

Introduction to the Work of the Taskforce on Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Budget Processes

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Background

The Inter-agency Taskforce on Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Budgets which has been working on programme budgets since 1999, built on the work of an earlier taskforce which had strong focus on coding. The core group of entities in the taskforce has included OSAGI/DAW as Task Manager, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP and WFP. With the introduction of case studies in 2000, other United Nations entities became more actively involved in the work of the taskforce, including DPA and OCHA in the Secretariat in New York, two regional commissions – ESCAP and ESCWA, as well as UNCTAD, FAO, WHO, ILO, UNHCR and ITU.

In 1999 the taskforce came to the realization that it was not sufficient to focus on budget codes, but that attention had to be given to programme budgets and planning processes in a broader sense. There was an increased awareness of the importance of resource allocations and budgets for promoting gender equality. In a growing number of countries gender perspectives are being incorporated in discussions of national budgets – today well over 40 countries have initiated some form of process to influence the national or local budget process from a gender perspective. Throughout the United Nations system there has been a growing realization of the importance of influencing the goals, resource allocations, activities and outcomes in the work programmes from a gender perspective if gender mainstreaming is to be fully implemented. It has become increasingly evident that greater focus is required on Medium-Term Plans, Programme Budgets and performance assessments (monitoring and evaluation) if gender mainstreaming is to be successful. The rationale for gender mainstreaming in programme budget processes is to increase gender equality as well as achievement of effective development in other sector areas. This growing awareness of the importance for resource allocations and planning processes for the achievement of gender equality was reinforced by the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey in 2002, which identified the incorporation of gender perspectives in national budgets as an important element in financing for development.

At around the same time results-based budgeting was introduced in one form or another throughout the United Nations system, including in the Secretariat. This provided a unique opportunity for influencing objectives and goals, expected accomplishments and indicators and targets. The fact that results-based budgeting is still relatively new in many

parts of the United Nations system provides both constraints and potentials. There are a number of general constraints related to the introduction of results-based generally as well as more gender-specific constraints. More general constraints to gender mainstreaming in the context of the results-based process have included the lack of experience in linking contributions of the entities to the results achieved as well as in developing appropriate objectives, expected accomplishments (results statements) and indicators. Specific gender constraints include a general lack of understanding of gender mainstreaming; at times a lack of commitment to gender mainstreaming, including at management levels; and poor

implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

The work of the taskforce

A project on "Mainstreaming Gender Equality into Programme Budget Processes within the United Nations System" was carried out between December 1999 and June 2000.¹ Phase One of the project consisted of an inventory of efforts made by organizations outside the United Nations to incorporate gender perspectives in internal budget processes, in order to build on existing experience. The findings from this phase revealed that little had been done apart from the work on national budgets. The most relevant work on institutional budgets had been done by the OECD/DAC Working Party on Gender Equality in the development of the Policy Marker on Gender Equality in 1997.

Phase Two of the first project involved an overview of the efforts made within the United Nations itself, based on a study of documentation, a written questionnaire and follow-up telephone/personal interviews. This phase involved 53 United Nations entities. The nature of the process in this phase meant that the findings were at a rather general level. While the overview revealed that much more needed to be done to bring gender perspectives into programme budget processes, some good practice could be identified in a number of entities. Phase Three deepened the level of analysis through case studies in five United Nations entities, DPA, ESCAP, ILO, UNFPA and WHO.

The inventory and case studies carried out in the first project highlighted the differences in approaches in planning and budget processes which exist across the United Nations system. The original goal of the taskforce had been to develop generic guidelines but it was clear that this would be very difficult. The experience from the case studies carried out had also shown the value of the process used in the project. It provided an opportunity for budget offices and programme managers to give explicit attention to gender mainstreaming, something they might not necessarily do if left to themselves, because of heavy work loads and uncertainties about taking on a new issue. The case studies were also based on consultation between budget officers, programme managers and gender focal points. Experience showed that this was not normal practice in most entities.

Members of the inter-agency network emphasized the importance of the process in the case studies for the entities participating, by creating awareness and commitment and opening opportunities for enhanced future collaboration within entities. It was therefore decided that, building on the lessons learned from the first project, the inter-agency taskforce would carry out a second project involving case studies in five additional entities – ESCWA, FAO, OCHA, UNICEF and UNCTAD – between January and June

¹ The project was carried out for the taskforce by consultants: Tony Beck (team leader), Isabella Bakker, Alicia Mondesire and John Mathiason.

2001.² Follow-up visits to most of the entities participating in the in-depth case studies in the first two projects were undertaken, about six to nine months after the completion of the entity report, to discuss the findings and feasibility of recommendations. A synthesis report on the first two projects, covering 10 case studies, was prepared. A workshop for European based UN agencies was also organized at the ILO in November 2001, with attendance of some 40 staff from 20 European entities, from programme budget offices or their equivalents and gender units/desks.

Finally in a third project carried out in 2002-2003, a further four case studies were undertaken in ITU, UNDP, UNHCR and WFP³. A total of 14 United Nations entities were thus covered by the in-depth case studies of the taskforce.

Outputs

The taskforce has had a large number of outputs as will be briefly outlined below. The reports mentioned are available on the website of the Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/>).

Future of the work on gender mainstreaming in programme budgets

The Taskforce on Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Budget Processes will be