

## CONCORD GENDER WORKING GROUP CONTRIBUTION TO THE 'ISSUES PAPER TOWARDS AN EU ACTION PLAN ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS'<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

The Gender Working Group (WG) welcomes the initiative to develop an EU action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment in external relations. It is a timely initiative given that there is a good momentum and a strong basis to promote the gender agenda (2005 European Consensus on Development, 2007 EC Gender Communication, 2008 Agenda for Action on the MDGs or the 2008 process towards the EC Communication on the Integration of cross-cutting issues in EU development programmes and in external relations).

In particular, the Gender WG welcomes the:

#### 1.1. Reinforced commitment to the twin-track approach:

This relates to the recognition of the importance of effectively implementing both strands of the twin track approach together, this being gender mainstreaming and specific actions to empower women & girls.

#### 1.2. Comprehensive approach:

The move to adopt a comprehensive approach including all domains of external relations, going beyond the five focus areas highlighted in EC Gender Communication on Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Development Cooperation.

#### 1.3. Strong emphasis on accountability, ownership & leadership

This is vital for an effective implementation of the plan and in order to make real progress in promoting gender equality and women and girl's empowerment.

#### 1.4. Capacity building initiatives

We particularly welcome the proposals to strengthen both internal and external capacity within the EU and for CSO, and women's rights organisations.

#### 1.5 Work on indicators & monitoring mechanisms

Indicators are vital for evaluating progress and impact and we welcome the emphasis on ensuring that indicators are put in place and the proposal to set up a task force to work specifically on this.

Monitoring mechanisms are equally important, however, more detail on the types of mechanisms is required.

### **2. Objectives of the Gender WG for the EU Gender Action Plan**

#### 2.1. Increased visible & long-term progress in promoting gender equality & women & girl's empowerment (move from policy to practice):

The CONCORD Gender WG welcomes the fact that this is an ambitious plan and highlights the need for this plan to lead to concrete results. The political and policy commitments exist, but evidence indicates a lack of progress in translating these commitments into a reality in the field. The Gender WG insists that this EU Gender Action Plan should challenge why progress has been slow and include concrete steps on how to overcome the obstacles and move forward. On the one hand, the Action Plan should be results oriented and on the other hand it should ensure gender equality and women and girl's empowerment as a political and strategic goal, which is key to long-term sustainable development and the eradication of inequalities and poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> **Contacts:** Nerea Craviotto, Chair of the Gender Working Group/WIDE: [nerea@wide-network.org](mailto:nerea@wide-network.org), +32 2 545 90 75 and Nathalie Ewing, CONCORE Gender focal point: [Nathalie.EWING@concordeurope.org](mailto:Nathalie.EWING@concordeurope.org), +32 2 743 87 62.

## 2.2. Engagement of all stakeholders

The Gender WG highlights that an EU Gender Action Plan should involve all stakeholders throughout the process, from planning to implementation to monitoring & evaluation. This is especially important to create ownership, leadership and accountability.

Stakeholders should include:

- European Commission: RELEX families including senior & operational staff (including the support of the gender helpdesk), EC delegations and gender focal points
- Member State governments
- Members of the European Parliament
- National Parliaments
- CSOs, especially women's organisations (European & Southern)

## 2.3. Southern dimension

It is imperative that the Action Plan is flexible and responds to the realities in the South and specific and changing situations and needs in the field.

## 2.4. Use and reference existing resources

A number of useful resources already exist such as reports, case studies etc which also highlight recommendations for achieving progress. The Action Plan should be based on 'evolution' and not 'revolution' and build on existing works and best practices.

Examples of useful references:

- 2008: Recommendations of mappings on gender and aid effectiveness carried out within the framework of the EC/UN Gender Partnership for Development and Peace
- WIDE November 2007 Mapping '*Who decides - Gender mapping the European Union's policy and decision-making in the areas of development, external relations and trade*': <http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/WHO%20DECIDES%20def.pdf?id=547>
- Findings and recommendations of the 2007 OECD Peer Review of the EC Development Co-operation
- CONCORD Aid Watch Reports (06-07 and ongoing): Link to this year's report: <http://www.concordeurope.org/Files/media/extranetdocumentsENG/NavigationSecondaire/WorkingGroups/Aidwatch/Aidwatch2008/Light-Full-report.pdf>
- Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender Equality in EC Development Cooperation

## **3. Process**

### 3.1. Coordination:

There is a need for clarification regarding the coordination between the national and EU level and how that will be reflected in the plan.

It is vital to interlink the different processes (European Consensus, EC Gender Communication, EP Gender Report, EC Communication on integration of cross-cutting issues, EC/UN partnership, EC toolkit, EC Roadmap, the MDGs commitments, etc) and ensure that these processes feed into other EU policy processes (i.e. Aid Effectiveness, Financing for Development, trade agreements, among others).

### 3.2. Coherence:

Mechanisms are needed to ensure that other policies related to development are coherent with the EU's commitments to promoting gender equality and women and girls empowerment.

### 3.3. Communication:

It is important that steps are taken from the beginning to communicate this process to the relevant stakeholders to build awareness, commitment and ownership.

### 3.4. Actors:

The actors involved should go beyond the EC and MS (refer to 2.2). The role, mandate and division of labour of the different actors should be clear. It is also important to know who is responsible for guiding the process and to clarify the role of the EU MS Gender Experts towards this process.

Ensuring a real participatory approach in the overall process is crucial. Making the actual voices of the primary stakeholders – women and girls – heard should be a priority.

### 3.5. Next steps & timeline

It is important to clarify and communicate the next steps and the corresponding timeline. For the CONCORD Gender WG this is especially important so that we can inform our members of this process and mobilize members to consult with their national governments and parliaments.

Next steps should also include consultations in different spaces, not just at MS level but with parliaments & CSOs, including women's rights organisations, too.

### 3.6. Status of the end document:

Finally, it is important to be clear on the status of the final document. The Issues Paper states that it will be a Staff Working Paper and annexed to the EC mainstreaming communication. Given the importance of the ownership and visibility of this Action Plan, the Gender WG questions whether the status of 'Staff Working Paper' is in line with and reflects the political and strategic relevance of this process.

Furthermore, the link between the Mainstreaming Communication and the Action Plan must be clarified. Both documents should be complementary.

## 4. Resources

The Issues Paper recognizes the lack of clarity on resources allocation. We would like to highlight too, that in order to be effective in the implementation of the strategy, adequate resources need to be identified and mobilised. Those resources should not just come from gender budget lines / initiatives but also from effective mainstreaming strategies within other budget lines (i.e. geographic, thematic lines).

The discussion on resources must take place at the beginning of the process to ensure that significant resources accompany the ambitions of the EU Action Plan. Indeed whereas we welcome the more comprehensive approach taking a broader scope of the policy areas (including women and conflict, trade, agricultural etc.), we are aware of the need to allocate concrete financial commitments to those areas too.

The Gender WG recommends the use of Gender Responsive Budgets, especially as a way of tracking gender equality spending. However, further work is required to ensure the effective use of this tool and to evaluate the impact of this method. This is of particular importance in a context where the EU is increasing the percentage of aid assistance channelled through budget support modalities.

## 5. Content:

The content must be accompanied by a clear process and strategy. Furthermore, the EU Action Plan must clearly present the list of issues to be addressed under external actions, highlighting that prioritisation by the implementers is also important.

### 5.1. Objectives

- All objectives need to be resourced (therefore a detailed budget is needed).
- The objectives should go beyond the inclusion of gender equality in policy dialogue to include as part of the objective that women and men and gender equality advocates are represented 'at the table' during discussions.
- In-house training should be targeted at different levels of hierarchy within the institutions (Senior management, operation staff & delegations).
- Capacity building for CSOs, including women's rights organisations, should include training for CSO and women's rights organisations to allow them a meaningful participation in the process.
- Accountability processes need to include different stakeholders (Parliaments, CSO and women's rights organisations). Access to timely information is also crucial.

### 5.2. Implementation

- Indicators: There is a need for strong time bound indicators accompanied by regular reporting and review mechanisms. Indicators should also measure the impact of actions. Refer also to existing work on indicators such as that done by Social Watch (refer to the Gender Equity Index 2008 - [http://www.socialwatch.org/en/avancesyRetrosos/IEG\\_2008/tablas/technicalNotes.html](http://www.socialwatch.org/en/avancesyRetrosos/IEG_2008/tablas/technicalNotes.html)).
- Ensure that other policies related to development are coherent with the EU Gender Action Plan.
- Need to ensure balance and coherence between all the different actions as they are all equally important.

### 5.3 Monitoring & Evaluation

- The section on monitoring and evaluation should be developed further and include the mid-term review of the Country Strategy Papers as well as the review of the EU financial instruments.
- The Gender WG also proposes the use of gender audits as a way of systematically increasing the accountability of EC services and mapping of EU MS gender interventions.
- The Gender WG also reiterates its support to the EC proposal of a joint annual reporting system, as stated in the 2007 EC Gender Communication, whereby the EC together with the Member States would monitor gender mainstreaming in EU development cooperation.

### 5.4. Matrixes

*Please refer to the track changes on the matrix pages of the annex 'CONCORD GWG – Track Changes – Issues Paper on EU Gender Action Plan'*

### 5.5. Specific issues requiring further reflection

During the morning session of the Member State Gender Expert Meeting, the participants agreed to put in place working groups to deepen reflection on the following issues:

- Human rights dialogue
- Gender & the new aid modalities
- Gender sensitive indicators
- Institutional set-up & capacity building
- Specific issues (eg. GBV, SRHR, women & conflict etc)

In addition, the Gender WG requests that the following themes are also addressed and that CSOs, and women's rights organisations, are invited to take an active part in these discussions:

- Best practices, challenges & obstacles to be overcome
- A discussion around gender as a sector
- Mobilisation of resources

CSOs, and women's rights organisations, should be invited to take an active part in ALL these discussions in order to be able to provide the EC and MS with the specific expertise from each CSO, and women's rights organisations.

## **6. Conclusions / Recommendations**

The EU action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment in external relations must aim to produce concrete progress based on an inclusive process that involves all the necessary stakeholders.

In particular, the Gender WG highlights:

### 6.1. Coordination between the European & National level:

The European and National level must work together in order to achieve common goals and a common vision and the division of labour should be clearly understood.

The Gender WG encourages all MS to put in place national gender & development strategy in line with EU commitments & with specific earmarked funds.

### 6.2. EU Gender Action Plan Budget

For an action plan to be effectively implemented it needs to be accompanied by a budget. We strongly recommend that this action plan is accompanied by a clear reference to the amount and allocation of money required, especially as no specific resources are mentioned in EC Gender Communication and there is very little allocated under the gender budget of the IIP. There is also a need to mobilise resources for CSOs, and women's rights organisations. The EU is asking CSOs to play a greater role and participate in different processes and this needs secure resources.

### 6.3 Ensure a permanent, genuine and structured policy dialogue with the different stakeholders

As highlighted in the introduction, it is vital to put in place an effective dialogue with all the stakeholders throughout the process (planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, analysis etc). As mentioned earlier,

we also request a formal consultation with stakeholders on this action plan to build upon the section on objectives, implementation & evaluation.

**The CONCORD Gender WG would be pleased to participate in this process.**

6.4. Emphasis on the principle of policy coherence for development

6.5 Create ownership of the EU Gender Action Plan

As highlighted at the beginning of our presentation communication and ownership of EU Action Plan is crucial. Currently, gender is strong on paper, but for the commitments to be translated into reality these processes must be owned and backed by political will and significant resources. It is important that commitment and awareness is created and that all the different actors are engaged in the process (the need to engage other DGs (Trade, environment, etc), to anticipate the new Commissioners & new EP...).

Annexes:

*'CONCORD GWG – Track Changes – Issues Paper on EU Gender Action Plan' - Please refer to the track changes in section 6 on the matrixes.*