

Contribution by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to the Open Consultation on Gender, Co-Chaired by the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania and the Republic of Ireland

New York
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On behalf of our Executive Director, Ms Ann Veneman, I wish to express the thanks of UNICEF to the Co-Chairs for the invitation to speak at the opening segment of this consultation.

I believe it goes almost without saying that we, together with all the agencies and Governments present here, share a common commitment to strengthening our collective efforts to achieve gender equality and promote and ensure the rights of girls and women, as well as those of boys and men. UNICEF places particular importance on these issues, and has special interest in these consultations, in view of the many ways in which the status, well being and participation of women affects the survival, growth, development and protection of children. We also, naturally, place particular importance on the rights of girls, who tend in many cases to be among the most disadvantaged people in society.

Given our collective concern to strengthen national capacities to pursue gender equality, to which the UN agencies contribute through their cooperation, I would like to share briefly the findings of the recently-concluded independent evaluation of UNICEF's application of the Gender Policy adopted by our Executive Board in 1994. This assessment of our experience over the last decade may hold lessons which could be of wider relevance and applicability to partners, including in the pursuit of greater effectiveness of United Nations cooperation in this critical area.

The recent Evaluation of Gender Policy Implementation in UNICEF recognised a strong correlation between increased gender equality and the achievement of key Millennium Development Goals affecting children, for example MDG 4 on child survival. Core goals for children can only be achieved if gender inequality is addressed at multiple levels. In this context, the Evaluation found that UNICEF has generated many good practices in programming for gender equality – but these have been the result more of individual efforts than of a systematic application of its policy. Lessons have not been effectively used for scaling up or for sharing and building capacity with partners.

In addition, UNICEF was found to have significantly under-resourced its efforts to mainstream gender in programme cooperation and to lack effective accountability mechanisms. Stronger communication is needed from senior levels to operational managers, emphasising the policies in place. It is interesting to note that the evaluators

referred to a study undertaken in 2005 which summarised the conclusions of gender equality evaluations from 9 international agencies, and reached very similar conclusions.

Our external Evaluators concluded that UNICEF is comparatively well-placed to be effective in gender mainstreaming, given its credibility with partners, strong field presence, the commitment of its staff and its life-cycle and rights-based approaches to programming with partners. However, they and we agree that certain systemic weaknesses need to be tackled. UNICEF is currently developing an organisational action plan to do so. This will include the strengthening of technical capacities and programming tools, the updating of our Gender Policy and of our systems of accountability for gender mainstreaming.

In the context of the consultations on System-Wide Coherence, I would conclude by emphasising that we fully intend to carry out these efforts to rapidly strengthen our own performance as part of the wider collective efforts of the UN system. The “complementarities process” together with UNDP, UNFPA and UNIFEM, identifying actions to align the work of all four agencies in support of gender equality results, and the immediate preparation of a shared e-learning package on gender, are among the current examples of our collaborative work. The UN Development Group working group on programming issues and the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality are among the critical forums to which UNICEF contributes - and through which the collective effectiveness of the work of UN agencies in support of national capacities can be improved, as a key part of the follow-up to the 2007 triennial comprehensive policy review.

We hope these brief lessons from our recent evaluation are of interest to the participants in this Consultation and we would be glad to make the complete report and findings available. The lesson that may be especially relevant for the broader gender architecture debate is the need to recognize that mainstreaming itself requires specialized resources and expertise - and that systemic change requires strong institutional investment and clear accountability mechanisms.

We look forward very much to the discussion this afternoon.

Thank you.

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