



**CONCORD Cotonou Working group
Briefing paper**

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Gender and Development

International development targets, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), will not be achieved if gender equality and women's rights are not fulfilled. Some data clearly show the feminisation of poverty: about 70% of those in extreme poverty are women and girls, while 70% of women and children are living below the poverty line; the women's share of worldwide wages is 10%, of illiterates is 66% and of people infected with HIV is 59%.

Inequality, including gender inequality, is detrimental to sustainable development and therefore women's rights are an important pre-condition to achieve development goals. Whereas gender equality and gender justice are goals, there are several strategies to achieve them, including gender mainstreaming (implement gender analysis and address the differences between women's and men's needs and priorities at every stage of the policy process, programming and implementation), rights-based approach (empower women to claim their rights and hold their governments accountable) and feminism (which mainly focuses on women's experiences in order to influence gender analysis).

The most effective approach is a twin-track approach of gender mainstreaming and of specific actions targeting the promotion of women's rights. Aid is not neutral with regard to gender as it tends to benefit men more than women. For this very reason, development assistance should be gender sensitive and benefit women disproportionately.

What the EU is doing

The European Community has strongly committed itself to promoting gender equality and women's rights in all its actions. On the international level, commitments include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), signed and ratified by all Member States of the Union, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, signed by all Member States as well as the European Community. Furthermore, the EC and the Member States have committed themselves to contributing to the achievement of the MDGs, and MDG 3 specifically calls for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

These commitments are clearly stated in the Cotonou agreement, (with article 31 explicitly focusing on gender issues), and are reaffirmed in the European Consensus on Development, which recognises that "the promotion of gender equality and women's rights is not only crucial in itself but is also a fundamental human right and a question of social justice [...] In other words, the EU will include a strong gender component in all its policies and practices in its relations with developing countries". The EU has committed itself to promote gender equality cooperation through the twin-track approach, as is repeatedly stated by EC key documents.

The EC is therefore legally and politically bound to promote gender equality and the rights of women and girls in its development policies and assistance. However, despite commitments in key policy documents gender mainstreaming has not yet been implemented systematically nor prioritised in actual EU development cooperation, while financial allocations and human resources are wholly inadequate compared to the commitments made.

Country strategy papers (CSPs)

CSPs are the bases for EC aid programming in developing countries. They should be aligned with gender-specific commitments and need to be adjusted based on assessments of gender-based performance indicators. While there is indeed evidence of a gender perspective in the CSP analysis framework, in several cases the response strategy remains weak in its ability to adequately address gender concerns. In several instances, gender is stipulated as a cross-cutting issue or is referred to in rhetorical statements such as “shall be mainstreamed” without clear indications of how this will be achieved, nor evidence of the provision of budget allocations. In Malawi, for instance, where gender equality index is only 0.374, education could be a key factor to tackle inequalities, but the EC response strategy does not have education as a focal sector and gender is considered a non focal sector. Mozambique has clearly integrated cross-cutting issues in almost all its sectors such as general budget support, health, food security/agriculture and governance but still there are no indicators to determine its impact. Zambia includes gender in the health focal sector but relies on the government as part of its governance commitments to address gender equality in the other sectors.

Investing In People (IIP)

Gender equality is one of the priority themes of the IIP programme, which is part of the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), one of the new EC external funding instruments. However the resources allocated are extremely low with only 5% of the total resources available for the thematic programme for the whole period. Although the IIP strategy committed to including gender as one of the cross cutting issue within its 4 main priorities, it is also not clear how that will be done. Thus, there is all the more reason to monitor the implementation of the IIP through its Annual Action Plans laying out the implementation plan for each individual year. Also, it remains unclear to which extent gender equality will be mainstreamed throughout the geographic programmes.

Communication on Gender Equality

Finally, the European Commission marked International Women's Day by issuing a Communication on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Developing Cooperation, which provides a framework for gender equality, analyses progress and challenges, and outlines a twin-track strategy to increase the efficiency of gender mainstreaming and implement specific actions. The Council issued its conclusions on the same topic in May and the European Parliament will adopt a resolution in January.

Our recommendations

- We support the twin-track strategy and stress that gender mainstreaming is a strategy (not a goal) and complements (not replaces) specific actions designed to promote gender equality.
- We also support the reference to MDGs as a minimum framework to achieve gender equality.
- Gender mainstreaming commitments must be considered across all thematic and geographic programmes, not only in those programmes explicitly addressing gender issues.
- For an effective gender mainstreaming, specific tools are needed: adequate human and financial resources, gender training for officials, gender-sensitive indicators, access to sex disaggregated and gender-sensitive data, research and analysis on current developments from a gender perspective, gender analysis included as part of the programming process, systems that measure the extent to which development aid promotes gender equality, as well as participation of women at programming, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation levels.
- We also urge the EC and member states to explicitly prioritise the fight against gender-based violence and the need to empower women by giving them the tools to practice safe sex and reduce vulnerability to HIV infection.
- The EU should not only focus on violations of women's rights committed by the state but also consider violations committed by private actors (in the economic sphere and at home).
- The EU should ensure consistency among all its external policies and instruments.
- The JPA should formally ask the EC to include a strong gender perspective in the CSPs, adhering to the twin-track approach, and ACP MPs and MEPs should lobby their own governments to make sure they take gender issues into account in the drafting process.
- Finally, the JPA is also a good opportunity to raise concerns on the final stage of negotiations for the EPAs and the EU-Africa Strategy: participants might want to ask how gender perspective is taken into account during the negotiations and if women's organisations have been consulted.

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