty, education, health, political decision-making, economy, human rights, violence against women, armed conflict, institutional mechanisms, environment, media and the girl child. The Platform for Action established that gender analysis should be undertaken on the situation and contributions of women as well as men in all areas, before actions are planned, such as development of policies or programmes. The importance of the gender mainstreaming strategy was reinforced in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to follow-up the implementation of the Platform for Action (June 2000).

Gender mainstreaming was defined by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) agreed conclusions 1997/2 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." The definition makes clear that gender mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a means to the goal of gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming is *one* strategy for promoting gender equality. It does not do away with the need for targeted activities for the promotion of gender equality but complements these activities. Gender mainstreaming is, however, an *essential*

strategy as it is the means by which critical policies, strategies, plans, and activities in all areas of development – political, economic, social, cultural and environmental - can be influenced to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women.

It is important to keep in mind that gender mainstreaming was established because of the failure of previous strategies, in order to address specific constraints. Lessons learned from implementation of special projects and activities for women in the 1970s and 1980s indicated that, while such projects remain essential, by themselves they cannot bring about the required changes to the status of women. Activities focused on women tended to be marginalized and women's access to resources and power remained minimal. Awareness of these constraints led to the integration strategy which attempted to address the issue of marginalization by incorporating "women's perspectives" into policy development and project design and implementation. However women's perspectives were still seen as "add-ons" and usually incorporated at later stages of planning processes when all major decisions had been taken and little real impact could be achieved. Efforts to redress these failings led, in turn, to the gender mainstreaming strategy. Gender mainstreaming was based on the need to move beyond trying to unquestioningly integrate women into the existing development agenda to changing or "transforming" the agenda so that it more adequately responded to the realities and needs of both women and men.

The term 'mainstreaming' came from the objective to bring attention to gender equality into the *mainstream or core* of development activities. A number of important elements in the mainstreaming strategy can be identified. These include the necessity to ensure: attention to gender equality from the *initial stages* of processes so that there is potential to influence goals, strategies and resource allocations and bring about changes in policies, programmes and other activities; *gender analysis* of the roles, responsibilities, contributions as well as potential impact of planned actions on women respective men, as the first essential step, before any decisions are taken; a focus on *both women and men* and the relations between them, especially in relation to access to and control over resources and participation in decision-making processes; *explicit attention* to gender perspectives, making them visible and showing the links between gender equality and achievement of the overall goals of all sectors – if gender perspectives are not visible, it is not gender mainstreaming; moving beyond focusing on increasing the numbers of women participating to *bringing gender perspectives to the centre of attention* in analyses, policies, planning processes and resource allocations; and identification of the *need for changes* in goals, policies, strategies and actions, as well as institutional changes – changes in structures, procedures and cultures.

2. Achievements since the Fourth World Conference on Women

In July 2004, a review and appraisal of implementation of gender mainstreaming in the United Nations system was carried out by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). A Secretary-General's report providing an overview of implementation was presented to the Coordination Segment in July 2004. The report noted that considerable progress had been made, particularly in the areas of establishing gender equality policies and strategies; establishing specialist resources (units, bureaux, advisers, etc); and providing training for staff. A large gap, however, continues to exist between policy commitments made at the Fourth World Conference

and actual implementation. Remaining challenges include the failure to systematically use gender analysis as the basis for policy and programme development; lack of integration of gender perspectives in sector policies and strategies; lack of capacity to identify and address gender perspectives in many critical areas; failure to use the full potential of training; inadequate resources; ineffective utilization of gender specialist resources; and lack of reporting requirements and accountability mechanisms.

The resolution recently adopted by Member States in the Coordination Segment of ECOSOC (July 2004) to ensure enhanced implementation of gender mainstreaming called specifically for the establishment of action plans with time lines by all parts of the United Nations system, which would address the gap between policy and practice with a view to strengthening commitment at the highest levels and establishing mechanisms to ensure systematic monitoring and reporting on progress in implementation.

To date there has not been sufficient systematic, comparative assessment of efforts and achievements at national level on gender mainstreaming. Individual ad hoc monitoring exercises and evaluations carried out by Governments, NGOs and international organizations have shown that similar gaps and constraints to those identified in the United Nations system can be found at national level. The review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2005 will provide further information on the status of gender mainstreaming at national level, although unfortunately not all Member States inputs to the review and appraisal include specific information on gender mainstreaming. Shadow reports being prepared by NGOs will also provide information on gender mainstreaming. Further ways and means of assessing progress on gender mainstreaming at national level need to be developed.

Regional Symposium on Gender Mainstreaming in the Asia-Pacific Region

An important step in assessing national level progress was taken in this region with the holding of the Regional Symposium on Gender Mainstreaming in the Asia-Pacific region, in ESCAP from 10-13 December 2001. The objectives of the symposium were to stimulate dialogue and exchange of experience and good practice on gender mainstreaming among different actors in the region, particularly between Governments. The symposium provided an important forum for identifying achievements, as well as constraints and remaining challenges and some of the possible means of overcoming these. It was recognized in the symposium that gender mainstreaming should be an important strategy in all national level bodies, not only

gender equality through gender mainstreaming within line ministries and other bodies. National machineries, and gender units or focal points within line ministries or other bodies at national level, were increasingly working in a catalytic manner – promoting and facilitating gender mainstreaming.

Some key constraints to gender mainstreaming were also identified in the symposium. Gaps between policy commitments and resource allocations negatively affected implementation of gender mainstreaming. Many organizational cultures were not supportive of the promotion of gender equality. There was little awareness of and commitment to gender equality goals and strategies at global or national levels or capacity to implement them. Even where specific policy commitments were in place, adherence to these was not mandatory and there were no sanctions for non-compliance. Neglect of gender perspectives in analyses, policies and programmes was not questioned by senior managers. Gender analysis was not done as a matter of course and unacceptable gaps remained in the availability and use of sex – disaggregated data.

3. Gender mainstreaming and the Millennium Development Goals

In the Millennium Declaration the international community reiterated the commitments made at the global conferences during the 1990s and focused attention on the implementation of those commitments through the establishment of measurable targets. The Millennium Declaration recognized the need to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate truly sustainable development. The specific Millennium Development Goal on gender equality (MDG3) aims to promote gender equality and empower women, with the explicit target of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015. The increased focus on the Millennium Declaration as the framework for development provides an excellent opportunity to highlight the importance of gender mainstreaming and promote greater implementation .

While it is important to have a separate goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women, progress towards achieving the goal of gender equality has to be assessed in relation to each of the other Millennium Development Goals . Success in achieving the other goals will not be possible unless gender perspectives are fully incorporated in the implementation of these goals. However, experience to date reveals that more effective implementation of gender mainstreaming is required. In the Millennium Development Goals Country Reports prepared by Governments to date, gender perspectives have not been adequately incorporated. Most of the focus has been on the specific goal on gender equality (MDG3) and little attention has been given to gender perspectives in relation to the other goals. The challenge will be to ensure that gender perspectives are explicitly outlined in discussions on poverty and hunger, education, maternal and child mortality, mortality, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, environmental sustainability and partnerships for development.

Given the recognition in the Millennium Declaration that gender equality is essential for poverty eradication, it is equally important that gender perspectives are fully incorporated into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) prepared by Governments. In many PRSPs gender perspectives are only included in sector areas

where the importance of the role of women, or impacts of the sector on women, are well known, such as health and education. The gender perspectives of other important areas for gender equality, such as agriculture, economic development, infrastructure and transport, are neglected. The development of PRSPs is not informed by gender analysis and there is still inadequate consultation with national machineries and women's groups and networks.

4. Remaining key challenges

One remaining major challenge to gender mainstreaming is the fact that gender mainstreaming is often still seen solely as increasing women's participation. Gender mainstreaming involves identifying and addressing the gender perspectives – the linkages between gender equality and different sector areas - in the work of line ministries or other bodies at national level. Gender mainstreaming means bringing attention to the perceptions, knowledge, contributions, priorities and needs of both women and men. Knowledge on the number of women represented in different contexts is not enough. Gender mainstreaming requires significant knowledge on what women and men do; what contributions they make; what resources they have access to and control over; what decisions they participate in; what their potentials are; what constraints they face; and what their needs and priorities are.

A continuing challenge is also the “separateness” or marginalization of work to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Ten years after the Fourth World Conference many specific processes and mechanisms focused on gender equality – such as policies, strategies, action plans, guidelines, training programmes and monitoring and reporting mechanisms - have been put in place, but often without significant integration into and impact on existing mainstreaming processes and mechanisms. It is not sufficient to establish separate policies, training programmes, methodologies and monitoring and evaluation processes on gender equality. Achievement of gender equality through gender mainstreaming requires further efforts to integrate gender perspectives into existing policies and strategies in different sector areas; into all capacity building programmes; into methodology development initiatives in all areas; and into routine monitoring and reporting mechanisms and procedures.

A further challenge is the fact that gender perspectives are not seen as essential for achieving the goals of all policy areas. 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”. This makes efforts to incorporate gender perspectives in these areas very difficult. Even in areas where the gender perspectives are well-known, such as in health, education and water sectors, the understanding of their importance to overall sector goals is not always clearly established. Although gender analysis is relatively well developed in these areas, there has been limited success in using this analysis to bring about needed changes at policy and programme levels. The water sector is a particularly illustrative example of this challenge.

In addition, when gender mainstreaming is presented as a very complex process, always requiring significant inputs from gender specialists and beyond the capacity of sector specialists, it is difficult to move implementation forward. Gender

mainstreaming cannot be achieved by gender specialists alone. One of major problems in implementing gender mainstreaming is that sector specialists are not adequately involved and their specific knowledge is not being used sufficiently. Innovative ways to secure the full involvement of sector specialists are needed.

Experience has shown that in many cases lack of involvement of sector specialists in line ministries or other bodies is not because of a strong opposition to gender mainstreaming but rather due to an uncertainty as to how to implement gender mainstreaming. Often gender specialists have not been able to respond adequately to the lack of awareness, commitment and capacity among sector specialists. This is because, while they may have a sound general knowledge of gender equality issues, they do not have the sector-specific information required to support sector specialists in implementing gender mainstreaming in their sector areas. Greater collaboration and stronger alliances between gender specialists and sector specialists, which build on the knowledge, experience and capacities of both, are therefore essential.

5. Generic steps to improve implementation of gender mainstreaming

Over the past decade a number of steps have been identified as essential for ensuring implementation of gender mainstreaming. These include: firstly, carrying out an assessment of the *linkages* between gender equality and different sectors, that is, to identify the gender implications of working on, for example, environment, poverty elimination, health development, and all other areas of development; secondly, identifying the *opportunities* for introducing gender perspectives in the work tasks undertaken – in research and analysis, policy development, collection, analysis and dissemination of statistics, training events and workshops/conferences, as well as in planning and implementing projects and programmes; thirdly, developing an *approach or methodology* for successfully incorporating gender perspectives into these work tasks, in a manner which influences goals, strategies, resource allocation and outcomes – keeping in mind that different approaches are needed for different types of work, such as research and analysis, statistics, project development; and fourthly, establishing *institutional mechanisms*, such as guidelines, gender specialists, and competence development to support effective implementation.

To increase implementation of gender mainstreaming and contribute more effectively to promotion of gender equality, it is important to ensure that: a *common understanding* of the goal of gender mainstreaming and what the strategy entails in practical terms is in place; *explicit commitment* from management levels is backed up by *concrete accountability mechanisms*, including clear reporting requirements; *responsibility* for gender mainstreaming is allocated across all categories and levels and there is awareness of what this concretely entails; effective *capacity-building* training programmes are available, focused on practical implementation and clearly linked to the work done by different categories and levels of staff; *well-resourced gender specialists* are able to support the process in a catalytic manner - providing advice, support, resources on request and ensuring systematic monitoring and reporting; and effective and systematic *monitoring and reporting* routines are in place.

6. Building on important innovations

A number of innovations in approaches have been developed over the past decade which could be further built upon to support gender mainstreaming in line ministries and other bodies at national level. These include gender mainstreaming in budget processes; making gender analysis mandatory, particularly in planning routines and review processes; and carrying out gender audits. These approaches could make significant improvements to enhancing the enabling environment for promoting gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming in budgets

Over the past decade, there has been an increased awareness of the importance of resource allocations and budgets at different levels for promotion of gender equality. To ensure accountability to policy commitments on gender equality and adequate attention to gender perspectives in policies and programmes, it is necessary to influence planning processes, budget formulation and monitoring and reporting on utilization of resources. In a growing number of countries gender perspectives are therefore being incorporated into national, regional and local budget processes. The experience of Australia and the Phillipines can illustrate some of the important work done in this region. This work includes analyzing existing budgets from a gender perspective and assessing the correlation of resource allocations with policy commitments on gender equality; training women's groups and networks on analysis of budgets and lobby techniques to influence budget processes at different levels; and working to incorporate gender perspectives in the formulation of new budgets as well as in expenditure reviews.

At the basis of all these initiatives is the objective to make national budget processes more accountable from a gender perspective – to ensure that policy, programme and budget decisions take gender perspectives into account and that policies on gender equality are matched with adequate resource allocations. A related objective is to increase women's participation in economic processes.

In the work on budgets, the extent to which the focus has been on securing funding for targeted activities for women, as opposed to ensuring that all allocations are made on the basis of adequate information on the needs and priorities of all women and men, has not always been clear. Specific funding for gender equality activities is necessary but will not fully ensure gender equality in all areas. Efforts are needed to ensure that policy commitments by governments on gender mainstreaming in health, education, agriculture, and all other sectors, are matched with the required resources. It is important that governments are accountable for the promotion of gender equality in all activities and investments across all sectors.

Mandatory gender analysis

Perhaps one of the most important good practice examples shared at the Regional Symposium on Gender Mainstreaming in the Asia-Pacific Region in 2001 was the mandatory use of gender analysis in planning processes by line ministries in some countries, for example Japan and New Zealand. An essential part of this strategy included support provided to line ministries by national machineries, such as advice and training, to ensure that gender analysis could be undertaken. Although a number

of challenges and constraints were identified in the discussions at the symposium, overall the experience was very positive.

Some experience has also been gained on the importance of ensuring that gender focal points are routinely involved and work collaboratively with line ministries in planning processes, as well as in any formal or informal project review processes, to support the systematic utilization of gender analysis in these critical processes.

The experiences of countries – including on challenges and constraints as well as achievements - should be documented and widely disseminated to promote replication of this approach in other countries.

Gender audits

A number of organizations have conducted gender audits which assess what is being done to promote gender equality, for example through gender mainstreaming, as well as how the institutional environment – norms, values, rules and regulations and procedures - supports or hinders promotion of gender equality. Fiji, for example, has reported carrying out gender audits. Such audits are usually carried out in a consultative manner and identify gaps and challenges which need to be addressed. Many gender audits also directly and/or indirectly link the work on promotion of gender equality with achievement of gender equality within the organizations themselves.

There has been very little documentation of the process involved in gender audits. Dissemination of lessons learned, including from the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, would be important for encouraging other countries to also utilize this approach. Gender audits could be an important instrument for developing an enabling environment for gender equality.

7. Enhancing long-term good practice areas

In a number of long-term good practice areas in the promotion of gender equality, while considerable achievements have been made, a number of challenges and constraints have been identified. There is a need for some rethinking of these critical approaches to ensure further progress in gender mainstreaming. These include training programmes, development of methodologies and tools, establishment of gender units and gender focal points and use of gender analysis.

Training programmes

Training was one of the very first approaches used to promote gender mainstreaming. A lot has been achieved over the past decade. However, there is a need for further thought to be given to how to utilize training more effectively. Although there has been a significant focus on training programmes over the past decade, in many organizations it is clear that the impact has not been sufficient. One reason for the less than optimum impact of training has probably been a tendency to treat training as primarily a technical process, requiring only the teaching of analysis

techniques. Attitudinal change is required which necessitates a focus on the rationales for the promotion of gender equality to develop awareness and commitment.

Gender mainstreaming requires that all professional staff in organizations have awareness, commitment and capacity for promoting gender equality, that is, know *why* promotion of gender equality is an important development goal and *what* they can do to achieve the goal in their own work. Staff in many organizations have received training which addresses the question of why they should be working on gender equality but have not received sufficient support in knowing *how* to go about it. This causes considerable frustration and can lead to opposition.

New approaches are needed which provide incentives and motivation for professional staff to further develop their knowledge, commitment and skills. Experience has shown that gender equality not only has to be *tailored to specific sectors*, but must also be *tailored to the different types of work* done by different groups of professionals. Once professionals are made aware of what the gender perspectives are in relation to the sector they work with, such as health, economics and agriculture, they need to understand how to go about working concretely with these issues when doing research and analysis; collecting and utilizing statistics; and developing, implementing and monitoring and evaluating projects. Sector professionals need to be assisted to understand the ways in which gender equality is relevant for the work in their "in-trays", and how they might go about addressing these issues. Innovative training programmes today focus on the specific tasks that participants are currently working on, in order to make the training as useful as possible. Many programmes also work towards the development of a set of concrete, measurable actions that individual participants can agree to undertake on the completion of the programme, as a means to ensure that the programme will have some immediate effect on the work of participants.

The training efforts made in many organizations have also had less than optimal success because of the limited attention given to follow-up. Managers must be made aware of the commitments made by participants and follow up these commitments on a regular basis. Some organizations have established "help-desks" (which can be electronic) to support participants who have further questions or need additional support after completing their training programmes. Training divisions should develop new means to follow-up training programmes to both assess the effectiveness of the programmes in both the short and long term, as well as ensure that professional staff get the additional support they need.

Training divisions in organizations should work together with gender specialists to put in place more diverse, action-oriented and client-friendly training activities on gender mainstreaming. A range of on-going learning processes need to be initiated, including on-the-job training and interactive debates where topical issues can be discussed, to meet the needs of all professional groups within organizations. Executive briefings for senior- and middle-level management, rather than traditional training programmes, have been used effectively in some organizations. It is, however, important to know the specific value and contributions of different types of activities. A series of brown bag lunches on diverse topics, for example, can certainly be effective in raising awareness and interest, but will not provide the "hands-on"

guidance needed to help professionals know what they need to do differently on a day-to-day basis.

Methodology and tools development

Many organizations, including line ministries, have developed useful methodologies and tools for promoting gender equality. However experience has also shown that many very relevant tools on many sector areas – such as guidelines, manuals, handbooks - are not being used effectively. There are many reasons for the under-utilization of the existing methodologies and tools. In some organizations there is little knowledge among staff that they exist because inadequate attention has been given to dissemination. Methodologies and tools can be used more in PR activities outside the organization than internally as a means to develop capacity. To be effective instruments for change, the tools developed must have a broad distribution within the organization and used effectively in training programmes. "Help-desks" could also be established to support potential users and get feedback to ensure development of more effective methodologies and tools in the future.

A second reason for non-utilization of existing methodologies and tools is that many are overly complex and not user-friendly. Busy bureaucrats need instruments which are clearly developed on the basis of an understanding of what they do, and can provide guidance in a concise manner. Experience has also shown that methodologies and tools which are developed in a collaborative manner, together with those who will use them, have the best chance of being used effectively and making an impact operationally.

Gender Units and Gender Focal points

Although the mainstreaming strategy requires a shift of responsibility for promoting gender equality from specialists to all personnel, especially management levels, this does not 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, have new roles - catalyzing, advising and supporting the efforts of others.

In many countries gender units and/or gender focal points have been established in line ministries and other bodies to promote and monitor gender mainstreaming. The mandates, access to decision-making processes, support from management levels and resource allocations of these experts and focal points, as well as the support provided by the national machineries, vary considerably across countries and this impacts significantly on the effectiveness of the experts and focal points. It is a challenge to ensure that gender units and gender focal points are not seen as solely responsible for gender mainstreaming. Their role is to support management to implement gender mainstreaming. They have potential to be powerful catalysts for promoting gender mainstreaming if sufficient attention is given to their mandates, location and linkages, resources, and support mechanisms.

While there can be no institutional blueprint for effective establishment and use of gender units and gender focal points in line ministries and other national bodies, there are a number of generic requirements which need to be met. These include:

firstly, a clear *job description* outlining the different roles – catalytic roles, advocacy, advisory roles, technical support, dissemination of information, competence development, outreach outside the organization, and monitoring and reporting; secondly, a *skills profile* outlining the qualifications required, and the means by which any necessary additional competence in gender equality and catalytic roles can be acquired on the job; and thirdly, an *organizational profile* clarifying location, reporting structures, access to decision-making processes, linkages with key structures and entities, including management, and access to financial resources.

In some countries networks for gender focal points in line ministries have been established by the national machineries which provide critical support and assist the professional development of the gender focal points, including through training, advisory services, and providing opportunities for networking and exchange to share experiences and good practices on gender mainstreaming. These networks could be further developed to create an enabling environment.

Gender analysis

Over the past 10-15 years different models for gender analysis have been developed which have often been unquestioningly adopted within organizations. The outcome of efforts to introduce gender analysis has been mixed, depending on how practical and "understandable" the analysis methods are, and the manner in which they are linked to the work of organizations. Presentation of analysis models in training programmes in a theoretical manner, with no direct links to the work of participants, can create frustration and resistance.

Developing gender analysis capacity does not so much require teaching a particular analysis model, but fostering capacity of participants to ask the right questions in relation to their work and to know where to go to find the relevant information. It needs to be kept in mind that training programmes do not aim to turn all professionals into gender specialists. Professionals should be supported to know how to analyse their work from a gender perspective, that is, to know what critical questions should be raised, and how to work with these in their daily work.

Presenting gender analysis solely as a separate analysis methodology often leads to the assumption that all gender analysis should be carried out as separate analyses. Gender mainstreaming rather requires that gender perspectives are incorporated into all existing analyses, such as sector analyses, poverty analyses or analyses on HIV/AIDS, disability, etc. Training programmes should support participants to fully integrate gender perspectives into the existing analyses in their day-to-day work.

8. Facilitating gender mainstreaming within line ministries

The work of a line ministry or other body at national level will be supported by the existence of a national policy and/or strategy on gender equality which includes an explicit commitment to gender mainstreaming. The existence of a strong, pro-active national machinery, interested in collaborating with line ministries and other national bodies, is also critical for successful implementation of gender mainstreaming.

At managerial level within line ministries, a number of critical steps can be identified: firstly, the development of an overall *policy and strategy* which clearly outlines the value of including gender perspectives in all areas of work in different the sector, highlights top management commitment and the expected roles and responsibilities and accountabilities of all staff, and indicates resource requirements; secondly, mandatory incorporation of gender perspectives into all *planning and budget processes*; thirdly, requirement of the development of concrete *action plans* with time frames in all organizational units, which include clear indications of how the plans would be monitored and reported on; and fourthly, mandated sex-disaggregation of all *data* and identification of data collection needs to adequately carry out gender analyses in all areas of work in the sector.

At institutional level, the following support to gender mainstreaming could be provided by management to create an enabling environment: firstly, development and delivery of hands-on *training programmes* for all categories and levels of staff, including executive briefings for senior levels; secondly, development of *guidance tools and materials* – briefing notes, fact sheets, guides and manuals; thirdly, development of *accountability mechanisms* to hold staff responsible – through individual contracts, reporting procedures and monitoring and evaluation procedures; fourthly, systematic *monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements*, including documentation and dissemination of good practice examples.

Individual sector specialists in line ministries would need to consider a number of issues in relation to the specific areas of work in sectors they are responsible for:

What does gender equality concretely mean in the specific area of work in the sector?

What has already been done to promote gender equality and what has been achieved? How can this be built on?

What gaps remain and how can they be addressed?

What are the implications for data collection and utilization? Is sufficient information/data available? Where does available information need to be further disaggregated? What new questions have to be addressed?

How would existing activities – data collection, analysis, policies, strategies, action plans, and activities - have to change to more adequately take gender perspectives into account?

What new actions would need to be undertaken?

9. The role of national machineries in promoting and supporting gender mainstreaming

A key question in relation to developing strategies and approaches for creating an enabling environment for promoting gender equality is the role of national machineries. National machineries have a critical catalytic role to play in promoting, supporting and monitoring gender mainstreaming in line ministries and other bodies at national level.

Unfortunately, experience has shown that, for different reasons, many national machineries are not directly involved in stimulating and supporting gender

mainstreaming and do not have close working relationships with line ministries and other bodies. The national machineries are fully engaged in implementing other activities, such as technical projects and carrying out research, advocacy and information dissemination. It is critical that national machineries establish support to gender mainstreaming as a priority area and identify clear goals on their roles in relation to gender mainstreaming, as well as indicators on the achievement of these goals. Roles that have already been discussed include the support provided to gender units and gender focal points in line ministries, including through networks, as well as the support to mandatory use of gender analysis in line ministries.

The potential role of national machineries needs further discussion. There is a need for further clarity on how national machineries could increase the priority given to gender mainstreaming, what "catalytic" roles for national machineries would entail in concrete terms; and what the resource and capacity requirements are for more active roles of national machineries in promoting, supporting and monitoring the implementation of gender mainstreaming in line ministries and other bodies at national level.

10. Conclusions

Like any other strategy, gender mainstreaming can only be as good as the efforts made to implement it. There is clearly a need to invest greater resources to ensure enhanced understanding of the strategy and the ways in which it should be implemented. A lot of what is today called gender mainstreaming – and is criticized for failing to achieve the intended goals – is in reality not gender mainstreaming. It is important to be clear about what gender mainstreaming is and what its implementation involves – particularly awareness that any process which makes gender perspectives invisible is *not* gender mainstreaming. It is also critical to be as practical and concrete as possible in promoting, supporting and monitoring its implementation.

The review and appraisal of implementation of the Platform for Action at this high-level regional intergovernmental meeting, and this panel and its parallel session in particular, provides an important occasion to renew commitment to gender mainstreaming as a critical strategy for gender equality and to build on achievements made and lessons learned by highlighting the main gaps and challenges and clarifying further actions required for its full implementation.

The importance of exchange of experiences, achievements and good practices, as well as constraints and challenges, cannot be over-emphasized. The parallel session provides an opportunity to discuss further good experiences with key well-tried approaches, such as training programmes and use of gender specialists, and to address some of the constraints identified in relation to these approaches. In addition, discussion of concrete experiences with some of the more recent innovations, such as gender audits, mandatory gender analysis and gender mainstreaming in budgets, would be very useful. Further consideration of the role of national machineries in relation to promoting and supporting these approaches in line ministries and other national level bodies would also be critical.

