

Gender in the Malestream – Acceptance of Women and Gender Equality in Different United Nations Organisations

Abstract

Torild Skard
Senior Researcher,
NUPI

The author outlines changing approaches to women's issues and gender equality in the UN system both before and since the International Women's Year in 1975 and describes how different UN organisations followed up the recommendations made by the large global women's conferences. Besides the UN itself the focus is on the large specialised agencies: FAO, ILO, UNESCO and WHO, two technical agencies in male-dominated areas – IMO and UNIDO – and two funds specifically related to women and children – UNFPA and UNICEF – during the period up to the end of the 20th century. The recommendations adopted by the women's conferences required a rethinking and a reorganisation of work in the UN organisations, but the follow-up encountered bureaucratic problems and resistance to change as well as to gender equality. Although some progress was made – more in some organisations than in others – implementation of the recommendations was slow, cumbersome and incomplete.

Keywords: FAO, focal points, gender equality, ILO, IMO, institutional change, international bureaucracy, specialised agencies, technical agencies, UN system, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIDO, UN programmes and funds, WHO, women in development (WID), women's conferences, women's rights

Introduction

As the main focus of the book by Devaki Jain on *Women, Development and the UN – A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Jain, 2005; Jain and Chacko, 2008) was on the role played by outside actors, the editor of *Forum for Development Studies* (FDS) invited further discussion from various people playing an active role within the UN system in promoting women in development. Obtaining contributions turned out to be more difficult than expected. The editor contacted a number of present and former

advisers for women/gender equality¹ in various UN organisations, but had few positive responses. Present advisers were extremely busy and also felt that they could not write freely about their experiences while they were members of staff. Former advisers were preoccupied with other questions, and those who had left the organisation often lacked documentation to ensure the quality of their accounts.

However, articles published in *FDS* by former senior staff members of the UN Division on the Status of Women, the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) (Chambalu, 2009; Skard, 2008; Timothy, 2008), in addition to other written material, provide a basis for certain reflections.² Although the reflections are mainly based on examples from the 1970s to 1990s, and thus are somewhat limited and fragmented, they may provide an insight into the UN system and the process of improving the status of women and promoting gender equality, and contribute to more systematic analysis of this period or more recent developments at a later stage.

A complex system

The UN system is extremely varied and complex. The oldest organisations were established before the UN itself. Three organisations that subsequently became members of the 'UN family' – dealing with meteorology, post and telecommunications – date back to the 19th century.³ In the wake of World War I, the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) were created and after World War II, the United Nations and three specialised agencies: the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), UNESCO and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Fifty-one

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- 1 These are known within the UN system as 'focal points for women or gender'. However, as the term 'focal point' refers both to organisational units, staff coordinating and promoting activities for the advancement of women and gender equality on a full-time basis, usually for the organisation as a whole, and officials doing this in units, divisions and departments as an additional task to their 'real job', I have used the term 'advisers' when referring to full-time corporate focal points.
 - 2 The article is to a large extent based on informal consultations with advisers for women/gender equality (MDC, 1988; MFA, 1990, 1993, 2002) and their contributions are very much appreciated. In the text only other sources will be specified. In connection with the article Berit Austveg, Bärbel Chambalu, Kul Gautam, Evy Messell, Pamela Tansey and Kerstin Trone provided valuable inputs.
 - 3 The International Telecommunication Union in 1865, the World Meteorological Organisation in 1873 and the Universal Postal Union in 1874.

member states signed the UN Charter in 1945. Thirty years later the membership had tripled with former colonies becoming independent nation states. Development issues gained great prominence and a number of funds and programmes were set up in the 1960s and 1970s to assist developing countries with social and economic problems.

In 2009, the UN has 192 member states, and in addition to the UN Secretariat the system is principally made up of 14 programmes and funds and 13 specialised agencies.⁴ The organisations have different mandates, although there is some overlapping, and range from health and education to tourism and aviation, from trade and environment to refugees and population. They also have different functions, being more or less normative – determining agendas, promoting understanding, setting standards, monitoring and providing policy advice – and/or operative – financing and managing activities and interventions. And the functions influence the organisational structures.

The programmes and funds are subsidiary bodies of the UN General Assembly. They are mainly operative, based on voluntary funding. The specialised agencies are autonomous organisations with their own governing bodies, linked to the UN through special agreements and reporting to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and/or the General Assembly. The agencies basically have normative tasks, financed by assessed contributions from member states,⁵ but they often have operational activities in addition, financed by extra-budgetary funds. The agencies fall into two categories. On the one hand, there are four large agencies with broad mandates – FAO, ILO, UNESCO and WHO – and on the other hand, a number of small, more technical agencies such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), UNIDO and the Universal Postal Union (UPU) (Bergesen and Lunde, 1999; NZMFAT, 2008; UN, 2008). Most of the organisations have formalised collaboration with relevant non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

4 Formally the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are specialised agencies, but they are not included here. In addition there are research and training institutes, various other entities, such as the OHCHR (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights), UNAIDS (Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS) and UNOPS (UN Office for Project Services), as well as subsidiary bodies (UN, 2008: 24–25).

5 The contributions are assessed on a scale based on the capacity of countries to pay and approved by the General Assembly or Conference.

An aspect all the organisations have in common is male dominance, both in decision-making bodies and among professional staff.⁶ The UN was created in a male-dominated world. In 1945, female members of parliament and government were extremely rare and the situation did not change much during the following decades. In 1975, only one out of ten MPs was a woman and there were still very few female ministers (IPU, 1997). In the UN system, representatives in the decision-making bodies were mainly, if not exclusively, male, and there were few women professionals in the secretariats. Although the Charter placed no restrictions on the eligibility of women to participate in any capacity (article 8), the necessity of securing ‘the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity’ of staff, in addition to a wide geographical basis (article 101), made it difficult to recruit women, as they generally had less education and less administrative and political experience than men. In addition, prejudice against women was widespread in the UN as elsewhere. In 1973–74, women staff at professional (P) levels and above amounted to 16 per cent in the UN system as a whole and most were at low levels (P-1 – P-3). Only the UN secretariat, the Development Programme (UNDP), ILO, UNESCO and WHO had female directors, 22 in all. There were no female heads of agency, but the UN appointed the first woman as Assistant Secretary-General in connection with the International Women’s Year in 1975: Helvi Sipilä from Finland (Hedervary, 1984; UN, 1974).

Early efforts

Women’s issues were dealt with in varying ways at different times and by different UN organisations. During the period after World War II, first and foremost the International Women’s Year (IWY) in 1975 represented a watershed. There were some efforts related to women before this, but they were limited and fragmented. The IWY put the status of women on the global agenda. In the years that followed, approaches, policies and procedures changed.

Due to lobbying efforts by women’s organisations (D’Amico 1999; Pietilä, 2007; Skard, 2008a; Winslow, 1995) equality between men and women was enshrined in the UN Charter in 1945. The *Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)* was established to follow up, reporting to ECOSOC and the General

6 Women are often numerous among support staff, serving mainly as secretaries.

Assembly. Although this was an intergovernmental body, whose members were selected by governments, unlike other bodies, its official members, affiliated NGOs and secretariat were primarily women. CSW members were usually experts heading women's organisations or holding distinguished positions as, for example, parliamentarians or judges. In addition, the CSW had extensive contacts with women's international NGOs and they participated in the CSW meeting. The CSW became a hub of women's activism, mapping out the status of women, raising issues and pressing for international recommendations to influence government behaviour. Originally consisting of 15 members, it was enlarged a number of times, and has had 45 members since 1989.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the CSW worked to collect information about the situation of women worldwide and promote women's human rights, particularly civil and political rights, by establishing a legal basis for equality. Several important conventions that were adopted by the General Assembly encompassed rights that were of special relevance to women: regarding the suppression of traffic in persons, the political rights of women, the nationality of married women and consent to marriage. With Third World countries joining the UN in increasing numbers, economic and social rights became more important. The role of women in development (WID) came into the limelight as population and food security issues became matters of general concern. Poverty, agricultural labour, family planning, scientific and technological development became items on the CSW agenda. In 1967, a general declaration on the elimination of discrimination against women was elaborated and a few years later the International Women's Year was proposed (Jain, 2005; Pietilä, 2007; Steans, 2006; Winslow, 1995).

The CSW collaborated with different parts of the UN system, trying to influence their policies and practice. In 1949, women were absent from the meetings of seven of the ten existing specialised agencies and during the following decades, only a few organisations dealt with women's issues: the four large specialised agencies and a couple of funds. In three of the agencies, women or equality was included in the Constitution.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was created as part of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 to reflect the belief that universal and lasting peace could only be accomplished if it was based on social justice. International women's NGOs were present at the peace conference and made proposals to be included in

the founding documents of both the League of Nations and ILO. Although many of the proposals were perceived as too radical, the Preamble of the ILO Constitution recognised the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value and the need to improve the protection of children, young persons and women. It was also decided that at least one female adviser should accompany each delegate at the General Conference when questions specially affecting women were to be considered (article 3), and that 'a certain number' of ILO staff should be women (article 9) (D'Amico, 1999; Galey, 1995; Pietilä, 2007; Winslow, 1995; www.ilo.org).

The ILO was special in that it was tripartite, bringing together governments, employers and workers in the executive bodies. This gave women activists more opportunities for influence, for example through their active role in employer's and workers' organisations that were solid male bastions with little enthusiasm for women's rights in the world of work. The International Federation of Working Women (IFWW) and the few feminists who were part of national tripartite delegations tried to influence the secretariat and the governing bodies during the interwar period. Several conventions were adopted promoting protective and equality measures related to maternity, night and underground work and minimum wages. The conventions were supported by research and information dissemination and followed by reports on the implementation. A supervisory body in the ILO monitored the follow-up in countries that ratified the conventions.

In 1944, a declaration concerning the aims of the organisation was annexed to the ILO Constitution, affirming that all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material wellbeing and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, economic security and equal opportunity. At the International Labour Conference in 1949, 22 representatives were women (4 per cent),⁷ and during the 1950s key conventions were adopted that had a worldwide impact in promoting women workers' rights. These include the conventions on equal remuneration for men and women and on discrimination in employment.

7 There were 17 women out of 244 government representatives (7 per cent), just one among 143 employers' representatives (under 1 per cent) and four among 156 workers' representatives (3 per cent) (D'Amico, 1999).

The purpose of the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)* was to contribute to peace by furthering universal respect for justice and human rights without distinction as to race, sex, language and religion. Special emphasis was placed on equality of education. In 1949, just three of the representatives and advisers at the fourth General Conference were women (2 per cent), but a committee of experts was convened to discuss the obstacles to women's education. In 1960 a convention was adopted against discrimination in education. In 1967, a comprehensive programme to advance the status of women in different areas resulted in a number of studies, reports, conferences and technical assistance projects. But the programme could be carried out only partially, due to lack of funds (D'Amico, 1999; Pietilä and Eide, 1990; Skard, 2008b; Winslow, 1995).

In the Constitution of the *World Health Organisation (WHO)*, gender equality was not generally confirmed, but the organisation was mandated to promote maternal and child health. Only nine women (1 per cent) were present at the World Health Assembly in 1949, but the organisation followed up and established model maternity and child welfare centres in a number of countries (D'Amico, 1999; Winslow, 1995).

The *Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)* was founded to improve food production and distribution and raise the levels of nutrition and standards of living of rural populations. There was no reference to women in the Constitution and no women were present at the FAO General Conference in 1949, but a Home Economics Service was established in the Nutrition Division to support women as homemakers. It was a large unit with regular funding and provided assistance in nutrition, childcare, health and sanitation, crafts and kitchen gardens (Geisler et al., 1999).

Among the programmes and funds, two stood out because of their focus on women and children: *UNICEF* and the *Population Fund (UNFPA)*. UNICEF was created right after World War II to give emergency assistance to children and in 1953 was placed on a permanent footing to address the needs of mothers and children in developing countries. UNFPA started its work in 1969 providing assistance in the area of population with a particular focus on family planning.

Changing approaches

Many people thought the International Women's Year (IWY) would not lead to much more than other thematic UN years. But 1975 became a turning point in women's history. The World Conference of the IWY in Mexico in the middle of the year, the adoption of a UN Decade for Women (1976–85) and then a convention to eliminate discrimination against women (CEDAW) in 1979, all contributed to the process of change. And large global women's conferences followed Mexico: Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995. They were driving forces in the promotion of the status of women worldwide. Since Beijing there have been no large global women's conferences,⁸ but a special session of the UN General Assembly was held in 2000 and an extended session of CSW in 2005. Parts of the women's agenda were included in the Millennium Development Goals⁹ (Emmerij et al., 2001; Jolly et al., 2004; Pietilä, 2007; Schechter, 2005; Steans, 2006; UD, 1976, 1981, 1986; UN, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1995, 2001a, 2005; Winslow, 1995; www.un.org).

The women's conferences were special, not only because they focused on women's issues, but because they were dominated by women. Having attended the UN General Assembly in 1974, where there were practically only men, I was amazed by the Mexico conference. The participation exceeded all expectations: 1,200 delegates from 133 countries, three-quarters of them women, 5,000 at the NGO Forum and 1,500 journalists – more than any previous UN conference. It was the first time women's questions were dealt with in such a comprehensive setting. Never before had so many women from so many different countries assembled: the female astronaut Valentina Tereshkova from the Soviet Union; the first lady of the Philippines, Imelda Marcos; the feminist adviser to the Australian prime minister, Elizabeth Reid; the female min-

8 The Beijing conference was one of the largest global conferences ever held, with 6,000 delegates from 189 countries, 4,000 NGO and 4,000 media representatives. More than 30,000 people participated in the NGO Forum. The size made it very difficult to manage. In addition, it was felt in the women's rights movement that the agenda and the recommendations in the Platform for Action basically did not need to be elaborated further, but rather be implemented, and with fundamentalist movements gaining in strength a new large women's conference might represent a step backwards instead of forwards.

9 Particularly goal 2: achieve universal primary education; goal 3: promote gender equality and empower women (by eliminating gender disparity in all levels of education, providing job opportunities and electing women to parliament); and goal 5: improve maternal health (UN, 2000, www.un.org).

ister of health from India, Prabha Rao; Professor Aziza Bennani from Morocco; Princess Ashraf Pahlavi from Iran; Jeanne-Martin Cissé, MP, from Guinea – just to mention a few. The multitude of political, social, economic and cultural differences, the mixture of foreign policy and women's issues, men's interests and women's, the tensions between those who emphasised equality, and those who emphasised development and peace – it was overwhelming, confusing and immensely stimulating. A new understanding developed of the situation of women under varied circumstances, and ties were created that gave the women's movement new strength, breadth and visibility.

From a women's rights perspective, the outcomes of the Mexico conference were momentous, much more radical than was expected from an intergovernmental meeting. It was recognised that discrimination of women existed worldwide and the Plan of Action contained the first international public policy to achieve elimination of gender discrimination and full gender equality, the integration and full participation of women in development and increased participation by women in the strengthening of world peace. In spite of tough time constraints the Plan of Action was very extensive, with numerous objectives and measures, and the conference adopted it by consensus.¹⁰ Governments committed themselves to elaborate national strategies and development plans, establish machinery to accelerate achievement of the objectives and report regularly on the results. The conference led to a marked increase in data collection and analyses relating to women.

The Mexico Plan of Action became a basic document and was confirmed and developed further by the Copenhagen, Nairobi and Beijing conferences. Supported by an increasing amount of knowledge on the status of women worldwide, the conferences adopted more and more comprehensive and ambitious declarations, platforms and plans of action.

The Mexico conference focused on peace and political participation, education and employment, health and the family, population and habitat, research and the media. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies went further, declaring all issues to be women's issues. Measures aimed at the advancement of women should be incorporated in all spheres of human activity from employment,

10 There was disagreement about other documents from the conference, mainly due to references to the Middle East and 'zionism' and this led to a vote (instead of consensus) later in the General Assembly, with 107 member states supporting the decisions from the conference, Israel voting against and 26 abstaining.

health, education and services to industry, science, communications and the environment. The Beijing Platform for Action consolidated the decisions from previous UN conferences, in particular the International Conference on Population and Development, and added important new elements relating to women's reproductive rights, women and violence, discrimination against the girl child and men's equal responsibility as sexual partners and partners sharing family responsibilities.

The conferences changed the perception of women. The focus was on women not only as mothers, but in all their present and potential roles in social, economic, political and cultural life. More and more they were viewed as full and equal partners with equal rights to resources and opportunities. In the early years, the focus was on human rights and women were seen in a paternalistic manner, as objects whose legal status and situation needed to be improved. In the 1970s, the contribution of women to development was acknowledged and they were considered to be a resource that could be used more effectively. The Nairobi conference was a turning point in that women were recognised as actors: intellectuals, policymakers, decision-makers, planners, contributors and beneficiaries of development. Since then, the rights and dignity of women have been seen more and more as values in their own right and an understanding has evolved that the equitable participation of women in all walks of life is not only women's legitimate right, but also a social and political necessity in making progress towards a more humane and sustainable future.

Beijing shifted the focus from women to gender, recognising that the structure of society and all relations between women and men had to be revaluated. Only through such a fundamental restructuring of society could women take their rightful place as equal partners. The empowerment of women was the central theme and governments committed themselves to mainstream a gender perspective into all areas of societal development.

Demanding tasks

As the great majority of governments were represented at the women's conferences, it might be thought that implementation of the recommendations would follow almost automatically and changes become evident in the actions of governments and international organisations. But to the extent that new policies were implemented at all, there were major delays and the processes of

change were cumbersome, uneven and drawn-out both at national and international level.

In the UN system, the recommendations had to be endorsed by ECOSOC, the General Assembly and the General Conferences of the specialised agencies. In spite of the staggering male majority in these bodies, this usually happened – but not always – and some member states had reservations. The Mexico Plan of Action included objectives and guidelines for action, but no specific measures and strategies. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies were more elaborate and concrete, but still it was left to each UN organisation to interpret and hammer out what the recommendations specifically should entail and to find ways of implementing them.

At the time of the International Women's Year in 1975 there was widespread ignorance about the situation of women worldwide. Very little research and data collection had been carried out, and the statistics that existed were rarely gender-disaggregated. In addition, there was considerable confusion about what was needed to strengthen the status of women. Traditional sex stereotypes of various kinds were common and the discrimination of women was reflected in their absence from decision-making, planning and implementation processes as well as a lack of understanding among the male elites of women's perspectives and needs.

After the Mexico conference, the advancement of women was no longer a matter for a few organisations. It concerned all of them and the UN system as a whole, in one way or another. The UN programmes and funds as well as specialised agencies were expected to contribute actively to the implementation of the adopted recommendations. As women should participate fully in decision-making at national and international levels, governments were requested to ensure an equal representation of men and women in all international bodies, conferences and committees. Further, measures had to be taken to ensure an equitable balance of male and female staff in all areas, in UN headquarters as well as in the field, in planning and projects.

In addition, new programmes were to be developed and existing ones changed. Emphasis was placed on research, data collection and analysis, technical assistance, training, elaboration and revision of international standards, distribution of information, monitoring, review and coordination. If necessary, financial and administrative mechanisms and procedures had to be changed. All goals and priorities, programmes and projects were to reflect

the needs and interests of women and measures to ensure that women benefited from development efforts and activities were to be taken. In addition to integrated programmes, women-specific projects or components were required to counteract the effects of earlier discrimination and strengthen the position of women.

To assist the system, the Mexico conference recommended the establishment of two special entities: the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). Both were created – UNIFEM after some years – and contributed to the advancement of women, but they never received sufficient resources to play the dynamic role that was foreseen in Mexico. The Division for the Advancement of Women in UN headquarters was also strengthened, but not much. In 1980, the General Assembly called for the establishment of focal points for women in the various organisations where they did not already exist.

Institutional barriers

Both the normative and operative UN organisations are structured as bureaucracies. This sets the context for the implementation of WID and gender equality policies, presenting obstacles as well as possibilities.

Although the organisations function in somewhat different ways, all have hierarchical lines of command and control and departments, divisions and offices with specified sectors or areas of responsibility. The vertical compartmentalisation ensures the technical quality of work. The qualifications of staff are defined according to the sector or area and activities developed on the basis of technical criteria. Often there is competition and little coordination between offices. The implementation of an overall WID/gender equality policy requires the sharing of concepts and experiences within and across units, but cross-sectional cooperation and communication between professionals with different competencies and tasks may be difficult. As recruitment and career promotion are based on technical qualifications and competition, it is important to be efficient, but collaboration may appear to be a doubtful undertaking, as others can take advantage of one's ideas and knowledge. In a technically oriented male culture based on the natural sciences and technological solutions to problems, staff

may also respond negatively to more socially and human oriented WID approaches.

The top-down command system means that implementation of new policies depends on support first and foremost from the top leadership, but also from middle managers. As loyalty is directed upwards, ideas from below may easily be stopped at any level, particularly if they are new or controversial. In fact, the principle of hierarchy is supposed to prevent changes that are not authorised from the top, and to secure stability and an outcome determined by the leadership. UN organisations – like other bureaucracies – change in response to internal and external factors, but normally the changes are slow. Even intentional change, initiated from above by management wanting reform, requires time and persistence. Change can also be initiated by staff, such as WID/gender equality units, by building a base for a new policy within and outside the organisation. To have an impact, however, some kind of support must be obtained from the top management and executive bodies. A dynamic and visibly committed head of an organisation can make an appreciable difference.

How easily change takes place depends on the level, from the more superficial alterations of rules, routines and interpretations of norms, to more profound transformations, relating to the basic strategies and positions of the organisation or the fundamental attitudes and values of staff. The deeper the changes, the more effort they require and the longer the process takes. WID/gender equality policies are challenging, because they generally entail both superficial and more profound changes to achieve the objectives.

To follow up the WID/gender equality recommendations, the UN organisations usually adopted WID/gender equality policies and plans of action and established administrative mechanisms to ensure implementation: WID/gender equality units of different sizes including advisers, focal points and other intra-agency organisational forms, such as interdivisional working groups. The organisational positioning, level of authority and resources of the mechanisms varied from one organisation to the other (Bergesen and Lunde, 1999; Geisler et al., 1999; Lotherington et al., 1991).

Technical agencies

Looking more closely at some of the UN organisations, I will focus first on two of the technical agencies. These were not only

extremely male-dominated, but related to sectors that in most societies were also male-dominated. Thus there is reason to believe that the agencies encountered special problems when trying to implement WID/gender equality policies. None of them had such policies before 1975.

IMO

It took time before the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) responded to the challenges relating to women. The purpose of the organisation is to promote safe, secure and efficient shipping on clean oceans. Historically, seafaring and sea trading were regarded as male preserves and vestiges of the tradition remained firmly anchored within a large section of the seafaring community. In addition, there was cultural opposition to women working in a man's environment, indeed working outside the home at all. Consequently, only 1–2 per cent of the workforce in the maritime sector were women and they mainly worked in catering and passenger service.

Views among member states differed and no WID policy was adopted by the IMO after the Mexico conference. After the Nairobi conference, the Secretary-General, C. P. Srivastava (1974–89) from India, asked a female programme officer to draft a paper on the role of women in IMO and the maritime field. In 1988, the programme officer (P-2) was designated focal point for women in addition to her regular tasks in the Technical Cooperation Division. The IMO never had a full-time focal point, but the same staff member performed the function during the following decades, advancing gradually to Deputy Director (D-1) of the division. Further, in 1988, a strategy on the integration of women in the sector was produced, distributed at the IMO Assembly and submitted to the Technical Co-operation Committee for implementation. In 1990, integration of women in the maritime sector became a regular item on the agenda of the committee.

The main objective of the strategy was to improve the training and employment of women in the maritime sector. As it was difficult to stretch the already meagre IMO funds to include women-related activities, the solution was to mobilise additional funding from donors for technical assistance projects. With funding from Norway a study was made of the employment potential for women in the sector, providing data for the development of an IMO gender-specific fellowship programme. Between 1993 and 2000, 39

fellowships were awarded for a wide range of maritime-related fields. In addition, a series of in-house sensitisation seminars on gender issues were held for IMO staff and seminars were organised for national authorities and the administrators of regional/national maritime institutes in different parts of the world.

There was a worrying shortage of seafarer officers worldwide and Secretary-General William O'Neil (1990–2004) from Canada initiated the elaboration of a plan of action for the integration of women in the maritime sector, inspired by the UN System-wide Medium Term Plan for Women in Development. The aim was to ensure that women were equal beneficiaries from the transfer of technology and had equal access to training in the IMO technical cooperation activities. A new source of funding was the IMO Technical Cooperation Fund.¹¹ Special emphasis was placed on the support of capacity-building and regional cooperation. For the advancement of women in maritime and port administrations, associations were created in the Pacific, West and Central Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and East and Southern Africa. The number of women staff at professional levels and above in IMO increased to 35 per cent (42 out of a total of 121) by the end of the century, and included a couple of women directors (UN, 2001b; www.imo.org).

UNIDO

In her article in this issue of *FDS*, Bärbel Chambalu describes the resistance women's issues met with in another technical agency, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO). This was not only due to the male dominance in the agency and the industrial sector, but the definition of what industrial development should entail and the role of UNIDO. The focus of the organisation was on technology and competitiveness, not human resources and working conditions, where women would be considered. Stimulated by the IWY, member states and UNIDO staff pressed for the integration of women in the industrialisation process, but the Executive Director resisted and member states did not allocate the necessary funds. However, expert knowledge on the situation of women was obtained.

The situation improved in 1986 when the status of UNIDO was strengthened and a new, more committed Executive Director took

11 Financed by publication sales, member states and individuals.

over. More was known about the realities in different regions and support from member states was more forthcoming. But severe financial problems in the 1990s, combined with weak management and insufficient commitment to gender both among member states and staff, led to a sidelining of gender issues. Only in 2006, with a new, more woman-friendly Director-General, did things start to improve: a study on gender mainstreaming in cluster development was produced, a Special Adviser to the Director-General was mandated to follow up and a gender policy was elaborated (Chambalu, 2009; Pietilä and Eide, 1990; www.unido.org).

The large, specialised agencies

These agencies dealt with women's issues on a limited basis before 1975, but the women's conferences challenged both the interpretation of their mandates and the content and volume of their activities.

ILO

The International Labour Conference (ILC) adopted a declaration on equality of opportunity and treatment of women workers in 1975, extending the concept of equality not only to employment and training, but society as a whole. The document guided ILO action throughout the Decade for Women. The Director-General, Francis Blanchard (1974–89) from France, established an office for women workers' questions – FEMMES – headed by a director (D-1) within the Promotion of Equality Department to promote equality between women and men and provide information on ILO's work for women workers. In 1981, the ILC adopted a new convention regarding not only maternity leave, but extended child-rearing leave for *either* working parent and the development of childcare and family services.

Ten years later a resolution on equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women in employment was adopted, changing ILO practice towards a more general gender-responsive policy. A comprehensive Plan of Action was elaborated and a WID coordinator was initially seconded by Norway and placed in the Technical Cooperation Department to ensure that ILO's development projects integrated women as participants and beneficiaries

in their implementation strategies.¹² When a new Director-General, Michel Hansenne (1989–99) from Belgium, took over, FEMMES was abolished and women workers' posts were established in three regions, with the task of promoting women's rights in all regional programmes under the overall guidance of a Special Adviser on Women Workers' Questions at headquarters. The Adviser was downgraded from director level and the post had no operational resources earmarked from the regular budget. Rather than reporting to the Director-General, as was the case earlier, she reported to the Deputy Director-General for Technical Programmes. However, her role as secretary for the Inter-Departmental Committee of directors of all technical departments, which monitored the implementation of the Plan of Action, was significant. A cross-departmental gender focal point system was put in place and regular staff posts were established for women's questions in two technical departments. At the same time ILO got its first female Deputy Director-General, Mary Chinery-Hesse from Ghana. In the course of the 1990s, efforts to implement a gender mainstreaming strategy were more systematic and a series of capacity-building initiatives for staff took place. The representation of women at professional staff levels and above in the organisation rose to nearly a third (228 women out of a total of 705 staff) (Lotherington et al., 1991; Pietilä and Eide, 1990; UN, 2001b; Winslow, 1995).

In 1999, the ILO got a new Director-General, Juan Somavia from Chile, with an exceptionally strong and visible commitment to gender equality. The same year an ILO Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Policy became the official tool for combating gender inequalities in the organisation's staffing, programmes and structure. The Action Plan was revised, identifying gender, together with development, as a cross-cutting issue in all the four strategic areas of ILO. The focal point network was strengthened and empowered with the reestablishment of a bureau for gender equality at headquarters, headed again by a director reporting directly to the Director-General. Regular budget resources were also set aside for operational gender mainstreaming action (www.ilo.org).

12 After a few years she was financed out of the regular budget.

FAO

FAO is the largest specialised agency and there was a basic need to replace the stereotyped and limited view of women being occupied only by domestic tasks and child-rearing, while agricultural activities were the domain of men. In the 1970s the approach started to change, as studies and research made it clear that rural women bore the principal responsibility for growing and processing food in many parts of the world. Several FAO conferences emphasised the need to integrate women into the overall work of the organisation. An Interdivisional WID Group was established in 1976 and the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (1979) underlined that women should participate in rural development on an equal basis with men, which implied equality in legal status, opportunity for education and employment and access to rural resources and services.

The speed of policy development did not result in gender mainstreaming being accepted by the majority of FAO's staff – mainly natural scientists – many of whom felt uncomfortable with gender issues. In 1983, an expert consultation was held on women and food production and the Home Economics Service was renamed the Women in Agricultural Production and Rural Development Service (ESHW)¹³, headed by a director (D-1), and placed in the Human Resources, Institutions and Agrarian Reform Division. The unit had some women-oriented projects, funded mainly by UNDP, UNFPA, Finland, the Netherlands and Norway,¹⁴ and the leaders of the unit worked actively to promote WID in FAO as a whole. They developed tools for gender analysis and got them used. A number of services and divisions had WID focal points and core groups of interested staff. The activities were supported by the Interdivisional WID Group with members at senior level, chaired by the Assistant Director-General of the Economic and Social Development Department, of which ESHW was a part.

Although the Director-General, Edouard Saouma (1976–93) from Lebanon, championed the importance of women in food security, there was widespread resistance and lack of commitment with regard to gender equality among managers and staff in the organisation. In 1987, the FAO Conference expressed its con-

13 It is not quite clear what the abbreviation refers to, probably Economic and Social policy, Home economics or Human resources and Women or WID.

14 In the 1980s, ESHW had 12–14 staff members and about 35 projects focused directly on women. Women were integrated in other projects as well, but the total number of FAO field projects at the time was approximately 2,500.

cern and requested a Plan of Action with a two-pronged approach: special programmes for WID and integration of WID into all projects and overall national development programmes. The Plan of Action was endorsed by the FAO Conference in 1989. During 1990–93 gender mainstreaming was supported by a large-scale compulsory training programme mandated by the Conference, which introduced basic gender concepts to 1,000 (80 per cent) of FAO's technical staff. But the results were mixed, as participants were 'sensitised', but lacked tools to change the way they carried out their development activities. The ESHW was given a key role in implementation of the Plan of Action, but lacked resources and most of the unit's efforts were directed at supporting field projects. From 1990 onwards the Interdivisional WID group and the focal point system declined.

The new Director-General, Jacques Diouf (1994 –) from Senegal, made gender mainstreaming one of 16 priority areas for interdisciplinary action and a new Plan of Action was adopted by the FAO Conference in 1995. The Plan no longer subscribed to a two-pronged approach. All technical divisions at headquarters were involved in the elaboration of the Plan and it made them responsible for gender mainstreaming. But the mainstreaming strategy was not clear and the focus was on input, not progress. Gender analyses were not made an integral part of corporate staff training, and there was a lack of commitment on the part of senior management. Further, there was no capacity and there were no funds to monitor implementation of the Plan. Thus the focal points and the reorganised Inter-departmental Committee on WID did not function as anticipated.

The ESHW was renamed the Women in Development Service and moved to the Gender and Population Division, now with a Chief who was responsible to the Division Director (D-2) who chaired the Inter-departmental Committee. The focus of the service was on policy advice and capacity-building via training in various technical areas. Like other units, the WID service was downsized,¹⁵ but the workload actually increased. Although there were more gender-related activities with their own budget in the technical departments, there were also many more requests for assistance. There were few women-specific projects and thousands of other projects. In addition, the service had to prepare handbooks and guidelines. By the end of the 1990s, it was evident

15 By the end of the 1990s there were nine staff members.

that the structures promoting gender mainstreaming were inadequate. And throughout the decade, female staff at professional and higher levels remained at only about 20 per cent (251 out of a total of 1172 in 2000) (Geisler et al., 1999; Lotherington et al.; 1991, UN, 2001b; Winslow, 1995; www.fao.org).

FAO and ILO

In 1991, Ann Therese Lotherington, Marit Haug and Anne Britt Flemmen published a comparative study of the FAO and ILO. They noted that the governing bodies in both organisations were active in putting WID policy on the agenda, but did not require other policies to be taken off or give it top priority, and that policies were not related to organisational structures. In general, ILO was more strongly committed to equality than FAO, and the top management in ILO was far more supportive of WID policy than the top management in FAO. In FAO, WID innovators were few and were not found in central positions. In ILO there were more, with some in strategic positions. Both organisations had long been in a situation with zero growth with regard to permanent staff financed through the regular budget, and implementation of the WID policy was executed largely with extra-budgetary funds from a few donors. Implementation strategies were mainly directed at superficial aspects of the work and were successfully introduced by some innovators. But the impact was limited due to the lack of follow-up from senior management. Radical changes did not take place and were perceived as extremely difficult and at best very time-consuming.

UNESCO

Challenged by the IWY, the UNESCO General Conference in 1976 decided to strengthen the participation of women in economic, social and cultural development and designed special activities in education, social science and culture. A series of books – *Women in a World Perspective* – was published that contributed significantly to improving the knowledge base. But the total allocations for activities related to women amounted to only around 1 per cent of the budget. When member states tried to expand the number and range of activities in the Medium Term Plan (1982–89) and integrate a feminine dimension in all programmes, resistance

in the secretariat was strong. Director-General M'Bow was not against gender equality, but not particularly committed either, and apart from those working with special women's programmes, there was widespread ignorance and confusion, and sometimes also negative attitudes towards women's issues. The director (D-1) for the status of women had an intersectoral committee to assist her, but lacked other material and institutional resources. Support was obtained from donors, however, and despite the economic and financial crisis of the mid-1980s and the consequent budget cuts, the activities related to women were maintained at 3 per cent of the regular budget.

Under the new Director-General, Federico Mayor (1987–99) from Spain, the budget allocations for women's activities varied and there were problems with the implementation of extra-budgetary funded activities. After the post of gender equality adviser became vacant in 1986, inadequate attention was given to women's issues. Activities were sparse and the number of fellowships as well as the participation of women in meetings decreased. In 1993, Norway seconded a well-qualified woman to the organisation, who became Special Adviser to the Director-General, with the task of preparing for the Beijing women's conference in collaboration with a consultative committee.¹⁶ A professional (P-5) in the social science sector took over the internal coordination of activities relating to women.

In 1994, an evaluation was made of UNESCO's action concerning women and gender equality. The evaluation report pointed out that the organisation had no gender policy framework and that women's issues were not systematically addressed in the planning and programming process. Sectoral gender-based strategies in the organisation's fields of competence were not developed, either. Although there were important differences between the sectors, the activities in support of women generally remained rather scattered and often based on individual initiatives, notwithstanding that in all sectors a number of successful programmes were being carried out.

Following up on Beijing, the General Conference decided to reinforce UNESCO's action in favour of women and gender equality. 'Women' were made a priority group (together with 'Africa' and 'Least Developed Countries', later also 'Youth'). After a lengthy administrative process a main gender-equality

16 Later she became a director in UNESCO.

unit was established within the Bureau of Studies, Programming and Evaluation, with a director and one or two professionals, two small units for special themes (Women and a Culture of Peace, and Women in the Mediterranean) as well as focal points in the substantive sectors and field offices. In 2000, the Women and Gender Equality Director noted that, although integration of a gender perspective in the organisation's activities was not consistent, all major programmes included projects and activities targeting women and girls. Special projects were financed more or less by extra-budgetary funds. All sectors were requested to indicate the financial resources being used for women as a priority group, but it was practically impossible to get an overview of what was actually spent and to what effect. The use of gender-sensitive (neutral) language in secretariat documents had a certain success, but there was a need for appropriate training and incentives for gender mainstreaming. During the decade, female staff at professional and higher levels increased to more than 40 per cent (443 out of 1064). In 1999, Koïchiro Matsuura from Japan took over as Director-General, but brought no new thrust to the promotion of gender equality (Pietilä and Eide, 1990; Skard, 2008b; UN, 2001b; Unit for the Promotion of the Status of Women and Gender Equality, 2000; www.unesco.org).

WHO

Before 1976, there was little recognition, documentation or concern in WHO about the roles women played in social and economic development, or about the relationship between these roles and women's status and health. The response to the Decade for Women was belated, but serious. Halfdan Mahler (1973–88) from Denmark was Director-General and the first stage was a period of policy development. The aim was to increase awareness of the need to integrate women as beneficiaries and participants in WHO programmes so that women's participation in overall development could be more effective. The approach was consistent with a general trend in the organisation that all citizens should attain a level of health that would permit them to lead socially and economically productive lives. Primary health care was key to reaching the goal.

The second stage of implementation entailed the establishment of mechanisms – focal points and working groups – to promote and coordinate activities related to women, health and develop-

ment at all levels of WHO. At headquarters, a Programme for Women, Health and Development was situated within the Division of Family Health. The Director of the division functioned as the focal point for women and co-ordinator of the Interdivisional Steering Committee on Women, Health and Development. In addition, there were focal points and working groups in each of the WHO regional offices.

In the third phase there was an increase in action, but despite successes it was clear in 1983 that progress was too slow. The World Health Assembly emphasised the need to give the issues high priority, and momentum was strengthened. Activities included information support and transfer, primary health care for women's special needs, social support for women, involvement of women's organisations and improvement of the status of women as health care providers. Forward-looking strategies were drawn up and a special project was organised on the recruitment of women to WHO. Under the new Director-General, H. Nakajima (1988–98) from Japan, a document on 'Human rights and women's health' was published and a Global Commission on Women's Health established. Efforts were made to systematically assemble information on women's health and develop gender-based indicators. Women's issues were taken up in a number of WHO programmes: nutrition, human reproduction, tropical diseases, mental health, water and sanitation, substance abuse, tobacco, AIDS, health protection and promotion, but the extent of the activities is not known (Winslow, 1995; WHO, 1985).

Female staff at professional levels and above in WHO increased to more than 30 per cent during the 1990s (357 out of a total of 1103), and in 1998 the first woman Director-General of a specialised agency was elected – Gro Harlem Brundtland (1998–2003) from Norway. She created a leadership group with an equal number of women and men and promoted gender parity among staff at professional levels and above.¹⁷ A Department of Gender and Women's Health together with focal points in departments and clusters formed a WHO Gender Team. Research documents and training curricula were produced, but there was a lack of funds and concrete measures for action. Gender issues were not made an

17 The strong representation of women at the top level was not maintained over time, however. In 2000, there were two women and nine men in the top echelons of the organisation (UN, 2001).

organisational priority, although a strategy of mainstreaming was adopted (UN, 2001b; www.who.int).

Programmes and funds

The programmes and funds are of many different kinds. The focus here is on the two with the most emphasis on women and children in their mandates, as a contrast to other more male-oriented organisations.

UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Fund was from its earliest days anxious to assist women in their maternal roles, and as awareness increased about the heavy domestic workload of many rural women in the Third World, the organisation also sought to support women in their roles as hewers of wood and drawers of water. But within the male-dominated UNICEF of the time of Executive Director Maurice Pate (1947–65) from the US there was deep resistance to the idea that an organisation created in the name of children should be concerned with women in capacities other than childbearing and rearing. The gradual conversion to the idea that women might have a significant role in development, was initially inspired less by the movement for women's rights than the mounting concern about population growth. Those who thought of women only as mothers, began to view their childbearing in a new and alarming light.

Until the 1970s, rural women in Third World communities were not perceived as making any significant contribution to the family economy. But the epoch-making book by the Danish economist Ester Boserup in 1970, 'Women's Role in Economic Development', and the Mexico conference emphasised the economic importance of women's work. Under Executive Director Henri Labouisse (1965–79) from the US a great deal of effort went into a new analysis of women in developing countries. In 1974, a family planning – later family welfare – adviser was appointed and became a senior policy specialist in community participation and family life in 1979. An internal WID task force pushed for a stronger UNICEF contribution to improve the situation of women both in programmes and staffing. Studies proliferated on the situation of women and, in 1980, recognition was expressed

for the first time in a UNICEF document of the fact that women are individuals in their own right and should be addressed in their multiple roles.

The 1980s was a 'lost' decade for development and women were losing status rather than gaining it. UNICEF's Executive Director, Jim Grant (1980–1995) from the US, launched the 'child survival and development revolution' in 1982. This consisted of GOBI-FFF: Growth monitoring, Oral rehydration, Breastfeeding and Immunisation, as well as Food security, Family planning and Female education. In all the elements the importance of mothers for children's wellbeing was acknowledged, but GOBI was considered more important than FFF. In 1983, UNICEF finally created a position of senior policy specialist, women's economic activity/basic services at headquarters. Subsequent task forces requested increased WID action, but some staff believed there was a dichotomy between the interests of women and the interests of children. The growing influence of the women's movement, the increasing presence of women in senior positions and pressures from the Executive Board, the UN and other partners as well as country offices, gradually had an impact. The decentralised character of UNICEF brought staff close to realities on the ground. The actual role of women in development and the discrimination against girl children became obvious and were documented. In 1986, the Board was still not convinced of the centrality of WID in the organisation and an implementation strategy was adopted to make the policy stick.

In 1987, UNFPA, WHO and the World Bank launched the 'Safe Motherhood Initiative'. UNICEF support was lukewarm to begin with, but country offices in AIDS-affected parts of Africa brought up the threat of HIV to young women and pushed the organisation into a new appreciation of reproductive health. In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, issues affecting girls and women that had previously been taboo, such as sexual and other types of exploitation, were included. And in 1989, the year the Convention was adopted, the *State of the World's Children* published specific statistics about women for the first time, in particular bringing maternal mortality to the fore. Family planning was also given more attention in the strategies for the 1990s. After Carol Bellamy (1995–2005) from the US was appointed the new Executive Director, as the first woman to head the organisation and the second to head a UN fund, particular emphasis was placed on girls' education. By the end of the 1990s, 45 per cent of the

staff at professional and higher levels were women (247 out of a total of 548) (Black 1996; Hazzard, 1987; Skard, 2008b; UN, 2001b; www.unicef.org).

UNFPA

Under its first Executive Director, Rafael M. Salas (1969–87) from the Philippines, the UNFPA grew from a small trust fund into the world's largest multilateral provider of assistance to population-related activities (although it never really became a large organisation).¹⁸ UNFPA was placed in the middle of norm implementation and operations management and population issues were both sensitive and controversial. UNFPA brought together governments and partners, helping them to become aware and discuss the issues. Data collection and analysis became a key endeavour, including censuses, surveys and studies of fertility and reproductive health services, and programming was evidence-based. Salas saw population and development as closely linked and realised the crucial importance of women. At the Mexico conference, he stated that equality between men and women did more than contribute to development. According to him, equality *was* development.

Although UNFPA dealt with women-related issues, the recommendations from the Mexico conference went further. Salas established a working group to elaborate guidelines for the work of the Fund to improve the status of women. The guidelines were updated in 1980 and 1988 and reviewed in 1993. It was stressed that women should not only be recipients, but active participants in population-related activities, and that their special needs should be taken into account in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of all UNFPA programmes and projects. Inclusion of a women's perspective was particularly considered in relation to population policies, research, training, data collection, information, education, communication and family planning. Special projects were recommended to provide formal and informal education for women, promote employment and participation in decision-making and support institution-building to ensure proper attention to women and their status.

A special unit for women and youth was set up with the task of creating awareness, doing advocacy and providing guidance and

18 In 2007, the Fund had a little over 1,000 core staff, of whom three-quarters were in the field (www.unfpa.org).

technical support for operational activities. Gradually the unit was upgraded and the adviser promoted to the level of director (D-1) with a professional to assist her.¹⁹ The unit reported directly to the Executive Director and was supported by an internal committee headed by the Executive Director, with representatives from all units. An external advisory panel of international experts was also established, meeting every two years. Further, technical advisers on women, population and development were placed in country support teams in the field.

By the mid-1980s, governments requested as a matter of urgency to make family planning services universally available. But under the pressure of conservative religious anti-choice and anti-family planning lobbies, the US reversed the policy it had followed since the mid-1960s and announced it would no longer fund programmes offering abortion services or counselling. The US was one of the founders of UNFPA and in the early years contributed as much as half of the Fund's budget. Although UNFPA was not in violation of the new policy, US funding was stopped from 1986 to 1992. The argument was that UNFPA supported programmes in China, although these in fact counteracted the one-child policy. The loss of US funding meant a considerable reduction of resources, but other member states increased their contributions.

In connection with the Nairobi conference, UNFPA produced an overview of projects related to women, population and development and analysed how a women's perspective was integrated into country assessments and activities. It was clear that further efforts were needed. Operationalising gender concerns was often difficult and time-consuming. There was a lack of information and expertise and financial resources were limited. Upon the request of the Governing Council, an implementation strategy was elaborated in 1987, including a work plan with verifiable objectives, timeframes and budgetary requirements. The strategy was reviewed every two or four years based on field experience and emerging issues.

Salas died suddenly and Nafis Sadik from Pakistan was appointed the new Executive Director (1987–2000). She became one of the highest-ranking women in the UN and the first woman ever to serve as an executive head of one of the UN's major voluntarily funded programmes. Although she came from a Third

19 Subsequently the unit became the Women, Population and Development Branch, putting it on a par with other entities in the Technical Division.

World Moslem country, Sadik was strongly committed to women's issues and became a vocal advocate for population policies, addressing controversial topics such as contraceptives, women's health and the rights of women and young girls. By the end of the 1990s, women comprised 50 per cent of staff at professional or higher levels in UNFPA (141 out of a total of 280) and they also held leading positions (Sadik, 1984; UN, 2001b).

As the head of UNFPA, Sadik served as the Secretary-General of the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 in Cairo. The conference anchored population issues in a human rights framework, underlined the right to reproductive health and stressed the importance of achieving gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women. This was the basis for further progress on gender equality and reproductive health at the World Conference on Women in Beijing the following year. Sadik and her team played a key role with their commitment, knowledge of the issues and negotiating skills, in addition to – among others – the Democrat US administration, again supporting reproductive rights and restoring funding to UNFPA, and a broad range of progressive women's NGOs. After the conference, the mandate of UNFPA was expanded to include a wider range of reproductive health issues, which also had implications for children. Following Nafis Sadik, another Moslem woman committed to gender equality became Executive Director of UNFPA in 2001, Thoraya Obaid from Saudi Arabia (www.unfpa.org).

Equality or window-dressing?

The global women's conferences drew up a vision of a world with equality between women and men. A global consensus and commitment was established to promote gender equality, which was reaffirmed by the Millennium Summit (UN, 2000). All UN member states supported or accepted the overall goal as well as strategies and actions to reach it, although some expressed reservations with regard to specific items.²⁰ The question remains open, however, as to the extent to which governments realised what it would take in practice to reach the goal, and how far they were willing or able to do what was required.

20 Disagreement and reservations centred particularly on reproductive rights and foreign policy issues.

Due to the lack of research and studies as well as adequate accountability systems, it is impossible to get an accurate picture of the contribution of the UN organisations to the promotion of gender equality over the years. Some bilateral and multilateral development organisations have been analysed or evaluated at certain points in time, but very few and only exceptionally in a historical or comparative perspective. The adoption of gender mainstreaming as a main strategy further increased the difficulty of measuring processes and their effects. The focus tended to be on inputs and activities, instead of outputs and results. So we cannot know how effective policies and institutional arrangements were during the period covered by this article and how woman-friendly the UN system actually became.

New mind-sets

In following up on the recommendations from the global women's conferences, the mandates of the organisations were fundamental to the task of determining objectives and areas of work. But the mandates were broad and general and could be interpreted in various ways. The women's conferences forced people to change their perceptions and define the tasks differently.

Technical agencies dealing with male-dominated sectors were expected to expand the scope of their activities to include women, despite resistance, because many felt this was inappropriate. More surprisingly, perhaps, was the opposition in other organisations, where women were part of the target groups. But the general view of women had to change, so that they were seen not as limited to one specific role, but in their entirety, with multiple roles. Most often this meant recognising women not only as mothers, but also as economic and political actors. In addition, the implications of widespread discrimination had to be understood, while at the same time social and cultural differences needed to be taken into account. And instead of women being seen as objects whose situation had to be improved, they were to be acknowledged as actors with important contributions to make, as well as rights. This meant that the organisations had to widen the range of issues addressed and their areas of work, changing their approach and working methods. Above all, they had to ensure a proper participation of women in the planning and implementation of programmes and activities, at headquarters as well as in the field. Thus, although the content of the challenges differed, all the organisations were

faced with the task of bringing about more or less fundamental changes in the substance of their programmes and the way they worked.

Resistance to change is a general characteristic of bureaucratic structures. In addition, aspects of the WID/gender equality policies themselves made implementation difficult. Although the plans and platforms for action from the women's world conferences were, on the whole, adopted by consensus, WID/gender equality policies were in fact controversial. In the UN organisations, there were differing views about how important the role of women was for development, and, in particular, many men perceived the advancement of women as a threat to their personal interest, their role in society, career possibilities, power and dominance. Underlining a welfare, anti-poverty or efficiency approach could reduce resistance to WID/gender equality issues by making them more technical and acceptable, but then changes would be more limited and less effective in achieving the objectives. Women might be integrated into the mainstream, but they would not shape it and a reorientation would not take place. Equity or empowerment approaches, on the other hand, implying that all policies and practice should take women's needs and interests into account as well as men's, could lead to achievement of the objectives, but were much more difficult to carry out due to the extent and character of the changes, and opposition, particularly from men defending the status quo and their privileged position. Thus WID/gender equality promoters faced an acute dilemma: either emphasise superficial and limited changes, renouncing the basic issue of gender equality, and obtain some sort of success; or focus on more profound transformation and risk more or less insurmountable resistance.

Improving the status of women could not take place without the involvement and support of men. To increase the impact of WID/gender equality promoters it was sometimes suggested that men should be appointed to these positions. But it was difficult to find men with the necessary competence and commitment, and particularly in the case of middle- or senior-level positions the appointment of men could be seen as reinforcing the traditional pattern of male preference and dominance, which the WID/gender equality policy was supposed to counteract.

How much attitudes changed in the different UN organisations, is not clear. Expectations as well as circumstances differed. Although there probably was some change, it was most likely

modest. The focus of WID/gender equality advisers up to the turn of the century was very much on the implementation of strategies and concrete actions that could reduce resistance among staff and partners, create gender awareness and achieve changes in procedures and activities (MFA, 2002).

In the process of promoting gender perspectives in the organisations, the meaning of WID/gender equality language often tended to change. In many cases there was a lack of adequate training and subsequent confusion about concepts, goals and means. In addition, there was a tendency to dilute the radical feminist texts of the world conference recommendations, which used terms such as gender, empowerment, participation and self-determination. At the decision-making level all the organisations supported equity and gender mainstreaming, but filtering down into the administration and being translated into specific actions, gender differences were often toned down, power aspects of the concepts denied and the need for a basic restructuring of society concealed. So, implementation measures mostly ended up entailing only limited technical adjustments, without addressing the specific gender dimensions and political aspects that were at the core of the original recommendations. Gender mainstreaming became 'gender malestreaming'.

Administrative change

Bringing about institutional change generally requires considerable efforts and resources. Information and awareness-raising, discussion and experimentation, and monitoring and evaluation are needed. Of special importance for the promotion of WID/gender equality policies are measures to overcome resistance and obstacles of various kinds.

The administrative arrangements to promote WID/gender equality policies in the different organisations varied, from a single individual as focal point at a low or middle management level to a relatively elaborate system with a WID/gender equality unit, headed by a director, with a network of focal points and an interdivisional committee. In light of the requirements of the task, it is striking how limited and weak the set-up often was. Although it has a more overarching character than many goals, the goal of gender equality was usually perceived as comparable with other goals, and WID/gender equality policy was seen as one of many priorities or aspects of development, not an approach

to development in itself, cutting across all sectors and involving all aspects of policy. As a consequence, the WID/gender equality units were rarely in an ideal strategic position to oversee gender mainstreaming in the organisation as a whole, but tended to be lumped together with other policy or technical units.

It is notable, too, how few personnel resources generally were allocated to the WID/gender equality mechanisms and how little authority was vested in them. Low organisational status and lack of special powers made it difficult for the units to advise and particularly to instruct colleagues in other parts of the organisation. The situation was not made easier by the fact that in most cases women staff – with lower status, also due to their gender – were asked to guide male partners and colleagues. And it was practically impossible for small units to effect far-reaching changes in large organisations. In addition, the focal points usually performed their tasks as an add-on to their other responsibilities, and the interdivisional working groups rarely operated at a high level, as intended, because senior managers had a tendency to send lower-ranking staff to the meetings.

There was a striking lack of resources, both budgetary and extra-budgetary. But resource deficiency was not the only constraint. There was also a lack of commitment and political will in the top management. This is demonstrated by the different approaches of the various leaders, supporting more or less extensive measures. In spite of the variations, however, internal accountability systems generally tended to be weak, without sanctions, reward structures or monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that could drive forward the institutionalisation of WID/gender concerns. Staff training related to WID/gender issues was rarely systematic and adequate – either in respect of general analysis or of the practical application of approaches and principles – and employment policies were practically never seriously reformed so as to be gender-responsive and ensure general competence with regard to WID/gender equality. Compliance with WID/gender policy generally remained a personal choice, not an organisational duty or a professional asset.

Strategies

What strategies were used to promote WID/gender equality policies in spite of constraints? Although organisations differed, similar strategies were used by WID/gender equality promoters. First

of all, plans of action were required, adopted by the decision-making bodies. Usually this was obtained, although the texts might not be sufficiently specific and clear. The next challenge was moving from words to acts. This was more difficult. The WID/gender equality units or focal points established alliances with supportive staff in other units and committed member states. Member states could put pressure on other member states and the top management and, in the case of donors, provide funds for activities and institutional change. The supportiveness of member states varied. Many had few women in government and attached little importance to gender equality. Donors who gave priority to WID/gender equality issues often preferred to finance projects in the field rather than administrative measures at headquarters. But some actively supported institutional change and this was crucial. With funding, the WID/gender equality promoters could be proactive and tip the balance of power in their favour in relation to resistant colleagues and partners.

To promote WID/gender equality policies one of the most important strategies was expansion of the knowledge base and information about the realities of women and men, through research, documentation, statistics and indicators, and the development of tools that staff could use in their work. Although not always fully achieved, this was done to a considerable extent, and apparently had an impact, including in sensitive areas.

If staff could not be persuaded, they could be replaced. To what extent this may have happened is not known. But the number of female professional and higher-level staff in the different UN organisations increased over the years, more in some organisations than others. Female professionals are not necessarily WID/gender equality promoters. The issues might not interest them or they might yield to the pressure of male-oriented UN cultures. But generally the chances were that women would be more supportive or easier to persuade than men. By the turn of the century, around one third of staff at professional levels and above in the UN system as a whole were women. Six organisations had 40 per cent or more women at these levels, while five had 20 per cent or less. The UN Secretary-General had a female deputy, and four spe-

cialised agencies, programmes and funds were headed by women (D'Amico, 1999; UN, 2001b).²¹

Just after the turn of the century, the view of gender equality advisers in a number of UN specialised agencies, programmes and funds was clear.²² There had been progress; in some organisations it was marked, in others less, but generally it was modest. No organisation had achieved the goals, and there was still very far to go. To make further progress, it was important to acknowledge the complexity of the task and the need for long-term efforts. Women's organisations, committed member states and a critical mass of well-informed, committed UN staff had to keep up the pressure. Donors had to provide funds. Top and middle management had to be seriously committed and professional staff trained to know the 'why' and 'how' of promoting gender equality in their respective fields. (MFA, 2002; see also the annexed document 'Is mainstreaming a dead end?' from the informal consultation held near Oslo, 6–9 November 2002).

In addition, more research and knowledge is needed, about women's issues on the one hand, and, on the other, about how to effectively implement institutional change in large international bureaucracies, so that they become driving forces for gender equality.

At a stage when agendas were set and norms developed at international level, the women's rights movement perceived the UN system as an 'ally'. Women's voices acquired a public and international space. Networking among women's organisations across national borders was facilitated and radical recommendations were adopted by global intergovernmental conferences supporting women's rights and gender equality. The question is whether the system can remain in the forefront, when the challenge is not only words, but deeds.

21 UNFPA, UNITAR (UN Institute for Training and Research), UNICEF, WFP (World Food Programme), UNESCO and UNAIDS had 40 per cent or more, UNIDO, UPU, IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), WMO and UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) had 20 per cent or less. UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO had female top leaders.

22 FAO, ILO, IMO, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIDO, WHO and UNDP, UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees), WFP.

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Appendix

Strategies for the promotion of gender equality in the UN system: Is mainstreaming a dead end?

Conclusions and recommendations from an informal consultation held near Oslo from 6 to 9 November 2002 organised by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Following four days of discussion the gender advisers of 15 UN organisations and development banks together with representatives of the UN, UNIFEM and donor agencies¹ drew the following conclusions and recommendations related to lessons learned in promoting institutional change for gender equality and effective strategies for the future:

1 Organisations represented: African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, FAO, International Fund for Agricultural Development IFAD, ILO, IMO, Inter-American Development Bank, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR, UNICEF, World Food Programme WFP, WHO and the World Bank in addition to the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and donor agencies in Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

A. Gender mainstreaming

is not a dead end strategy. But it is not always fully understood and implemented in the right way.

- There is confusion about concepts: ‘gender’ and ‘women’. However, one does not exclude the other. The use depends on the context. ‘Gender’ is most fruitfully used as an adjective, not a noun, in concepts like ‘gender equality’ and ‘gender analysis’. ‘Women’ (and girls) are essential actors and target groups in relation to gender equality. It is important to analyse issues so that gender differences and disparities appear and women are visible in relation to men.
- There is also confusion about goals and means. The goal is gender equality and women’s empowerment. To achieve the goal, different strategies and actions are needed according to circumstances. Polarisation of approaches does not work. A main strategy is gender mainstreaming of all policies, programmes and projects. But ‘women must not be lost in the mainstream, or malestream!’ Targeted women-specific policies, programmes and projects are necessary to strengthen the status of women and promote mainstreaming. In any case, there must be specialist support, institutional mechanisms and accountability.
- Agencies have chosen different bases for their action: human rights or efficiency considerations. In fact, it is not a question of either/or. The human rights basis is more fundamental, but is not always made explicit and in some organisations it is not well understood or appreciated. The emphasis will vary from one organisation to the other, but it is important to realise that the promotion of gender equality implies a social transformation in society in addition to more effective economic development and poverty reduction.

B. Global commitment

The international women’s conferences from Mexico (1975) to Beijing (1995) established a global consensus and commitment to promote gender equality which was reaffirmed by the Millennium Summit (2000). This is a long term commitment and it is important to keep the goal on the agenda. Ongoing political and financial support from Member States is essential to maintain focus on gender issues and ensure implementation of the recom-

mendations. The mandates and policy statements of UN organisations and development banks should have conceptual clarity and explicit language so people understand them. Commitments should be clearly spelled out, given visibility and cultivated. Without pressure from governing bodies and top management mandates and policy statements do not get implemented. External advisory gender boards or panels can be used to answer questions and help elucidate and depersonalise issues.

C. Organisational change

The challenge is to transform multilateral organisations to actively pursue the goal of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through a process of gender mainstreaming and other forms of organisational change. As gender equality often touches on power relations, there can be strong discomfort and even resistance to change. To make progress the following is needed:

- strong, active leadership,
- incentives and accountability and
- a critical mass of committed individuals.

D. Tools

Useful tools include

- partnerships: internally and externally,
- action plans to move from general policies to practice,
- advocacy events to keep the issues visible,
- simple, understandable language that is suitable for non-specialist audiences,
- universal norms, country statistics and local knowledge,
- sex-disaggregated data and analyses,
- best practice dissemination to excite the imagination,
- regular reporting on commitments, monitoring and evaluation,
- gender champions in relevant positions with appropriate financial resources,
- gender-balanced staffing and supports, including adequate training, and
- individual recognition for good practice, rewards and incentives.

E. Top management

Responsibility for promoting gender equality is system-wide and rests at the highest levels of management. The active support of top management is crucial to increase action and impact. There must be more than lip-service. Leaders need to issue regular instructions and ‘walk the talk’. The responsibility of different levels of management must be clearly defined and leaders not only at the top, but also at middle and lower levels must follow up actively. The most important responsibility must be to create an enabling environment for gender equality. Measures – score-cards – for ‘enabling environment’ should be put in place by top management. The gender units/advisers need to be proactive in advocating with and assisting top management to obtain the necessary support for gender equality. Also female top leaders need assistance on this. There are competing concerns, goal congestion and resistance to change and to addressing gender issues.

F. Enabling environment

An enabling environment for the promotion of gender equality is important. Indicators of this include among others:

- percentage of core funds dedicated to gender issues,
- gender inputs and outputs in corporate programmes and results frameworks,
- gender issues integrated in corporate policy,
- gender mainstreaming performance in performance appraisal reviews of staff,
- gender perspectives in human resources policy: affirmative action in recruitment, gender balance, work/life measures, harassment policy, value and visibility of interdisciplinary skills in vacancy announcements and promotions and
- regular gender ‘audits’ including baseline data and monitoring.

G. Gender units

To promote gender equality, funds and competent staff are required. Corporate gender units are necessary. Regarding the level, resources and institutional placement of the gender units, the key objective is maximum and timely access to key corporate strategic processes and high-level management. There must be a critical mass of staff resources/gender specialists kept together

and then ideally additional fulltime specialists in other units and decentralised offices. There should be allocation of adequate resources and a match of expectations and resources expressed in clear terms of reference of catalytic functions of the gender unit.

H. Capacity-building

Capacity-building for gender mainstreaming is still needed in international organisations. A corporate capacity-building plan should be elaborated and be the responsibility of the staff training and capacity-building unit. The sustainability of efforts and investments is crucial, particularly in times of high staff turnover. It is important that policy informs practice as practice should influence policy. Capacity-building should be tailor-made and demand-driven for various audiences: orientation for newcomers, gender modules in other courses (e.g. project cycle), gender sensitivity training, gender analysis training etc. Examples of successful practice are very useful and more cases should be presented. But lessons learned cannot only be general, some must be context-related.

I. Networks

Networks and alliances are important within the organisation and outside. Internally, ownership should be shared with both women and men, and between Headquarters and the field. Externally, collaboration should be established with governments, civil society and other UN organisations. Links should be established and support provided for women's organisations and groups, keeping in mind the character of the different groups and organisations. It is also important to collaborate with business and professional organisations, employers and trade unions, social and cultural associations, youth clubs etc.

J. Involvement of men

The involvement of men is important to promote gender equality: more male staff in gender specialist posts, more male gender focal points in other units and more male trainees/facilitators for gender capacity-building courses. Training curriculum should be 'packaged' with a results-oriented focus to appeal to managers. It is

important to break stereotypes. HIV/AIDS might be a good entry-point for talking with men about ‘masculinity’, gender-based violence, trafficking etc. Contacts should be established with male government and NGO representatives and they should be encouraged to participate in advocacy events and discussions.

K. Accountability

To monitor progress it is important to define different roles and responsibilities for staff members at different levels of accountability. Existing accountability mechanisms need to be catalogued or mapped by level: leadership (executive head), management (ADGs/Directors), gender advisers in units, corporate gender units, country representatives. The role and accountability should also be mapped for non-programme/non-technical units such as evaluation/audit offices, programme budget offices and human resources offices. Core competencies needed for fulfilling various responsibilities need to be identified. Special attention should be given to the development of results frameworks and systematic measurement of results. Even if planned results are not achieved, efforts undertaken to meet gender commitments should be acknowledged.

L. Mottos

‘Whatever works, do it’ (don’t be hung up in dogmatic approaches or language).

- ‘Be persistent (things are never fast and easy), passionate (both competence and involvement are needed) and keep a sense of humour (there are many perspectives and ways of thinking)’.
- ‘Don’t compromise your dignity’ (there are limits to what a gender focal point can or should do).
- ‘Damned if you do, damned if you don’t’ (there are rarely simple solutions).
- ‘Don’t reinvent the wheel, there are so many wheels’ (learn from the experiences of others).
- ‘The more you advance, the more remains to be done’ (new opportunities entail new challenges).

