

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

**SUBREGIONAL WORKSHOP ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING FOR
MINISTRIES OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL WOMEN MACHINERIES
BEIRUT, 3-5 AUGUST 2010**

What is gender mainstreaming?

Gender mainstreaming was adopted as a concept and as a global strategy in the Beijing Platform for Action during the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. It was defined as:

“The process of assessing the implications for women and men in any planned action, including legislation, making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences integral dimensions in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”

Gender mainstreaming is a strategic approach and an important tool in order to achieve the goal gender equality and sustainable socio-economic development. It requires that all programmes, policies and activities are viewed from a gender-perspective, i.e. considering both the role of women and men in the process as well as the effect the institutions/organisations have on women and men in the work environment as well as in their society. It is an important element of good governance due to its contribution to increased fairness, justice and equity between women and men in the development process.

To ensure an effective gender mainstreaming process, the key entry point would be to analyse the organisation from a gender perspective, namely through analysing the internal policies (formal and informal) governing the work of the organisation and better understanding how these policies affect men and women and their living conditions within the organisations; the structure and hierarchy of the organisation and better understanding of the representation of men and women in this hierarchy and how they link to the decision-making processes; the procedures and processes of work within the organisation; and the culture of the organisation and how people link to each other and form formal and informal networks.

Following the detailed analysis of the organisation from a gender perspective, measures should be taken to identify and recommend key changes in structure, organisational culture and social behaviour that addresses the existing gaps and can be supportive for creating a more gender-sensitive organisation.

The role of National Women Machineries

The Beijing Platform for Action states that “a national machinery for women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas.”^{*} It is, thus, essential for all governmental bodies and mechanisms to closely coordinate with the national women machineries in mainstreaming gender into their programmes and policies.

^{*} Beijing Platform for Action, 1995, chapter IV.

Nineteen out of the 22 Arab States have either established high-level National Women Machinery or restructured existing mechanisms to bring them in line with the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action. In their capacity as governmental authorities, National Women Machineries have been entrusted with two functions: (a) coordination among various public institutions and among them and civil society institutions; and (b) monitoring and tracking the work of all governmental agencies in addressing women's issues and promoting gender equality. They have to safeguard and advise on how to mainstream gender into policies, strategies, programmes, and project budget allocations.

Hence, National Women Machineries are important key sources of information and expertise for line ministries. Due to their mandates, they have already worked on gender mainstreaming and can provide important information on lessons learned and good practices. They can also help harmonising and synchronising gender mainstreaming efforts in different ministries and between ministries and producers of national statistics, and, last but not least, they are an important link for ministries to the civil society and can contribute to establishing strategic alliances.

The role of ministries

Gender mainstreaming is based on the understanding that gender-neutral policies do not exist. Any kind of decision made by organisations, especially in politics and governance, always has different implications for men and women. Therefore, it is essential that ministries ensure that their decisions take into account the specific needs and requirements of women as well as of men in order to work towards providing equal opportunities for all staff in their organisation as well as all citizens in their country. Ministries are also the ones that can and must ensure that resources are allocated in a way that allow for mainstreaming gender in all policies and programmes.

Ministries of Labour play a key role in regulating the workforce at the national level. In many Arab countries, the Ministry of Labour's role extends to include updating labour legislations so as to meet the needs of the labour market in light of the social and economic developments, providing needed quantitative and qualitative data on the status of labour at the national level as well as other services, such as nationalisation of the labour force, support programmes for the labourers, regulating the work of foreign workers, and regulating the relationship between the employers, employed and the State.

To that extent, actions of ministries of labour have a direct implication on women's participation in the economic sphere, be it through legislation and regulations that guide the economic sectors and labour force participation, or through extensive supervision of the technical and vocational education and other support programmes that enhance the labour force skills to enter the job market. Therefore, the partnership with the Ministry of Labour would allow for tangible and maximum impact and influence on women. In fact, more gender-sensitive ministries of labour will ensure the provision of more sensitive programmes that will have an impact on female participation in the labour force, particularly in ESCWA countries.

Working together

The ESCWA Centre for Women was established in 2003 with a mandate to support the member countries in their efforts towards gender equality and women empowerment. Following its establishment, the Centre embarked on implementing a series of training programmes, expert group meetings, documentation and publication of materials that are relevant to the needs of member countries.

Training workshops on institutional building and on gender mainstreaming national plans, policies and strategies were regularly offered to the staff of National Women Machineries in ESCWA member countries. In 2007 two subregional workshops on gender mainstreaming for the Mashreq and Gulf regions were organised. Follow-up action through the organisation of more workshops to build the capacity of the National Women Machineries was requested from ESCWA.

To further respond to the needs of member countries, the ESCWA Centre for Women designed a subregional gender mainstreaming programme to be implemented during the biennium 2010-2011 targeting National Women Machineries and ministries of labour in seven countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Lessons learned from past experiences at the international and regional levels emphasised the importance of building strong linkages between National Women Machineries and governmental organisations in the field of gender equality and women empowerment. Strong linkages between National Women Machineries and governmental organisations will ensure an effective gender mainstreaming process and will also maximise the resources available with the National Women Machineries.

The main thrust of this programme is to ensure the collaboration and team work among the National Women Machinery and the Ministry of Labour

The programme includes:

Workshop on gender mainstreaming for representatives from National Women Machinery and the Ministry of Labour

3-5 August 2010

A subregional training workshop will be held in Beirut during 3-5 August 2010 for participants from the selected seven countries on gender mainstreaming. The training workshop will look into aspects of organisations, organisational analysis from a gender perspective and how to develop action plans.

With this workshop, the ESCWA Centre for Women will support National Women Machineries and ministries of labour to work jointly on mainstreaming gender in the policies, structure, programmes and culture of the ministries of labour.

Follow-up and mentoring

August – October 2010

To further consolidate knowledge gained and skills acquired during the training programme, it is expected that each team will apply skills and knowledge gained while conducting an organisational analysis and developing a gender mainstreaming plan in the Ministry of Labour as soon as they return to their countries. During the implementation period, ESCWA will provide guidance and support to the team through emails and help the team members in identifying questions, analysing documents, and verifying analysis outcomes, etc.).

Documentation of success stories

November 2010

As soon as the analysis is finalised and an action plan is developed, ESCWA will support documenting the experience and preparing a publication on lessons learned and success stories.

Exchange of experience among ESCWA member countries

December 2010

ESCWA will hold a regional meeting to share experiences and allow for national teams to present their experiences to other member countries and document lessons learned. In fact, one of the main outcomes of this programme will be a study that will examine the laws and practices of the ministries of labour in selected ESCWA member countries and develop recommendations on: 1) policy measures, such as the amendment of discriminative labour laws and practices; and 2) identification of plans to bridge the gender gap at the ministries' level in order to ultimately empower women in general and increase their economic participation in particular.