



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 8.3.2007
COM(2007) 100 final

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL**

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Development Cooperation

[SEC(2007) 332]

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that Gender Equality is not only crucial in itself but is a fundamental human right and a question of social justice. Furthermore, Gender Equality is essential for growth and poverty reduction, and it is key to reaching the Millennium Development Goals. Nevertheless, gender inequalities are still ingrained in the cultural, social and political systems of many countries.

The EC and the EU Member States are key players in the effort to close the gender gap in the developing world. At international level they are signatories to International Agreements and Declarations supporting Gender Equality **(1)** (for all endnotes see **Annex I**). Accordingly, current EU development policy contains a strong commitment to accelerate progress in this important area.

Thus, the **European Consensus (2)** highlights the importance of Gender Equality in the context of the new aid modalities. While Gender Equality is a common objective and a common value of the entire EU, the Consensus recognises Gender Equality as a goal in its own right. Furthermore, the policy document identifies Gender Equality as one of the five common principles **(3)** of EU development cooperation.

In addition, the EU is committed to the equality of women and men, girls and boys in its development cooperation Agreements with all geographical regions **(4)**. Furthermore, the 'Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men'**(5)** identifies the 'promotion of women's rights and empowerment outside the EU' as one of six priority areas **(6)**.

To progress towards greater Gender Equality most Member States and the European Commission have, hitherto, adopted a twin-track strategy. This comprises, on the one hand, the mainstreaming of Gender Equality in all policies, strategies and actions and, on the other, the financing of measures which directly support women's empowerment **(7)**.

To adapt this approach to the new aid modalities and to the requirements of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the Commission, together with UNIFEM **(8)**, organised a major Conference in November 2005 on the theme "Owning Development: Promoting Gender Equality in New Aid Modalities and Partnerships". This Conference reviewed the progress made in eliminating gender inequality in the developing world, and re-assessed the role of the EU in accelerating Gender Equality in the context of changes in the architecture of EU development aid.

The present Communication builds on the outcome of that Conference, the policy framework of the European Consensus, and on the practical experience gained so far. The Communication also responds to the commitments made in the Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men by formulating an EU strategy to progress towards achieving:

- equal rights (political, civil, economic, employment, social and cultural) for women and men, girls and boys;
- equal access to, and control over, resources for women and men;
- equal opportunities to achieve political and economic influence for women and men.

While the previous 'Programme of Action for the mainstreaming of Gender Equality in Community Development Co-operation' valid between 2001 and 2006 provided the basis for capacity building within the European Commission, the present document places Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment firmly in an EU context and is intended to send the strongest possible signal regarding the importance of Gender Equality in all future EU development cooperation efforts.

2. RATIONALE FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women are at the centre of sustainable social and economic development, poverty reduction and environmental protection. Despite this, gender inequality is part of the daily experience of a large proportion of the world's women. In spite of the complex nature of such inequalities experience has shown that the following areas are particularly significant in understanding the relationship between the status of women and sustainable poverty reduction.

The role of women in **employment and economic activities** is often underestimated because most women work in the **informal** sectors, often with low productivity and incomes, poor working conditions, with little or no social protection. E.g. in Africa women constitute 52 % of the total population, contribute 75 % of the agricultural work and produce and market 60 to 80 % of food. The female labour force in sub-Saharan Africa in 2005 was about 73 million, representing 34 per cent of those employed in the formal sector, earning only 10 per cent of the income while owning 1 per cent of the assets **(9)**.

Although **trade** liberalisation has had a positive impact on most economies in the long term, it may also result in short-term negative consequences for vulnerable groups with poor women being particularly affected **(10)**. Different sectors of the economy can have a crucial impact on Gender Equality: e.g. poor **infrastructure** can undermine girls' schooling because of insecure transport or if the lack of nearby water sources 'forces' the parents to use girls for house work.

Women's empowerment is a key aspect of **governance**. In many countries women still tend to be marginalized as decision-makers. Legislation ensuring equal rights **(11)** for all women and men is critical and must also be accompanied by implementation in order to protect the fundamental human rights of women and also to enhance the reduction of poverty and economic growth. In **conflict situations** women have a critical role and should be fully incorporated into the peace-building efforts, in conformity with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 **(12)**.

Gender inequalities persist as regards access to **education** **(13)**. 57% of the school-age children not in school are girls **(14)**, while almost two thirds of the world's illiterate people are women **(15)**. The ability of women and girls to empower themselves economically and socially by going to school or by engaging in productive and civic activities outside the home is constrained by their responsibility for everyday tasks in the household division of labour.

In the field of **health** there are concerns over women's limited access to basic health services. In addition, the main area where serious Gender Equality concerns exist is the sphere of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Not only does an increased investment in SRH support a basic human right, but an increase in the health status of women has positive effects on the overall economy. Many of the modest gains in women's health realized in recent decades are now threatened by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In addition, the increasing rate of HIV infection among women and girls is a cause for deep concern **(16)**.

Gender-based violence both violates women's human rights and is a serious obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace. Very often sexual violence is associated with the spread of HIV/AIDS. **Trafficking** of women is a crime, which has its roots in widespread poverty, inequality, weak governance, armed conflicts and lack of protection against discrimination.

A more detailed analysis of gender inequality is set out in **Annex II**.

3. PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

The European Union has taken important steps to support greater Gender Equality both within and outside the Union. Gender Equality is becoming a recognised part of the dialogue with more and more partner countries and is being incorporated into the EU's consultations with civil society. This process has raised the level of awareness of our development partners regarding the importance of Gender Equality and women's empowerment and has sensitised them in particular to the relation between greater equality and poverty reduction **(17)**. This process has complemented the considerable progress at country level in accelerating the achievement of Gender Equality through various projects and programmes supported by the European Commission and the EU Member States **(18)**. Throughout the 10th EDF programming exercise, the EC has placed particular emphasis on gender sensitizing the country strategies. There has been clear progress also in the area of capacity building both in Member States and the Commission. **(19)**

Nevertheless, in spite of this progress, significant challenges remain. First, we are still far from reaching the MDG targets. In particular, the first gender MDG deadline of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 was missed. Secondary school enrolment of girls in relation to boys averaged 89% in the developing countries. Women still have a smaller share of decent jobs than men, and one in three women will suffer some form of gender based violence in her lifetime. In addition, the MDGs focus on the health and education aspects of Gender Equality and fail to capture other multifaceted dimensions of Gender Equality **(20)**.

Second, at the social and cultural level there are important factors which serve to slow progress towards the achievement of Gender Equality. Thus, traditional social structures may offer only limited incentives for changing the existing distribution of power between men and women, especially to those with a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo*. This may go some way to explaining why specific gender-related actions are not always regarded as high priority and why, in most country strategies, gender is a subsidiary issue **(21)**.

Again, despite the considerable progress that has been made, it is apparent that effective gender mainstreaming has not been fully integrated into country strategies or in the practice of EU development cooperation. In the case of the European Commission a 'Thematic

Evaluation of the Integration of Gender in EC Development Co-operation with Third Countries' (2003) recognized the constructive work that has been done by the Commission but concluded that specific policy goals on Gender Equality and the integration of gender in EC development co-operation have been weak. Furthermore, the Report concluded that the financial resources specifically allocated to support the integration of gender in development cooperation have been negligible compared to the resources allocated to other horizontal issues. The indications are that many of the recommendations of this Evaluation remain valid – both for the Commission and for some EU Member States. (See the 9 main recommendations of the Report in **Annex IV**). (22)

One of the major assets the EU has available to promote Gender Equality in its external relations is the experience of best practices from inside the Union. Gender Equality is recognised by the EU as a fundamental human right and as a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of growth, full employment and social cohesion. Accordingly, the EU has invested heavily in Gender Equality through legislation (23), gender mainstreaming, specific measures for the advancement of women, action programmes, social dialogue and dialogue with civil society.

A genuine European approach should be built based on this longstanding experience, as well as on the unique nature of Europe as a multicultural and highly diverse group of countries that – despite significant differences in culture and traditions – are all united in devoting a great deal of attention to the issue of equality between women and men. As a fundamental European objective, the EU should support third countries in adhering to, and in the implementation of, international commitments such as the Beijing Platform for Action.

4. AN EU STRATEGY TO ACCELERATE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GENDER EQUALITY

The European Union is now at a turning point regarding Gender Equality in Development Cooperation. The framework and policies are in place – the most important question is how to ensure the effective implementation of strategies and practices within the new aid modalities that genuinely deliver for women. It has to be clearly seen that measures to increase Gender Equality, in addition to increasing social cohesion and enhancing the protection of women's human rights, have a strong impact on economic growth, employment and poverty reduction.

4.1. Objectives

The new EU strategy must respond to two **objectives**: first, to **increase the efficiency of gender mainstreaming**. Second, to **refocus specific actions** for women's empowerment in our partner countries. To reach these objectives cooperation strategies for Gender Equality and women empowerment will have to adapt to the new aid architecture, primarily budget support.

4.1.1. Efficient mainstreaming

For Gender Equality mainstreaming and women's empowerment to become more effective, changes will be needed in three areas:

(1) *Political action:*

- Gender Equality and women empowerment have to be brought to the table during the political dialogue with partner countries at the highest level (24);

(2) *Development cooperation:*

- The key role of women in growth and development needs to be taken into account in the preparation and implementation of cooperation strategies; e.g. agricultural and food security strategies must clearly address the differing constraints faced by rural women, since in certain developing countries they are responsible for up to 80 % of basic food production (25);
- Effective partnership, dialogue and consultation have to be established with relevant stakeholders (including governments, research centres, universities, civil society, international organisations) in the preparation of country strategies and aid programmes;
- Mutual accountability mechanisms have to be put in place that include Gender Equality and women empowerment; the accountability role of different actors: government, regional economic communities, development agencies, international institutions, civil society, parliament and media, must be clarified;
- Gender sensitive performance indicators have to be developed and used;
- Budget support has to take into account Gender Equality concerns by linking the disbursement of incentive tranches to gender sensitive indicators and by going hand in hand with a high quality policy dialogue.

(3) *Institutional capacity building:*

- Updated practical tools have to be developed in the assessment and implementation phases (26);
- Improved access to information and best practices, and gender training for partner countries and staff have to be provided.

4.1.2. *Specific actions to empower women*

Deriving from the analysis in Section 2 above, 41 gender specific actions have been identified in the following broad areas:

- **Governance** (human rights, women's political empowerment, development of indicators, role of women in conflict and post conflict situations);
- **Employment and economic activities** (economic and social empowerment of women, employment, gender budget analysis, public finance management);
- **Education** (abolishing school fees, incentives to send girls to school, improving school environment, adult literacy);

- **Health** (social protection schemes, sexual and reproductive health and rights);
- **Gender-based violence** (legislation, victim protection, awareness raising through media, education and training).

An indicative list of these possible supportive actions has been drawn up and is presented in **Annex III**. These activities are examples to help to identify the proper programme mix for each specific country or region. The proper mix of activities will be decided case by case after a thorough analysis of each individual situation.

4.2. The Principle of Ownership and the New Aid Modalities

Central to the Paris Declaration is the principle of ‘ownership’ of development co-operation initiatives by the recipient country. For actions that promote Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment it has been shown that ‘ownership’ must not only be taken by partner governments, but also by the women beneficiaries themselves. In practice this often means ownership through the involvement of CSOs and CBOs (27). Support to CSOs advocating Gender Equality is especially important in cases where the number of women active in local or central government or in parliament is limited. The EU will, therefore, seek to support the emergence of such CSOs where they do not exist and to ensure a significant investment in capacity-building for such organisations where they exist but are in need of strengthening for example in the areas of: lobbying skills, advocacy, gender analysis and economic literacy.

The EU will seek to ensure the efficient channelling of development aid in support of country-owned gender policies on the basis of an in-depth policy dialogue with partner governments and key non-government stakeholders. The constraints and needs in each specific country context will be analyzed in order to enable genuine local ownership to be created both at the government and at the civil society levels as well as within the donor community.

The paradigm shift represented by the Paris Declaration is reflected in the preferred new mechanisms for aid delivery, i.e. budget support and sector wide approaches, as opposed to support for individual, stand-alone projects. The use of budget support is dependent on the presence of certain conditions, in particular having a national or sectoral development strategy under implementation, having a macro-economic reform programme in place supported by major international donors (usually the IMF) and having a proven commitment to reform.

Budget support can contribute to the achievement of Gender Equality by linking the disbursement of variable tranches to improvements in gender disaggregated indicators; by strengthening public finance management systems, and by stimulating a wider dialogue on partner countries’ policy priorities.

The European Commission and the Member States will support the development of indicators plus the collection of the relevant data that can track changes in Gender Equality and which can be linked to the disbursement of variable tranches.

4.3. Gender in National Strategies

The preparation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, a National Development Plan or a Country Strategy Paper provides a unique opportunity to analyse the status of women relative to men, to determine gender-related obstacles to development and growth and to define country-wide gender sensitive policies. The gender situation of a country has to be analysed

across sectors with an eye to understanding its implications for growth and poverty. In this context, the EU's on-going process of political dialogue with partner countries will be used to ensure that Gender Equality issues are included in the analysis of poverty variables. This political dialogue will be complemented by EU assistance to reinforce the gender capacities of national authorities. Emphasis will be put on defining poverty not simply as a lack of income or financial resources, but as encompassing the notion of inequalities in access to, and control over, the material and non-material benefits in society. This will involve the inclusion of a number of issues on the political agenda such as:

- Securing acceptance for a broader multi-dimensional conception of poverty beyond income poverty including time poverty and measures of the differential impact of poverty on both women and men, as well as the promotion of technology that reduces time poverty;
- Securing agreement that civil society should contribute to policy dialogue, formulation and monitoring of PRSPs all from a gender perspective plus agreement for appropriate capacity-building measures to be put in place;

4.4. A Need for Gender Sensitive Indicators

Indicators are necessary to measure the outcomes of gender mainstreaming and gender specific actions (28). Most indicators currently used tend to reflect Gender Equality concerns in the social sectors. There are few reliable indicators available in most developing countries to measure changes in female employment, the unpaid care economy, civil rights, incidence/prevalence of violence against women, right to inheritance/property and land use, women's representation and participation in decision-making.

The EU will therefore support the development and use of gender-sensitive indicators and the strengthening of the underlying basic statistics to enable progress across the entire spectrum of equality and empowerment issues to be addressed (29). **Annex VII** contains a non-exhaustive list of possible indicators, taking into account the areas of education, health, governance/empowerment of women, employment/economic activities, time use and violence against women.

4.5. Strategies for Gender Responsive Budgets

The increased use of budget support as a major instrument of aid delivery raises the question of how to promote Gender Equality within or through such a programme. To achieve this it is vitally important to ensure that partner countries' budgets are gender responsive. This requires:

- Focus on gender awareness and gender mainstreaming in the budgeting process at national and local levels;
- *Re-prioritisation* of expenditure and *re-orientation* of programmes within sectors to achieve both Gender Equality and human development.
- Monitoring of government revenue and expenditure to ensure that the inequality gap between females and males is in fact decreasing;

4.6. Coordination and Harmonisation with Member States

Coordination aimed at maximising complementarity between the programmes of EU Member States and the Commission is a key element in the effective promotion of Gender Equality in development cooperation. The Commission will continue the practice of organising regular meetings of Member State Gender Experts and, together with the Member States, will seek to increase not only EU-wide coordination but also harmonisation of activities on the promotion of Gender Equality in development cooperation. Priority will be given to reinforcing EC and Member State gender expertise through the identification and exchange of best practices. The preparation of Country Strategy Papers and Joint Assistance Strategies will continue to be a focus for enhanced coordination and harmonisation efforts. Furthermore, EC Delegations and EU Member State Embassies will continue to use existing coordination mechanisms to address Gender Equality activities in the field.

4.7. EU Action at International and Regional Levels

Bilateral cooperation with partner countries on the issue of Gender Equality will be complemented by EU action at the international level. The presence of a unified European voice at this level reinforces the role of the EU as a major global actor in development cooperation. The Commission and the EU Member States will actively seek to advance Gender Equality and women's empowerment in relevant international fora. Of particular importance is the promotion of the extension of the scope of Gender Equality from health and education to other areas not captured by MDG3.

Regional and inter-regional cooperation encourage information sharing between the members of the regional organisations on gender specific tools, data, analytical documentation and training. The Commission and the Member States will therefore continue to promote regional cooperation in the field of Gender Equality as well as engaging with the existing international and regional networks in this area.

5. SPECIFIC EC ACTIONS FOR THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY

The role of the European Commission in implementing this strategy will involve actions on three fronts:

5.1. Country Programming

The European Commission will pay particular attention to ensure that Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment feature in all future country and regional strategies **(30)**. This will involve the following actions:

- the further development of internal tools and programming guidelines;
- the systematic gender assessment of country and regional strategies, including the mid-term and final reviews of such strategies;
- the adjustment of country strategies according to the results of the above assessments;
- the building of partnerships with relevant international organisations who have a significant experience in mainstreaming gender into projects and programmes. **(31)**

5.2. Thematic Programmes and Other Financial Instruments

Apart from national or regional programmes, additional resources are available through multi-annual thematic programmes tabled by the Commission under the financial perspectives 2007-2013. The Thematic Programme “Investing in People” **(32)** contains a financial envelope for funding EC actions in the area of promoting Gender Equality and the empowerment of women. Through this Thematic Programme EC funding will be made available to the following broad areas of interventions:

- policy and advocacy events promoting the implementation of international commitments;
- capacity building for NGOs and associations dedicated to the advancement of Gender Equality and women’s rights;
- strengthening statistical capacity of governments.

The funds available will be allocated through calls for proposals from eligible organisations and by direct agreements with selected partners.

Gender Equality will also be supported through the implementation of the Environment **(33)** and Food Security **(34)** thematic programmes, as well as under the new European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR II) **(35)** and the Instrument for Stability **(36)**.

5.3. Monitoring and Follow-up

The practical outcome of this new EU Strategy needs to be monitored. Accordingly, to evaluate the progress made and to refine and adapt the Strategy to changes in the international context, the European Commission will organise in 2010 a second major international Conference on Gender Equality with the participation of all major stakeholders **(37)**. Furthermore, a mid-term and a final evaluation of the implementation of this strategy will be executed by an external evaluator in 2010 and at the end of the 10th EDF cycle. These evaluations will include a gender budget analysis of EC funded projects and programmes including general budget support in at least twelve selected pilot countries.

EC Delegations, in close collaboration with Member State Embassies, will continue to include in their annual reporting an assessment of the promotion and achievement of Gender Equality in the partner country. Also, the Gender Equality section of the ‘Annual Report on the European Community’s development policy and the implementation of external assistance’ will continue to publish aggregate information on progress made towards achieving Gender Equality. The EC and the Member States will examine the possibility of a joint EU annual reporting system that could include monitoring of gender mainstreaming in EU development cooperation.

6. CONCLUSION

The eradication of poverty demands that women and men be given equal opportunities in the economic and social spheres and have equal access to, and control over, the resources of society. However, if significant progress is to be made in the achievement of greater Gender Equality by the EU’s developing country partners, the EU needs to tackle systematically the constraints on the achievement of this goal that exist both on the side of developing countries themselves and inherent in some of the EU’s own development cooperation mechanisms.

These issues can be addressed only in the context of an enhanced political dialogue which incorporates Gender as an explicit theme and which paves the way for the EU to engage actively with those CSO's and other organisations that make up the constituency for increased Gender Equality in the country concerned.

Within such a framework the primary instrument to achieve greater Gender Equality, **gender mainstreaming** has to be used in a more effective and practical way if we are to make real progress towards the goal of greater Gender Equality. The secondary instrument, **specific, targeted actions**, to empower women, has to be used so as to complement mainstreaming activities and to address key strategic issues that impact on the well-being and opportunities of particular vulnerable groups. For both instruments, their application must be sensitive to, and reflect, the unique social and cultural situation of each of the EU's developing partner countries. To support such an approach, the focus of Gender Equality which, hitherto, has been mainly on health and education, must be broadened and extended to include other areas of cooperation.

A combination of advocacy, support for women's groups and specific actions to change cultural, social and political patterns and the distribution of political and economic power marks the way forward to promote Gender Equality. Clearly this will be a challenging task. But the EU is committed to supporting our partner countries to overcome all obstacles on this crucial path.