



DELIVERING ON THE PROMISE OF EQUALITY

UNFPA'S STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK ON GENDER
MAINSTREAMING & WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT 2008-2011

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INTRODUCTION: UNFINISHED AGENDA OF THE 21ST CENTURY

At the dawn of the 21st Century, humanity continues to witness massive human rights violations in the form of discrimination and violence against half of the world's population. The unequal status, freedoms and opportunities afforded to women and girls exist to a greater or lesser degree in every society and country of the world and regrettably, all too often taken for granted as 'normal' aspects of society and human relations. The widespread and deleterious effects of gender inequality on individuals, families, communities and countries remain largely invisible and underestimated. Despite a solid evidence-base demonstrating the centrality of women's empowerment and gender equality to poverty reduction and development, and to unravelling the world's most pressing global challenges, including HIV and AIDS; and despite universal promises of equality made at the highest levels of government (most recently at the 2000 Millennium Summit and the 2005 World Summit), gender equality remains an unfinished agenda for the 21st Century.

A critical gap in fulfilling the promise of gender equality and women's empowerment lies in the area of reproductive health and rights. As affirmed at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, a woman's ability to make autonomous, informed decisions about sexuality and reproduction, free of any form of discrimination, coercion and violence, is central to her enjoyment of human rights. And a woman's exercise of her reproductive rights is key to her political and economic empowerment, and thus to unleashing her full potential and capacities as an agent of poverty reduction and development. Yet, across the world, gender inequality persists and millions of women and adolescent girls are unable to exercise these rights, thereby undermining the important role they could play in poverty reduction and development efforts.

UNFPA's contribution: UNFPA is one of the leading United Nations and international development agencies with a strong mandate, country-level presence and operational capacity to promote women's empowerment and gender equality. Its core mission of furthering sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights for all is a pillar of poverty reduction, gender equality and development. As such, UNFPA is accountable for progress on gender equality from an ethical, as well as a results-based programmatic and financial perspective.

"Advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women, and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development-related programmes."

ICPD Programme of Action, Principle 4

Addressing and promoting gender equality is at the heart of UNFPA policies and programmes across its operations on different continents. This has been particularly marked since the ICPD and the Beijing Platform for Action – in which governments agreed that a gender perspective should be an integral and cross-cutting aspect of all follow-up efforts.¹ While UNFPA's sustained commitment and efforts on gender equality issues (such as gender-based violence) have contributed to placing them high on public and policy agendas, UNFPA's experience with gender equality programming needs to be revisited as gender remains a challenge not only for the organization, but for the international development community as a whole.

Countdown to the MDGs: In the countdown to 2015 for reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the UN System is also expected to contribute to the improvement of the lot of the world's most vulnerable populations. UNFPA's Strategic Plan 2008-2011 encapsulates the agency's critical contributions to poverty reduction and to achieving the MDGs.² Not surprisingly, the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is both a goal in itself and central to achieving all the other goals in both the MDGs and UNFPA's Strategic Plan. UNFPA is therefore challenged to redouble its efforts on gender equality programming.

¹ Beijing Declaration, Paragraph 38: "We hereby adopt and commit ourselves as Governments to implement the following Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all our policies and programmes..."

² "Gender equality advanced and women and adolescent girls empowered to exercise their human rights, particularly their reproductive rights, and live free of discrimination and violence", UNFPA Strategic Plan 2008-2011.

RATIONALE FOR A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN UNFPA PROGRAMMING

UNFPA's resolve to embark on a reinvigorated gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment approach falls squarely within the organization's efforts to develop a holistic human rights-based, gender-responsive, culturally-vested approach. UNFPA has already launched programmes to build capacity in two of these aspects of programming. A concerted effort on gender equality programming is thus not only timely, but central to fulfilling the human rights of women and advancing gender equality and placing them at the forefront of all UNFPA programmes.

Adopting a systematic gender perspective with a *results-oriented and evidence-based approach* would increase impact of UNFPA programmes, especially in the area it most invests in: reproductive health. To illustrate, a common assumption is that since reproductive health services primarily benefit women, there is little need to be concerned with gender mainstreaming or women's empowerment strategies, or with the engagement of men. Yet gender-related attitudes and barriers to autonomous sexual and reproductive decision-making by women, or to shared rights and responsibilities with men, are well-documented and a major reason why sexual and reproductive health problems persist on such a widespread scale.

Thus, while it is often considered as an 'add on' or peripheral to programming, ignoring a gender equality perspective leads to missed opportunities for improving and saving lives, for achieving results, and to poor utilization of available resources. Fully employing a gender mainstreaming approach, on the other hand, indubitably adds value by identifying key gender factors in a given sociocultural, economic and political context, and systematically opens up new approaches and good practice to address them. UNFPA-supported programmes have much to gain if a gender equality perspective is strengthened, by:

- Improving **effectiveness**, by ensuring that gender-blind approaches or built-in discriminatory biases, be they legal, cultural, social, or economic in nature, do not stand in the way of achieving results (i.e. in terms of service access and utilization); and ensuring that opportunities are seized to secure optimal results (i.e. transforming gender attitudes and power relations);
- Improving **efficiency**, by maximizing the use of existing resources and investments, especially in areas where UNFPA spends the bulk of its resources (i.e. reproductive health, HIV prevention); and/or can leverage support from national policies and budgets (i.e. through influenc-

ing leading development and funding frameworks); and

- Enhancing **sustainability**, through improved results. The proven success of programme interventions is key to sustaining political and community will, as well as to ensuring continued funding to build on and expand existing programmes. Quality programming and results hinge on integrating a gender equality perspective. UNFPA's ability to mobilize additional resources will be strengthened if it is recognized as a leader in programming for ICPD and its linkages to ongoing efforts to realize the MDGs, both of which demand a gender equality perspective.

PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK

This Strategic Framework has the following aims:

- To reaffirm UNFPA's policy³ that promoting gender equality requires a **dual approach** to programming consisting of both mainstreaming gender and supporting explicit components focused on women's empowerment;
- To **identify strategic priorities** forming the core of UNFPA's gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment efforts, with a view to maximizing the Fund's results in the medium term; and
- To lay out the principal elements of **an operational plan** for implementation and follow up of the Framework, with emphasis on capacity development and accountability.⁴

The overriding aim of this Framework is to contribute to the attainment of the organization's highest-level goals, as reflected in the Strategic Plan. It is intended as a first step in providing strategic and operational guidance for its implementation, as recommended by the assessment of the organization's previous four-year plan.⁵ This will

³ UNFPA's first policy on gender mainstreaming was introduced in a circular (29 November 1997), *Each Staff Person's Responsibility: Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective into all Policies and Programmes in UNFPA*, as a result of the Agreed Conclusions adopted by ECOSOC in September 1997. This provided a definition of gender mainstreaming and called for translating the concept into practice across all sectoral areas of the UN System. Currently, the Policies and Procedures Manual (2005), Section 4 on Gender, provides the most current guidance for UNFPA-supported programmes.

⁴ Also in line with United Nations Development Group (2006). *Enhancing the UN's Contribution to National Capacity Development: A UNDG Position Statement*, a new framework for UNCTs, October 2006.

⁵ UNFPA (2007). *Assessing the Implementation of the MYFF 2004-2007*. Dalberg Global Development Advisers. See page 23, "Recommendation 9: Identify strategic interventions as a guide for country office programme options".

be achieved through the implementation of a capacity development strategy and workplan to implement the recommendation of the gender equality and women's empowerment framework. UNFPA's strengthened ability to deliver gender equality results will be critical to the successful implementation of the Strategic Plan, especially in the light that gender equality is both a goal and mainstreamed throughout its expected results.

For purposes of clarity, it is important to note that the Framework is not intended to provide comprehensive guidance, nor an inventory of, UNFPA's ongoing work on gender equality issues.

PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE FRAMEWORK AND KEY FINDINGS

Background: This Strategic Framework has drawn from an internal needs assessment and consultative process undertaken in 2005/2006 that included meetings and interviews with selected UNFPA staff, as well as staff from other UN agencies; a consultants' report and draft papers; a workshop with Country Technical Services Teams (CST), Headquarters and Country Office staff (July 2006, New York); and desk reviews of Country Office annual reports and Gender Advisers' mission reports, as well as results of the ICPD+10 global survey.⁶

Findings: To date, UNFPA has applied a gender perspective with varying degrees of success. The key findings of the internal assessment point to:

- Uneven levels of gender mainstreaming across the organization;
- Insufficient skills and expertise among staff, with existing expertise distributed unevenly within the organization and critical gaps in Country Offices and at Headquarters, as well as in key programme areas;
- A common misperception that only assigned focal points and advisers have the responsibility to address gender issues, whereas in reality gender equality is 'everybody's business';
- The need for user-friendly tools to assist staff in gender mainstreaming;
- A need for indicators on women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming to be systematically incorporated in UNFPA's programme and performance evaluation systems;

- The need for more effective mechanisms for establishing and monitoring accountability on results for gender equality;
- The need for focused gender assessments to gauge and monitor progress on the quality and quantity of resources invested in gender equality programming both at the level of UNFPA-supported country programmes, as well as within UNFPA; and
- Gaps in sharing of good practice on gender equality programming within UNFPA.



⁶ UNFPA (2004). *Investing in People: National Progress in Implementing the ICPD Programme of Action 1994-2004*.

DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

Gender mainstreaming or incorporating a gender perspective are terms that can be used interchangeably to mean programming that ultimately furthers gender equality (see Glossary of Terms). The goal of gender mainstreaming is to integrate and promote gender equality and women's empowerment in programmatic activities. This implies taking into account women's and men's perspectives, needs and rights, opportunities and challenges, at all stages of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies and programmes.

A gender equality perspective centres on understanding the causes of discrimination and unequal power relations between men and women in a specific context, regardless of whether rooted in prevailing social attitudes and customary practices or discriminatory laws and policies, among other factors. Compounded forms of discrimination need to be taken into account based on age, race, ethnicity, education, income level, residence, religion, marital, HIV or other status. These factors serve as critical inputs to inform what the best programme strategies are for working towards gender equality. In essence, applying a gender equality perspective means looking at ways to change 'the rules of the game',⁷ by questioning and responding to the underlying values and factors for unequal status and treatment.

UNFPA policy calls for a dual approach that both: (1) mainstreams gender across all its activities; and (2) supports explicit programme components on women's empowerment. UNFPA gender mainstreaming efforts need to operate at both formal (i.e. laws, policies) and informal (i.e. customs and cultural factors) levels; and need to be applied to all programming areas, from census work and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), to reproductive health service delivery and reproductive health commodity security. UNFPA's approach also implies working with men, as well as women of all ages and from diverse backgrounds in transforming discriminatory attitudes, behaviours and practices.

Similarly, to further gender equality, human rights concerns need to be both mainstreamed and made explicit across UNFPA operations, with a focus on the poorest, most

excluded and marginalized groups. A **human rights-based, culturally-vested approach** has implications for UNFPA programmes to ensure, for example, not only that reproductive health services are made available, accessible, of good quality and culturally-acceptable but that women and adolescent girls (rights-holders) are informed of their rights to access those services; are empowered to negotiate their use of those services; have the means to access remedial mechanisms when these rights have been violated; and are enabled to make autonomous decisions regarding their health and life options. This also implies community mobilization and participation of agents of change, or gate keepers, such as cultural custodians and religious leaders to create a supportive culturally acceptable environment for gender equality. It also means that duty bearers (i.e. policymakers, service providers, lawyers, police, community leaders – most of whom are often male) are made aware of the human rights of women, including reproductive rights; have the will and capacities to meet their obligations (including in terms of allocating resources); and are held accountable for their actions, in conformity with human rights standards. It is at these levels of intervention that unequal gender relations and harmful attitudes and practices can be transformed, ultimately resulting in greater equality and improvements in the status and rights of women, and benefits to families, communities and countries at large.

UNFPA'S COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES

UNFPA's comparative advantages in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment are based on its mandate, strong field presence, partnerships, experience and expertise.

One of UNFPA's major comparative advantages is its unique approach in bringing together human rights, gender equality and cultural issues in the development of policies and programmes. The organization's developing expertise in **human rights-based and culturally-sensitive programming** is a key asset when furthering progress on gender equality – a process that requires understanding the deep-rooted sociocultural norms and beliefs on the status and roles of women and men, and fosters community ownership of the process.

UNFPA is currently one of the **leading UN operational agencies with a strong mandate in the area of gender equality**. Its **field presence** in over 140 countries and access to policymaking circles at central and de-

⁷ Goetz, AM. (1997). *Getting Institutions Right for Women in Development*, London: Zed Press. North, D (1990). *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

centralized levels positions the organization to promote gender equality in national policy, programming and funding frameworks. It is also often the Chair and a key member of national UN Gender Theme Groups, further facilitating this function. Its **recognized contributions on key gender issues** include its lead role in furthering reproductive health and rights globally; championing efforts to tackle various forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls at policy, legal and local levels in several countries; promoting the human rights of women, including of especially disadvantaged groups such as indigenous, migrant and refugee women; and working on masculinities issues and partnering with men. UNFPA has a track record in reaching both men and women through the programmes it supports, another vantage point for furthering gender equality, in line with international calls for more attention to working with men and to developing programmes addressing and responding to their needs and perspectives.

UNFPA places a premium on coalition-building and strong **partnerships**. The multisectoral nature of the organization's mandate on population, sexual and reproductive health, and development issues has also lent itself to nurturing a broad base of partners from government and civil society, parliamentarians, women's, youth, human rights and faith-based groups, research institutions, other development and UN partners, development banks, the media and the private sector. Multisectoral partnerships, in which each development partner's efforts and outputs complement the other's, are crucial in furthering a gender equality agenda and, collectively, attaining desired outcomes. In addition, at the global level, UNFPA has also been an active member of UN inter-agency networks collaborating on gender mainstreaming.⁸

EMERGING ISSUES.



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Universal Access to Reproductive Health reaffirmed by World Leaders in 2005: The centrality of reproductive health to poverty reduction, gender equality and development, including for achieving the MDGs, has been widely recognized at the highest levels of government (see World Summit Outcome document, paragraphs 57g and

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