

# **Lessons from Evaluations of Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation**



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# Lessons from evaluations of women and gender equality in development cooperation

## 1 Introduction

In 2005 Norad commissioned the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) and partners to carry out an evaluation of the *Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (1997-2005)*. The evaluation showed significant weaknesses in the institutionalisation of activities, a lack of resources and deficient reporting of results in the field. Several other evaluations of efforts to promote gender equality in development cooperation have come to similar conclusions. Consequently, this criticism does not apply to Norwegian development cooperation alone; it appears to apply to international development cooperation in general. There is therefore reason to consider the findings of these evaluations more systematically in order to find out what they say about weaknesses in efforts to empower women and promote gender equality and the explanations and recommendations they provide.

This synthesis report is based on a review of evaluations<sup>1</sup> by Norad, Sida, DFID, the European Commission (EC), OECD/DAC, UNDP, ILO and the World Bank<sup>2</sup>. The evaluations reviewed here were carried out in the period 2002 to 2006.

DFID (2006), *Evaluation of DFID's Policy and Practice in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Volume 1. Synthesis Report.*

European Commission (2003), *Thematic evaluation of the integration of gender in EC development co-operation with third countries. Volume 1 – Final Report.*

International Labour Office (2005), *Thematic evaluation report: Gender issues in technical cooperation.*

Norad (2005), *Evaluation of the 'Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (1997-2005)'*.

OECD/DAC WP-EV (2003), *Review on Gender and Evaluation. OECD/DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation.*

Sida (2002), *Mainstreaming Gender Equality. Sida's support for the promotion of gender equality in partner countries.*

Sida (2002), *Sweden's and Holland's Strategies for the Promotion of Gender Equality in Bolivia.*

UNDP (2006), *Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in UNDP. New York.*

WB/OED (2005), *Evaluating a Decade of World Bank Gender Policy: 1990-99.*

Since 2002, growing international attention has been paid to weaknesses in the strategy to integrate women and gender equality into development cooperation, and to the lack of

1 They comprise three multilateral evaluations; UNDP 2006 (global), ILO 2005 (global/TA), the World Bank (WB) 2005 (global) and five bilateral evaluations; Norad 2005 (global), Sida 2002a (global) and b (Bolivia), DFID 2006 (global), the European Commission. I have also studied an organisational analysis of UNIFEM 2004 and a review of a number of bilateral evaluations under the auspices of the DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation (OECD/DAC WP- EV 2003).

2 The evaluations of the gender equality activities of Sida and DFID are exceptional in that they are large, comprehensive evaluations that also include thorough country studies. Sida, DFID, EC and Norad have all published more detailed country studies, and DFID has published a number of thematic studies as well. The UNDP evaluation (UNDP 2006) is also a comprehensive evaluation, with country reports for eight countries carried out by local consultants and not published separately. The ILO evaluation (ILO 2005) only covers gender equality activities in technical assistance (TA). The World Bank evaluation (WB 2005) is not really a new evaluation but is based on two previous evaluations carried out in 1994 and 1997, plus a two-stage evaluation in 2000 and 2001 by the OED of the Bank's Gender Strategy, which was carried out in preparation for the new Gender Strategy in 2001. The evaluation is limited to project assistance, which means that it deals with the new aid agenda to only a limited degree.

results. I have therefore chosen to include a certain amount of more recent literature and three reports from meetings<sup>3</sup> that address this issue. These reports have largely focused on the possibilities for strengthening gender equality activities in a situation with new aid modalities.

## **2 Common characteristics of and differences between evaluations**

In connection with the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995, several donor organisations developed new strategies for women and gender equality. These strategies all closely followed the recommendations from the Beijing Conference, which recommended strengthening the position of gender mainstreaming in their activities and making gender mainstreaming the main strategy, and also engaging in complementary, targeted activities aimed at empowering women. 'Gender mainstreaming'<sup>4</sup> means systematic integration of the gender perspective at all relevant levels. It is these activities that have been evaluated in the period 2002-2006.

All the evaluations were carried out with a view to improving efforts to empower women and promote gender equality, and most of them also with a view to gathering information in order to develop new strategic documents. The evaluations largely consider the institutionalisation of efforts to promote women and gender equality and focus on assessments and recommendations relating to the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming. Almost all the evaluations look to the future and explicitly address the issue of how the lessons learned from previous activities can inform the work and challenges of today.

The differences between the evaluations are largely related to their design, i.e. the extent to which there is emphasis on internal institutionalisation as opposed to focus on the results of activities. The differences in design are closely related to the size of the budgets allocated for the evaluations. The more comprehensive the evaluation and the larger the budget, the greater degree of detail with which the evaluation has been able to address the results of development cooperation.

### ***Do the findings point in the same direction?***

The findings in the evaluations all point in the same direction. Work on institutionalising the empowerment of women and gender equality have had low priority, there have been insufficient resources to implement policies and strategies, the focus has shifted to other areas, and there is no systematic reporting of results in this area. The mainstreaming strategy has been unsuccessful. The decentralisation of aid to embassies or country offices and the new aid modalities, which focus on harmonisation and budget support in connection with countries' poverty reduction strategies, have diverted attention away from women's and gender equality issues and posed entirely new challenges for activities relating to the empowerment of women and gender equality.

### ***Are there any common recommendations?***

The recommendations from the evaluations all point in the same direction, especially as regards measures to reinforce efforts to promote gender equality in development cooperation. They include recommendations that organisations must have clear goals for their activities, must ensure stronger leadership of work on women and gender equality, must invest more resources and must organise their work better and more systematically. The evaluations recommend clarifying concepts and terminology, providing clearer mandates and improving training. Several of the evaluations (EC 2003, ILO 2005, Norad 2005) suggest (re)introducing earmarked funds for innovative measures, i.e. catalytic funds. They also recommend stronger leadership, which means that activities must have the support and involvement of the organi-

<sup>3</sup> The three international meetings are: (i) *Owning Development: Promoting Gender Equality in New Aid Modalities and Partnerships*, UNIFEM and EC, 9-11 November 2005, Brussels. (ii) Joint biannual meeting of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and the OECD/DAC Network on Gender Equality, Nairobi, 30-31 January 2006. (iii) Annual meeting of OECD/DAC Gendernet, 5-7 July 2006, Paris, attended by bilateral and multilateral gender advisers.

<sup>4</sup> In the Norwegian version of the Strategy for 1997-2005 the term "integration of women" was intentionally used instead of "mainstreaming". This was because it was believed that Norway had already introduced this as an important principle in development cooperation in the 1985 Strategy. In this synthesis report, we speak of the empowerment of women and gender equality in development cooperation, but we use the term gender mainstreaming because this is the term that is used internationally.

sation's management, and that the management must require results from the work that is done. Mechanisms for making management accountable should be introduced, as well as general incentive systems. All in all, there are only minor differences between the recommendations contained in the evaluations.

The evaluations by Norad, Sida, UNDP, DFID and the World Bank all point out that competence must be improved at country offices. The authors of the evaluations agree that countries' own competence in the field of women and gender equality must be utilised to a far greater extent than before.

They all state that the reporting of results must be improved while at the same time recognising that this is difficult, given the new aid modalities. The evaluation reports recognise that the new modalities provide new opportunities to put women and gender equality on the political agenda, but point out that this requires greater willingness and ability to promote this area and engage in coherent dialogue with partner countries. Other reports (Gaynor 2006) consider how the empowerment of women and gender equality may have a place in the work that is in progress on the follow-up to the Paris Declaration on the harmonisation of development assistance. They also recommend that efforts now be focused on the operational level (Mehra and Gupta 2006), and that work be made more strategic, relevant and aimed at resolving operational problems.

### **3 The institutionalisation of work on gender equality**

The evaluations point out that work on women and gender equality was weakened in many organisations towards the end of the 1990s and that lower priority was given to resources for this work. Special networks of gender focal points and gender adviser systems disappeared. The institutional apparatus that existed prior to 1995 was in many cases downsized and given fewer resources at the same time as gender mainstreaming became the main strategy, and often as a consequence of this.

The evaluations show that the gender mainstreaming strategy was not followed up by operationalising the institutional structure, resources, working methods and approaches in other technical areas. Attempts were made to integrate women and gender equality into sector activities and priority areas, but these attempts were met with a great deal of passive opposition and little enthusiasm. There are many different tools, guidelines and other analytical works on how to integrate women and gender equality into other areas of development cooperation, but there are few examples of their being put to good use. The DFID evaluation (DFID 2006a) shows that although DFID is one of the leading aid agencies as regards providing financing for studies and reports, the knowledge acquired from these documents does not reach the operational level. It also shows that important areas are not addressed, such as women and gender equality in 'pro-poor growth' strategies and also, to a certain extent, in the area of social policy and welfare programmes.

Training was also downsized during this period. Management responsibility for women and gender equality was not operationalised, and work on women and gender equality was regarded as one goal among many other strategic goals. However, several of the evaluations provide little detail about how work is organised internally and say little about internal reporting routines. Most organisations submit an annual report to the management on women and gender equality, but these reports are not used strategically to improve the work that is done, even in cases where they identify clear deficiencies.

#### ***Institutional arrangements***

The evaluations point out that there is a need to clarify the responsibility and location of the gender equality adviser. The responsibility for work on women and gender equality rests with everyone, not only with the gender advisers. Consequently, the mandates and responsibilities of the gender advisers often become diffuse. They may include possessing updated technical

expertise, being a resource person for both technical and operational knowledge about how to approach and operationalise efforts to promote women and gender equality, they must be “watchdogs”, instigators and rapporteurs. This means that they must know the development cooperation system and be updated on the new aid modalities and the changes and discussions that take place. The gender advisers must also be prepared, they must be proactively involved in putting women and gender equality on the agenda when new themes are brought up. At the meeting of OECD/DAC Gendernet in July 2006 (OECD 2006), the focus was on the new challenges for gender advisers, and it was maintained that they must change their working methods in order to ensure that women and gender equality are put on the agenda in connection with harmonisation and budget support.

There are two underlying and competing approaches to these challenges. The first is that it is essential to invest in active work on gender equality if we are to achieve gender mainstreaming. The second is that strongly institutionalised work on gender equality may obstruct active gender mainstreaming because other sector advisers and programme managers abandon their responsibility for gender mainstreaming. The latter type of thinking was to some extent behind the reduction in resources for gender equality activities in aid organisations.

According to the evaluations, the responsibility for work on women and gender equality must be placed at management level. It must be part of management’s responsibilities and management must be held accountable for work in this area. If management is to be held accountable, it is important that horizontal and vertical accountability be developed within the organisations and that there also be internal and external requirements for results. The Norad evaluation emphasises that external pressure is weak and states that there should be stronger external engagement in the area of women and gender equality. For example, DFID has an external Gender Advocacy Forum, which contributes to this.

The evaluation teams were somewhat cautious about recommending specific organisational models, given the new aid modalities. However, they clearly indicate that it is important to have good gender equality expertise centrally located at head offices and substantial expertise at country offices (UNDP 2006:43, WB 2005, Sida 2002e, ILO 2003). The DFID evaluation points out that good expertise and a strategic approach at country offices can offset and rectify a lack of mainstreaming in the planning phase at project level. The Bolivia evaluation (Sida 2002e) concludes that if it is desirable to strengthen work on women and gender equality it is important to ensure that there is sufficient, relevant expertise at the embassy. In Bolivia the experience of a locally employed gender adviser was good. However, other evaluations point out that precisely this may weaken the authority of people working in this area, that the management delegates this work to new employees or to local employees with little authority and perhaps a limited external network.

At the same time, several of the evaluations point out that precisely because work on women and gender equality is not systematically institutionalised to any great extent, organisations are dependent on individual expertise and effort, and consequently the reporting of results becomes anecdotal and the results are unsustainable. Because this work is not institutionalised but dependent on enthusiasts, it may be exposed to cutbacks and relegated to the sidelines if new agendas, such as harmonisation, gain a prominent place in the work of the organisations or the embassies. Nevertheless, the fact that individuals and enthusiasts play a role in drawing attention to women and gender equality is an important finding that must be taken seriously.

### ***Lessons learned from the mainstreaming strategy***

The evaluations all point in the same direction – that gender mainstreaming has been unsuccessful and that sufficient resources have not been invested in implementing the goal of mainstreaming. There is disagreement about the extent to which ‘gender mainstreaming’ is a good concept, but this discussion is unclear in the evaluations, and they largely conclude that

it is the lack of implementation of mainstreaming that is the problem rather than the concept or the approach (C. Hennan in Sida 2004).

The ILO, EC and UNDP evaluations all point out that gender equality is often operationalised in the form of women-oriented projects and that there has been little success in integrating these activities into other programmes. The ILO evaluation points out that many of the efforts aimed at improving the living conditions of women are unsustainable and do not address gender differences. Several of the evaluations (Norad 2006, ILO 2005) show that the weaknesses found in efforts to empower women and promote gender equality reflect deeper problems experienced by the organisations in implementing development policy goals and administering cross-sectoral themes.

The UNDP evaluation (2006) also points out that work on documenting the connection between women and gender equality, economic development and poverty reduction has been neglected. Cooperation between the people working on poverty reduction and those working on women and gender equality was established in the early 1990s but was discontinued in the next decade because the necessary resources disappeared.

An interesting example of work on mainstreaming is the new action plan *Gender Equality as Smart Economics*, produced by the World Bank in cooperation with OECD/DAC Gendernet and bilateral donors, including Norway, which was adopted by the Board of the World Bank in September 2006. The action plan focuses on ensuring women's access to capital, labour and land markets, and it may be important in efforts to operationalise work on women and gender equality in "pro-poor growth" activities.

The World Bank (2005) finds that the focus on gender mainstreaming is lost when responsibilities are decentralised to the operational level. The evaluations say that to retain the focus on mainstreaming it is important that the overview over and supervision of women and gender equality activities be combined in a competent, central unit. Gender mainstreaming can only be achieved by incorporating this thinking into operational activities, by operationalising gender strategies in the field; but at the same time if this is done without a strong, central unit as 'supervisor', this work is easily weakened in the encounter with the many other priorities of and demands on development cooperation.

Is it true that spokesmen and spokeswoman for gender mainstreaming wish to stress management responsibility and thereby tone down the need for women-oriented expertise? And is it correct that emphasis on women-oriented expertise easily leads to management abandoning its responsibility? What must be done to ensure investment in both management responsibility and managers' demand for results from work on women and gender equality while at the same time ensuring that substantial investments and resources are devoted to strengthening women-oriented expertise both at head office and at country level? Logically speaking, these two strategies should mutually reinforce each other.

The evaluation teams point out how work on women and gender equality is weakened and evaporates in operational activities. The donors have ambitious goals and strategies, women and gender equality activities are often included in analyses, albeit superficially, but this gradually vanishes out of focus in implementation and reporting. In specific interventions and programmes, efforts to promote women and gender equality are not systematically dealt with or identified. Several of the evaluations call this 'policy evaporation'.

While one article (Mehra and Gupta, 2006) maintains that the gender mainstreaming strategy is in crisis and argues that this work must be approached by strengthening the position of women and gender equality in a new way, Moser and Moser (2005) argue that since gender mainstreaming is not a product but a process it is meaningless to say that it has been unsuccessful. Instead, one should consider what is in place organisationally and what are the

important organisational limitations on further work. However, both articles emphasise, as do the evaluations, that in order to make progress more attention must be paid to the results of implementation of gender mainstreaming.

#### **4 Results and reporting**

The evaluations attempt to elucidate results through country studies, with reviews of a selection of individual initiatives. The Norad evaluation (Norad 2005) showed that there was also substantial under-reporting of results in activities relating to women and gender equality. The area does not have the necessary status, which means that reporting often focuses on areas such as the new aid modalities, which are regarded as being more important. The DFID evaluation also shows that there are tendencies for positive results not to be sufficiently reported, which prevents good learning across countries and sectors.

Several of the evaluations (OECD/DAC WP-EV 2003, Sida 2004, DFID 2006a) point out that there is a need for more research and evaluation on the relationship between women's rights and poverty reduction.

In its evaluation of results, the Sida evaluation distinguishes between practical and strategic gender needs. While they find that individual efforts have largely led to concrete improvements in meeting women's practical needs, they find less evidence that activities have addressed strategic gender needs and achieved a greater degree of equality. They are therefore concerned that the effect of the efforts is unsustainable and that more underlying barriers to gender equality should be addressed. The Sida evaluation points out that it is not easy to distinguish between practical and strategically-oriented work; there is a broad interface between them and a great deal of overlap.

The UNDP evaluation points to the same thing, stating that gender mainstreaming is often operationalised in the form of women-oriented projects within micro-financing and similar areas instead of the spotlight being focused on inequalities and rights. At the same time, it is important to ask why the UNDP offices focus on women and not on gender equality. Both the UNDP evaluation and other evaluations say little about why this is the case. Is it because it is easier to try to improve livelihoods for women than to challenge legal regulations, national policies and social attitudes that discriminate against women? Or is one of the explanations that people want to see quicker results from their efforts and there is a stronger demand for women-oriented activities?

This is perhaps connected to the fact that there has been too little focus on how to approach work on women and gender equality in a culturally and socially sensitive manner. The concepts and content of interventions must be adapted to local and national contexts. The Sida evaluation provides good insights into how the national and historical contexts in three countries, South Africa, Bangladesh and Nicaragua, played an important role with respect to how the initiatives were formulated and which goals were focused on. It recommends that gender equality be approached by addressing inequalities in men's and women's access to resources (equality/inequality) and other types of inequality and discrimination.

The evaluations do not deal systematically with assistance for women-oriented projects. This applies both to support for gender machineries and support for civil society, including women's organisations. The Norad evaluation (2005) shows that Norway is in the process of limiting support for gender machineries and now only continues to provide such support in Malawi. Support for civil society and women's organisations is under pressure because it is regarded as requiring extensive administrative resources and people are looking for more effective administrative models. The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)<sup>5</sup> has just carried out a study (AWID 2006) which shows that many women's organisations are

<sup>5</sup> The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) [www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org) is an international membership organisation with a secretariat in Toronto and offices in Mexico City and Cape Town.

having financing difficulties. The OECD has recently changed the gender marker<sup>6</sup> in order to specifically cover the financing of women's organisations and gender machineries so that it is possible to obtain figures for aid financing of these areas by country on a continuous basis (OECD 2006).

Although all the evaluations point out that the international framework is in place, with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), and that countries have now committed themselves to following them up and have formalised their strategies and institutions in this area, it is recognised that work in this area often encounters resistance, both within the aid organisations and in partner countries. One of the informants says that it feels like swimming upstream. Work on women and gender equality is still controversial in many places and these themes are sensitive. A certain amount of adaptation and caution is also required in order to achieve the goal. In many ways, a great deal of progress has been made as regards formal, official policy, but attitudes and national institutions are lagging behind. This is reflected in legislation and the practical application of legislation and official policy which contradict the goals.

The Sida evaluation is the only one to address this matter explicitly, but several evaluations deal with it implicitly, among other things by looking at how work on gender issues also includes work with men and efforts to change the balance of power between the sexes.

With the new aid modalities it will be more difficult to measure the effects of development cooperation. There will therefore be reason to place less emphasis on measuring the results of aid in isolation and more on concentrating resources on measuring progress for women and gender equality in individual recipient countries.

The evaluations point out that the OECD/DAC gender markers are now being used but they do not provide a good basis for evaluating development assistance. The gender markers say something about the inputs, about where the budget allocations are, but nothing about the outputs and results. Work is still in progress on improving the statistical base for women and gender equality in development assistance, in cooperation between Gendernet and DAC Statistics (OECD 2005). DAC also points out that as the new aid modalities increase in scope, there will be more information to report per partner country than per donor country, as is currently the case. It is the results of overall development cooperation that are interesting, especially if donors divide the tasks between them.

This will also alter the kinds of results that can be measured. While it was previously the results of individual projects that were measured, with the new aid modalities, such as budget support, it will become far more common to measure social changes, i.e. to find indicators for women and gender equality in general social development.

This is also in line with the Paris Declaration, where, to an increasing extent, measurements must be based on the country's own information systems, statistics and indicators. Part of the problem is that the data are not good enough and that the gender indicators that have been developed do not provide an adequate basis for action<sup>7</sup> (Social Watch 2005, Annex 2). This does not mean that only indicators and national statistics can and must be used. Studies and research are also necessary.

However, measuring overall results in partner countries does not meet aid organisations' need to report on inputs and results to their own parliaments and citizens. It is still necessary to

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<sup>6</sup> A common coding system has been established through the OECD in order to be able to identify and measure interventions in selected areas, such as women and gender equality.

<sup>7</sup> The Journal of Human Development devotes an issue to criticisms and analyses of these indices. [http://journalonline.tandf.co.uk/\(lvgybsyzm5yjh55ou2ppuu2\)/app/home/issue.asp?referrer=parent&backto=journal,1,17;linkingpublicationresults,1:104621,1](http://journalonline.tandf.co.uk/(lvgybsyzm5yjh55ou2ppuu2)/app/home/issue.asp?referrer=parent&backto=journal,1,17;linkingpublicationresults,1:104621,1)

develop better reporting systems<sup>8</sup> for this purpose. They will probably continue to be based on a combination of overviews of inputs, documentation of individual initiatives and overviews of partner countries' status and progress. Evaluations and research studies will also be able to document the results that are achieved in greater detail.

The evaluations say little about best/good practices. Since the social and cultural context is vitally important for both inputs and the results of work on women and gender equality, many people will also be cautious about prescribing generally applicable best practices. In a new research project<sup>9</sup> on which factors improve the situation of women, Ruth Eyben (Eyben 2005) questions current thinking on gender mainstreaming and the effect chain from policy, strategies and their implementation in the field. Gender mainstreaming is not something that can be planned once and for all and then implemented in the field. Instead, it is dependent on the context and the person, and the empowerment of women is often a result of many factors that mutually influence each other. From the grassroots perspective, they consider the factors that may directly help to explain which processes are involved in improving the situation of women and can help to maintain and strengthen this progress. OECD/DAC Gendernet intends to document best cases for work on women and gender equality as part of its next programme, 2007-2009 (OECD 2006).

The evaluations emphasise that after the Beijing Conference a dual strategy emerged: gender mainstreaming, supplemented by programmes that focused on empowering women (known as "targeted programmes"). In most evaluations this is still a valid strategy. At the same time, the evaluations point out that it is important to ensure support for the activities by civil society relating to women and gender equality, in the form of practical measures, work on human rights and strategic work on gender equality. There must be watchdogs, promoters and practitioners. Several of the evaluations point out that non-governmental organisations are still primarily concerned about practical gender needs and place less emphasis on the more strategic work on women's rights. It is this that generates legitimacy and support at the local level, but at the same time the absence of strategic work may undermine practical work in the longer term.

An evaluation of Norwegian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Sri Lanka and Ethiopia (Norad 2005e) found the same pattern. The work of the NGOs is largely governed by the needs of local partners and the legitimacy inherent in addressing the practical needs of women and men. It is also probably essential in order to achieve the legitimacy required to be able to promote strategic needs. However, the evaluation shows that NGOs fail to make the investments required for strategic work, which is both resource-intensive and more difficult to implement and document the results of.

A recurrent theme in the evaluations is that good opportunities for promoting women and gender equality in development cooperation are overlooked or not grasped to a sufficient extent. Moreover, many of the evaluations show that activities target individual, local projects; this applies to ILO, bilateral projects (Norad, Sida) and civil society as a partner. The evaluations point out that these micro-level projects do not have an impact at the national level; they do not alter legislation, procedures or behaviour that would improve the situation of women in the longer term (WB 2005).

Gender analyses and gender equality apply to both men and women. Few of the evaluations consider how the analyses incorporate men and masculinity, or the extent to which work on gender equality results in men being included in activities. The Sida evaluation brings up this matter and refers to good results where this has been done. It also states that in many cases it is essential to include men in the debate on women and gender equality. Not least, it is

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<sup>8</sup> At the request of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Regional Department, Norad's Evaluation Department is currently developing an improved reporting routine for embassies' reporting of results in the area of women and gender equality.

<sup>9</sup> The project is being financed by DFID and being implemented in cooperation with UNIFEM and OXFAM.

important to include male leadership because in many cases there will be a great deal of resistance to empowering women and promoting gender equality, since this will often mean that men lose some of their power.

Jütting and Morrisson (2005)<sup>10</sup> argue that the greatest challenge today is to change the social institutions that hinder the empowerment of women and gender equality. In addition to focusing on education and health and strengthening women's rights, it is important to influence the social institutions that govern women's access to resources and opportunities. They recommend that even if the empowerment of women and gender equality may also mean that men lose power, it is important to emphasise that there are also win-win possibilities for everyone. In other words, use the empowerment of women and gender equality instrumentally by showing that they create better livelihoods for all. They also recommend including men far more actively in debates, training and advocacy. They go so far as to recommend that possibilities be investigated for compensating men provided that they do not erect barriers to women's opportunities. It is hard to imagine how this can be done in practice and be sustainable, nor do they discuss this in detail.

## **5 New aid modalities and efforts to promote gender equality**

Few of the evaluations address the new aid modalities and efforts to promote gender equality. There has only been focus on this in the past two or three years and consequently it is the most recent evaluations (Norad, UNDP and DFID) that deal with this issue to the greatest extent.

The Norad evaluation explains the decline in efforts to promote gender equality as being the result of competing agendas, including new aid modalities. The Norwegian aid administration has focused on harmonisation, sector programmes, budget support and joint donor strategies. A great deal of energy and resources have been devoted to analyses, meetings and dialogues with partner countries in this area, while work on cross-sectoral themes, such as gender equality, has suffered. The DFID evaluation stresses the same point and states that harmonisation and budget support make entirely new demands on gender mainstreaming.

Several of the evaluation teams have therefore taken the view that the new aid modalities have made work on the empowerment of women and gender equality more difficult. This is also seen in the declining interest in and support for "gender machineries"<sup>11</sup> in developing countries, and threats of reductions in support for women's organisations.

At the same time, several evaluation teams and other analytical reports have pointed out that the new aid modalities present new opportunities for work on gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Budget support and the harmonisation of development cooperation provide opportunities to lift gender equality into central policy and, not least, into the finance and planning ministries as well as the sector ministries.

UNIFEM and the European Commission arranged a conference on the new aid modalities and gender equality in November 2005, where the report *Accountability Upside Down. Gender equality in partnership for poverty reduction*<sup>12</sup> (Social Watch 2005) was presented. The report points out that the new aid architecture places great emphasis on policy but lacks mechanisms for monitoring resources and measuring effects. The question of how to measure the inputs and results of inputs for women and gender equality in the new aid architecture thereby reflects a greater challenge as regards which demands can and should be made in relation to new forms of assistance, such as budget support.

The Social Watch report also emphasises that the new aid modalities open up new opportunities for the empowerment of women and gender equality. At the same time, it stresses that

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<sup>10</sup> In their Policy Brief from the OECD Development Centre.

<sup>11</sup> Institutions, legislation and procedures intended to safeguard work on the empowerment of women and gender equality.

<sup>12</sup> The report was commissioned by UNIFEM in connection with Beijing+10.

better data and knowledge about the results of inputs are required if both civil society and other players are to hold donors and partner countries mutually accountable for activities. Given the new aid modalities, the authors believe that this can best be done at recipient level (and not for each donor) (Social Watch 2005, Annex 2).

This is followed up by Gaynor in the presentation *The Paris Declaration's partnership commitments and the implication for gender equality*<sup>13</sup>. The Paris Declaration and efforts to harmonise development cooperation focus on procedures and administration of aid that result in a more cost-effective use of aid funds by reducing transaction costs. The Paris Declaration says little or nothing about development effectiveness; i.e. the extent to which development policy goals, such as gender equality, have been achieved.

Several reports (DFID 2006, Gaynor 2006, Gendernet 2006) have underlined that one main strategy is that women and gender equality must be strengthened in partner countries' poverty reduction strategies, since these provide the basis for donors' harmonised efforts and budget support. They raise the issue of what the responsibility of donors is when poverty reduction strategies lack a gender dimension. The DFID evaluation also shows that substantial resources are required to engage in dialogue to strengthen work on the empowerment of women and gender equality if this area is not already identified in the poverty reduction strategy. They find few traces of such proactive dialogue taking place.

The DFID evaluation (DFID 2006a) refers to the fact that two development trends, namely the decentralisation of the administration of aid to country offices and the new aid modalities, go a long way towards explaining the weak focus on women and gender equality. Harmonisation and budget support pose entirely new challenges for efforts to promote gender equality, and if these are not resolved there will be no renewed or reinforced efforts in this area. The DFID evaluation also shows that a considerable amount of analytical work, guidelines and tools must be in place to improve the connection between the gender equality perspective and poverty reduction by maintaining a multi-dimensional understanding of the concept of poverty.

At the same time, Gaynor (2006) takes the view, as do many others, that the Paris Declaration and the new aid modalities have a great potential for giving new impetus to the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality in development cooperation, and for giving work in this area political weight by ensuring that it has a central place in high-level political discussions and in countries' economic policies and political priorities. The OECD/DAC Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, which is responsible for following up the Paris Declaration, has established four thematic groups to report on progress in the harmonisation of development cooperation<sup>14</sup>, with clear targets and indicators. Reports must be submitted from both donor and recipient countries. So far, this work has largely concerned procedures rather than development policy goals. Consequently, women and gender equality has not been a theme up to now.

Gaynor (2006) therefore argues that it is urgent to include women and gender equality in work on the Paris Declaration because it will be far more difficult to get them included afterwards ("retrofitting gender") when the schedules and reporting system are in place. She argues that it is important that the mandate of the Paris Declaration be expanded to include focus on results and thereby also on development policy goals for women and gender equality ("not only doing the things right, but doing the right things"). She argues that the mandate for the group working on evaluations of the results of the Paris Declaration should be expanded to include development policy goals. Gaynor particularly refers to the indicators

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13 This memorandum was presented at the IANWGE meeting in Nairobi in January 2006 and in a revised version at the OECD/DAC Gendernet meeting in Paris in July 2006.

14 One of the goals is the proportion of joint analytical studies that have been carried out to reduce transaction costs for recipients and increase the effect and impact of analytical work. This should pave the way for more cooperation between donors and more interest among recipients in joint evaluations and analyses of the situation of women and gender equality.

related to the operationalisation of national development strategies in result-oriented operational programmes (Indicator 1) and to result-based reporting on and evaluations of progress in relation to the goals that are set in national development plans and programmes (Indicator 11)<sup>15</sup>. She recommends that women and gender equality be integrated into the evaluations of results that are to be carried out for the five pilot countries<sup>16</sup>, which will be used to further develop indicators for progress in the implementation of the Paris Declaration.

OECD/DAC Gendernet (OECD 2006) has the area of new aid modalities, budget support and gender equality in its programme of action for the period 2007-2008 and will arrange a joint seminar with the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, which is responsible for following up the Paris Declaration.

## **6 Gender equality activities and the United Nations**

The United Nations (UN) is the central norm-giving organisation and is responsible for what is often called ‘a comprehensive gender architecture’, i.e. institutions, regulations, committees and reporting systems. Examples are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and member states’ reporting to the UN on the Beijing Plan for Action (BPfA). This provides a framework for countries’ own work on legislation and strategies to promote women and gender equality. All the evaluations refer to the fact that this framework has made this work more legitimate in the past decade. In addition to all the specialist organisations that have the integration of women and gender equality in their mandates, the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) is the UN’s special proactive unit for the promotion of women’s rights and gender equality. So far, UNIFEM is not a specialist organisation but an associated fund linked to the UNDP, and it has developed good cooperative relationships with many UN organisations.

The relationship between the UNDP and UNIFEM is discussed in the UNDP evaluation, which points out that the UNDP closed down parts of its strategic work on women and gender equality on the grounds that it could be transferred to UNIFEM. The evaluation points out that UNIFEM cannot mainstream gender into the UNDP. UNIFEM’s task is to act as a catalyst. The evaluation therefore recommends that the UNDP strengthen this strategic work internally. The evaluation also recommends that they should not compete for limited resources but find working methods that will improve cooperation between the two organisations, especially at regional and country level.

Both the UNDP evaluation (2006) and the organisational assessment of the UNIFEM organisation (UNIFEM 2004) point out that UNIFEM must be strengthened by increasing both financial resources and personnel, and must be given a higher status in the UN system. Up to now, UNIFEM has constantly been given more comprehensive tasks without being given the necessary additional resources. Not least, many people believe that the position of Executive Director of UNIFEM must be placed higher in the UN hierarchy in order to give it the necessary status and ensure that there is more coherence between tasks, responsibilities and the Executive Director’s position in the UN system. So far, cooperation between the secretariat function of DAW and the operational work of UNIFEM has been deficient. Efforts to reform the UN include a proposal to create a new organisation for women and gender equality in the UN, with more resources and a stronger mandate. The idea is for the new organisation to include both DAW’s work as a secretariat for CEDAW and work on women and gender equality in the UN committees, and UNIFEM’s operational work on capacity-building and strengthening gender equality activities in member states in the South.

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<sup>15</sup> “Indicator 1: Translate these national development strategies into prioritised results-oriented operational programmes as expressed in medium-term expenditure frameworks and annual budgets” (partner country responsible, donor country responsible for strengthening the partner country’s ability to do this); “Indicator 11: Endeavour to establish results-oriented reporting and assessment frameworks that monitor progress against key dimensions of the national and sector development strategies; and that these frameworks should track a manageable number of indicators for which data are cost effectively available” (partner country’s responsibility, donor country responsible for delivering aid in a way that strengthens the country’s ability to do this, joint responsibility for capacity-building and requiring results so that a more results-oriented administration is achieved).

<sup>16</sup> This is to be reported on.

At the same time, the UNDP evaluation shows that one of the most important UN organisations in this field, the UNDP, has demonstrated its weak ability to engage in targeted work for women and gender equality. The other evaluations do not address assistance via the UN system. Other studies have shown that the possibilities for the UNDP's work on women and gender equality are limited; that they are subject to partner countries' priorities and willingness to focus on this area. UNIFEM has a unique role as catalytic actor, but there are also signs that UNICEF and UNFPA, due to their mandates and areas of operation, can address women and gender equality more directly than the UNDP and put this area in a more central position in their work at country level.

One example of this is the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the Country Assistance Programme (CAP) for Vietnam (UNDP 2005). In the UNFPA action programme for Vietnam 2005-2007, women and gender equality play a central role. The UNDP has gender mainstreaming as one of several cross-sectoral themes, but women and gender equality are not mentioned at all when it comes to the description of the two priority areas for the period: poverty reduction ("improve the quality of (pro-poor) growth") and good governance. This is even more surprising since the UNDP has previously supported the gender machinery in Vietnam for two periods, for instance by supporting the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW) from 2002-2004. An evaluation of this support shows how weak the national system still is and how over-ambitious plans have undermined the sustainability of the project to support capacity-building in the gender machinery. The evaluation therefore recommends continuing this support.

Every two years, the UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANGWE) and OECD/DAC Gendernet, which represents bilateral donors, hold a joint meeting. The report from the IANGWE meeting in Nairobi in 2006 (IANGWE and OECD/DAC Gendernet 2006) concludes that the UN system must improve its ability to work on the basis of the organisations' comparative advantages, they must also collaborate far more on analytical studies (which is in line with the Paris Declaration), they must promote a result-based working culture and, finally, they must develop "mutual accountable indicators", i.e. common indicators that are recognised by all parties and can serve as a basis for holding both donor and recipient countries accountable for results. At present this is done to a far lesser extent than might have been expected.

## **7 Conclusions**

So what conclusions do I draw from my review of recent evaluations and analytical studies on women and gender equality?

In my opinion, the extent to which renewed efforts to empower women and promote gender equality in development cooperation will succeed will depend on these efforts demonstrating their relevance and usefulness in dealing with the major challenges development cooperation faces, such as poverty reduction, human rights, and peace and conflict resolution.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of this work, it is important to focus more strongly on the practical implementation of strategies for women and gender equality in operational activities, and to work more strategically on areas where this is regarded as being especially relevant and where it will increase effectiveness and the achievement of goals in other areas. Mehra and Gupta (2006) go so far as to suggest this as an alternative approach. By focusing activities on areas that are high on the agenda, it will also be possible to focus more attention on the area of women and gender equality.

Efforts to empower women and promote gender equality have to do with the redistribution of power and authority. This is, and will continue to be, a sensitive area that encounters considerable opposition. Wisdom, willingness and the ability to enter into alliances and develop win-win situations are required. There are many indications that focusing on and

prioritising efforts to empower women and promote gender equality are becoming increasingly important and that it is essential to address the areas that have a high political profile, such as the new aid modalities and the area of peace and conflict resolution. The challenge is to change work on women and gender equality from a supply-driven, institutionalised area to an area where there is greater demand from the field. Consequently this work must be more targeted and activities must be more strongly prioritised.

In my view, there is a special challenge in the area of poverty reduction (“pro-poor growth”) and gender equality. Several initiatives have recently been taken in this area, and this is necessary in order to ensure the participation of women in the new growth strategies. At the same time, the challenge is to extend the women and gender equality area in poverty reduction strategies and not allow these efforts to be limited to the current focus on education and reproductive health of the Millennium Development Goals. The political participation of women, violence against women and women’s legal rights, inheritance and family law are crucial areas.

Stronger focus on efforts to promote gender equality in the UN, with improved coordination between the UN committees and specialist organisations and, not least, a stronger UNIFEM are important. A greater degree of cooperation between bilateral and multilateral donors in the field could also help to strengthen this area politically.

In recent years there has been widespread uneasiness concerning the lacking effort to empower women and promote gender equality, and a feeling that the direction and strength of these efforts have been lost. The evaluations have confirmed this picture and today there is a considerable amount of openness about these findings, while there is also uncertainty about how it is actually possible to strengthen work on gender equality, given the new aid agenda. Thus, seeing as this window of opportunity may not remain open for long, it is paramount to respond immediately.

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