



GENDER MAINSTREAMING

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INTRODUCTION

In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was signed by governments across the world. *Gender equality* was identified as a major global goal, and *mainstreaming* was identified as the most important mechanism to achieve it.

The mandate for gender mainstreaming was strengthened by the ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions in 1997 and the outcome of the General Assembly special session to follow-up the Beijing Conference (June 2000). Following the UN endorsement of gender mainstreaming, this has come to be the dominant policy approach in the European Union (EU).¹ Gender mainstreaming has become an important global strategy for promoting gender equality. Whether it is successful is another matter.

WHAT IS GENDER EQUALITY?

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals, irrespective of whether they are born male or female. Equality involves ensuring that the perceptions, interests, needs and priorities of women and men - which can be very different because of the differing roles and responsibilities of women and men - will be given equal weight in planning and decision-making.²

There is a dual rationale for promoting gender equality:

1. Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and social justice.
2. Greater equality between women and men has been found to be both a pre-condition for and an effective indicator of sustainable people-centred development. The perceptions, interests, needs and priorities of both women and men must be taken into consideration not only as a matter of social justice but because they are necessary to enrich development processes.

"Sixty years have passed since the founders of the United Nations inscribed on the first page of our Charter the equal rights of women and men. Since then, study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity or to reduce infant and maternal mortality. No other policy is as sure to improve nutrition and promote health — including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation. And I would venture that no policy is more important in preventing conflict, or in achieving reconciliation after a conflict has ended": *UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan*³

WHAT IS GENDER MAINSTREAMING?

Gender mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy to achieve the goal of gender equality, by placing this aspiration at the centre of analyses and decision-making. Gender mainstreaming is the process by which the impact of all policies and programs on women and men are considered at every stage of the program cycle — from planning to implementation and evaluation.⁴

The major principles of gender mainstreaming were established in the ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions (1997/2):

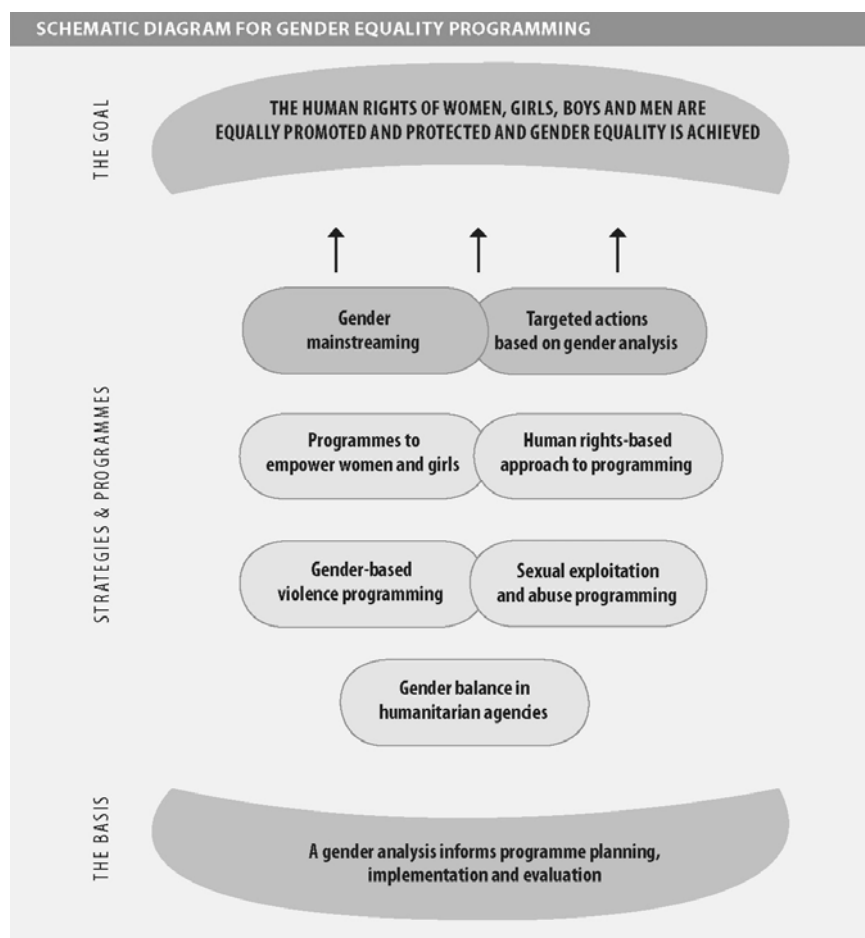
"Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension 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"⁵.

Achieving gender equality requires change a fundamental level, including changes in attitudes and relationships, changes in institutions and legal frameworks, changes in economic institutions, and changes in political decision making structures.⁶ Optimally, mainstreaming achieves this by enlarging the policy framework to bring the analyses of gender inequality into line with academic feminist views of 'the problem'.⁷

Gender mainstreaming means there is no further need for women specific targeted interventions → FALSE

The Beijing Platform calls for a two pronged attack upon gender inequality. Gender perspective should form an integral part of all activities across all programs, however, this should be done in compliment with separate women's projects designed to address specific gaps or problems in the promotion of gender equality. Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment are in no way in competition with each other. The endorsement of gender mainstreaming within an organization in no way implies that targeted activities are no longer needed.

Women-specific projects are still necessary because gender equality has not yet been attained and gender mainstreaming processes are not well developed. Targeted women-specific initiatives can both empower women and act as an important incubator for ideas and strategies than can be transferred to mainstream interventions. Initiatives focused on men support promotion of gender equality by developing male allies.



PROBLEMS OF MAINSTREAMING GENDER

The mainstreaming of gender in refugee issues, planning and policy was initially welcomed as a strategy to facilitate the development of effective mechanisms to address the massive disparity between conditions and treatment of refugee men and women. Since the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, gender mainstreaming has been widely criticised as a confusing conceptual framework at best, and at worst, a force that has totally undermined women's rights. Some say that it has resulted in the disappearance of attention to women's specific needs and the gender-differentiated impacts of policies and programs.⁸

Mainstreaming has been described as a "deceptively simple concept that is likely to be extremely difficult to operationalize" and as "an extraordinarily demanding concept, which requires the adoption of a gender perspective by all the central actors in the policy process". Vagueness and the lack of ownership behind the concept has made it easy for organisations to ostensibly embrace mainstreaming without implementing the extensive ground work and structural change that is necessary to ensure effective outcomes.

One of the greatest concerns regarding mainstreaming is the degree to which mainstreaming can tackle the tendency of markets to replicate and aggravate inequalities in society. At face value, mainstreaming appears to be addressed to public organisations, rather than to private market actors. Its success in tackling equality will depend to a significant extent on the willingness of these organisations to pursue mainstreaming even where this will impose burdens and costs on market actors. However, mainstreaming has emerged as a strategy in a period in which many governments have been anxious to reduce the costs and burdens imposed on market actors. Within the context of macro-economics there is a sense that trade liberalisation is a 'hard area' that has nothing to do with gender. Gender equality and gender mainstreaming are therefore relegated to "softer" areas that must work to offset the costs of macro planning decisions and outcomes. Allowances may be made to examine food distribution between men and women but gender will not be considered in discussions about agricultural liberalization or tariff reductions. Yet both of these have significant implications for food security, self-sufficiency, and sustainable livelihoods. Present approaches to macroeconomics have tended to reinforce a simplistic antipoverty agenda that is incompatible with process of gender mainstreaming. Gender equality must be reaffirmed as an end in itself and not simply a means to an end when convenient. This requires attention to structural policies and changes of paradigms including specific attention to institutional factors such as how the so-called "hard areas" and "soft areas" interrelate at the meta, meso, micro and macro levels of the economy.

On a more practical level, within in the UN, there has been found to be a number of obstacles and constraints upon gender mainstreaming. Initial analysis showed there to be considerable confusion around mainstreaming concepts, in particular the equating of gender mainstreaming with gender balance in the Organization. There was a general lack of understanding of what gender mainstreaming entails in practical terms and a lack of access to support mechanisms. Concern was expressed at the remaining gaps between policy and practice, with particular challenges relating to inadequate institutional mechanisms, including in the area of data collection, accountability, monitoring, reporting and training, as well as inadequate resource allocation.⁹

MAINSTREAMING IN UN POLICY IN UNHCR POLICY

Although UNHCR's Statute does not specify any particular responsibilities in relation to the protection of refugee women and girls, numerous Conclusions adopted by the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom) articulate principles to be followed and measures to be taken by UNHCR in this respect. The Agenda for Protection, adopted by ExCom in 2002, has a special focus in Goal 6 on meeting the protection needs of refugee women and refugee children.¹

UNHCR is also bound by resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly, ECOSOC, and the Security Council that relate to their activities and mandate. Such decisions and resolutions have given UNHCR the responsibility to promote gender equality and work towards the elimination of violence against women and girls of concern as integral parts of their protection mandate.

The UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) strategy UNHCR's age, gender and diversity mainstreaming (AGDM) strategy supports the meaningful participation of girls, boys, women and men of all ages and backgrounds, who are of concern to the Office. AGDM operates to make their participation integral to the design,

¹ UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls: Chapter 2: Principles and Practices for Gender Equality

implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all UNHCR policies and operations so that these impact equitably on everyone of concern.

Its overall goals are gender equality and the enjoyment by everyone of concern of their rights regardless of their age, sex, gender or background. Their attainment is the responsibility of all staff.¹⁰ A rights- and community-based approach is fundamental to the strategy and should underpin all activities.

UNHCR's AGDM strategy involves:¹¹

- promoting a multi-functional team (MFT) approach to bring together the expertise and skills of all UNHCR staff and partners to maximise effectiveness;
- undertaking regular participatory assessments with women, girls, boys and men of all ages and diverse backgrounds to analyse their protection risks, concerns, priorities, capacities and proposed solutions and evaluating the outcomes in partnership with them;¹²
- putting persons of concern at the heart of operational planning by ensuring that findings from participatory assessments are analysed from an age, gender and diversity perspective and form the basis of protection strategies and programming for solutions;
- identifying through age, gender and diversity analysis where targeted actions are required to address inequalities and support the empowerment and protection of discriminated groups, in particular women and girls at risk;
- mainstreaming age, gender and diversity analysis into all activities such as policy development, manuals and guidelines, capacity building and training and in the design and delivery of programme assistance and sharing lessons learned;¹³ and
- holding staff accountable for mainstreaming and targeted action through an AGDM accountability framework.

Part of this strategy involves the collection of sex- and age-disaggregated data. This should be collected and analysed routinely to understand the impact of the humanitarian response on the total population. Unless it is known who is affected, and who is most at risk, the services provided by the UN may be off target. Data on the population affected by the crisis should always be broken down by age and sex and other relevant factors such as ethnicity or religion.¹⁴ UN Resolution 2005 31 expresses concern at the inadequate institutional mechanisms in the UN, including in the area of data collection, accountability, monitoring, reporting and training, as well as inadequate resource allocation.²

RESOURCES

- A taskforce within the Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality worked to develop an inventory of good practice examples on gender mainstreaming taken from the United Nations system available at <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/resources/goodpractices/>>
- A handbook offering 'real and practical guidance on identifying and addressing the differing needs and situations of women, girls, boys and men': Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs - Equal Opportunities. IASC Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action, IASC, December 2006, available at http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/subsidi/tf_gender/default.asp?bodyID=1&publish=0.
- A tool which outlines a series of steps for conducting a participatory assessment with refugees or other persons of concern. If applied systematically, it is meant to ensure that women and men of all ages and backgrounds are given the opportunity to identify and voice their own protection risks, priorities, and solutions, and thus participate meaningfully in the development of the annual country operations plan: UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations, May 2006, available at: <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=462df4232>>
- A resource packet on masculinities and male inclusion in gender mainstreaming covering definitions, approaches, application in the refugee context and tools: Masculinities: Male Roles and Male Involvement in the Promotion of Gender Equality. A Resource Packet, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, September 2005', available at: <http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/masc_res.pdf>
- A guide which describes best practice of the clinical management of people who have been raped in emergency situations. It is intended for adaptation to each situation, taking into account national policies and

² Resolution 2005 31, 'Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system'

practices, and availability of materials and drugs: Clinical Management of Survivors of Rape. A Guide to the Development of Protocols for Use in Refugee and Internally Displaced Person Situations, WHO and UNHCR, January 2005, available at: <<http://www.rhrc.org/pdf/cmrs.pdf>>

- A training kit on Refugee Protection aims to facilitate the integration of a gender perspective into all aspects of operations, and particularly, in protection training. This training kit highlights five important gender themes relating to protection, namely, women's human rights, gender-based violence, gender sensitive refugee status determination procedures, interviewing and interpreting, and emergencies: UNHCR Gender Training Kit on Refugee Protection and Resource Handbook, December 2002 available at: <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3f463b632&page=search>>
- A report of a dialogue created by over 500 consultations with refugee women undertaken to give these women a voice and help the UNHCR take stock of the Office's commitments to, and remaining gaps in, promoting equal rights of refugee women and men: Respect Our Rights: Partnership for Equality. Report on the Dialogue with Refugee Women, Geneva, Switzerland 20-22 June 2001, December 2001, available at: <http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/unhcr_ref.pdf>
- A guide to provide practical examples of empowerment: Good Practices in Gender Equality Mainstreaming. A Practical Guide to Empowerment, UNHCR, June 2001 available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=search&docid=413476574>

¹ Esther Breitenbach and Yvonne Galligan 'Measuring gender equality: reflecting on experiences and challenges in the UK and Ireland' *Policy & Politics* (2006) 34(4), 597–614

² Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, United Nations, 'Important Concepts Underlying Gender Mainstreaming', (CH rev. August 2001) Available at: <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet2.pdf>>

³ Kofi Annan (UN Secretary-General) 'Masculinities: Male Roles and Male Involvement in the Promotion of Gender Equality_A Resource Packet', Beijing +10 meeting in New York, March 2005.

⁴ Inter-agency Standing Committee, 'Women, Girls, Boys and Men_Different Needs – Equal Opportunities' IASC Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action, December 2006

⁵ ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2, Available at: <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=4652c9fc2&page=search>, Accessed 7/4/08

⁶ Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, 'Gender Mainstreaming – An overview', United Nations New York, 2002.

⁷ Fiona Beveridge and Sue Nott 'Mainstreaming: A Case for Optimism And Cynicism' *Feminist Legal Studies* 10: 299–311, 2002.

⁸ Joanna Kerr, 'Gender Mainstreaming: Can it Work for Women's Rights?' Spotlight 3, November 2004, available at: <http://www.awid.org/publications/occasionalpapers/spotlight3_en/pdf>

⁹ Resolution 2005 31

¹⁰ ExCom Conclusion No. 102 (LVI), 2005, para. (p).

¹¹ UNHCR Handbook for the protection of Women and Girls, 34

¹² ExCom Conclusion No. 102 (LVI), 2005, para. (p).

¹³ ExCom Conclusion No. 105 (LVII), 2006, para. (i)(iv).

¹⁴ Inter-agency Standing Committee, 'Women, Girls, Boys and Men_Different Needs – Equal Opportunities' IASC Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action, December 2006