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Implementing the European Union gender action plan 2010-2015: challenges and opportunities

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Research Report



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1 Introduction

The European Union (EU) first articulated its policy commitment to gender equality in development cooperation in 1995 (EC, 1995) following the Beijing UN Women's Conference, and has redefined it several times since. The 2007 Conclusions of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) are the strongest expression of policy to date, expanding the focus beyond development cooperation (GAERC, 2007: paras 1, 4 and 6). These state that, 'Gender equality is a fundamental human right, a question of social justice and also a core value of the EU, including EU development policy [as underlined by the European Consensus on Development (2005) and the Development Cooperation Instrument.] [...] The promotion of gender equality and the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls are goals in their own right and also instrumental and key to achieving internationally agreed development goals.'¹ The Council Conclusions emphasise the importance of 'broadening of the scope of gender equality beyond the social sectors' to other areas such as economic growth, trade, migration, infrastructure, environment and climate change, governance, agriculture, fragile states, peace building and reconstruction. Furthermore, as development is only one of the policy areas that have an impact on women and girls, the Council stresses 'the need to ensure that policy in other areas is coherent with the objectives of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment'.

A growing awareness of the gap between EU policy and practice on gender equality on the part of several Member States² led the European Commission (EC) to draft an operational framework to strengthen implementation: the EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development (Gender Action Plan) (EC, 2010a). The EU recognised that, despite progress over recent decades, women and girls continue to make up the large majority of the world's poorest, and women are underrepresented in governments and decision-making bodies and have fewer opportunities and receive lower pay than men in labour and financial markets. There was also concern that the financial and economic crisis could hamper progress already achieved towards gender equality. The Gender Action Plan (without the introductory narrative contained in the EC Staff Working Document) was included as an Annex to the 2010 Council Conclusions on the MDGs (Council of the EU, 2010). Inclusion in the Council Conclusions raised its profile and linked it firmly, if narrowly, to achievement of the MDGs.³

The Gender Action Plan does not deal directly with impact or results. Comprehensive implementation would, however, deliver tangible, positive improvements in the lives, opportunities and rights of the poorest and most marginalised women, girls, men and boys.

Key stakeholders, including Member States, European External Action Service (EEAS), the Directorate General for Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid (DEVCO) and European civil society, regard the Gender Action Plan as a strong document with clear objectives, actions and indicators, and welcome the emphasis on gender mainstreaming and political and policy dialogue. Mainstreaming gender analysis across all policy and practice allows donors and partner governments to move towards an understanding of how imbalances in gender power relations impede progress towards sustainable and equitable development for all, and what needs to be done. It shifts the focus from seeing women and girls as vulnerable or 'virtuous victims' (Sweetman, 2012: 402) with special needs, or as a homogeneous group, towards grasping the nettle of transforming the mainstream (goals, policy and practice) to enable justice for all. Integrating gender analysis into policy and political dialogue is a vital route towards reshaping this mainstream. The emphasis on gender mainstreaming in all policy areas and in political dialogue sets the EU Gender Action Plan apart from other such plans.⁴

¹ Including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Cairo Programme of Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

² Reported in interviews.

³ The MDGs do not cover all aspects of gender equality.

⁴ For example, the World Bank's Gender Action Plan 2007-2010 and Applying Gender Action Plan Lessons: A Three-Year Road Map for Gender Mainstreaming 2010-2013 focus on economic opportunities.

Box 1: Mainstreaming gender analysis

Gender needs to be regarded as ‘an analytical concept’, as Andrea Cornwall (2007: 75) argues, rather than used as a descriptive term. Seen in this way, it can be a powerful tool for analysis that places attention on ‘the power effects of the social constitution of difference’ in each context (ibid.). Gender analysis examines how people’s gender identity and expression (woman, man, trans and intersex) determine their opportunities, access to and control over resources and capacity to enjoy and exercise their rights. Gender analysis is about asking questions and generating data and qualitative information to shape policy, strategy, actions and outcomes.

This paper focuses on implementation of the Gender Action Plan. It explores what has been achieved, identifies challenges and proposes a series of actions to accelerate progress. It also assesses the extent to which the Action Plan remains up to date and, in particular, the extent to which it includes a central economic perspective.

In summary, it is laudable that the EU has adopted a Gender Action Plan and that implementation is underway. The Gender Action Plan provides a framework for action, monitoring and accountability. However, progress is uneven across and within the three actors (EU Delegations, the EC and Member States) and patchy across and within the nine objectives. The requirement to coordinate reporting at partner country level is proving a valuable incentive to greater EU collaboration and coordination, but weak political and senior management leadership and insufficient analytical capacity on gender are hampering comprehensive implementation.

2 The approach and objectives

The Gender Action Plan proposes a three-pronged approach:

- 1 Political and policy dialogue on gender equality (placing gender equality as a systematic topic on the agenda of policy and political dialogue with partner countries);
- 2 Gender mainstreaming (designing policy in all areas – economic, health, education, environment, infrastructure, trade, science and research, agriculture, peace and security etc. – to address the specific concerns, needs and constraints of women and men); and
- 3 Specific actions (to catalyse or give added impetus to reduce gender inequality).

The Gender Action Plan makes it clear that gender mainstreaming necessitates:

- Changes in institutional working methods and shared responsibility;
- Obtaining and using gender-disaggregated data and qualitative information;
- Conducting gender analysis of differences in access to resources, opportunities, constraints and power between and among women, men, girls and boys; and
- Putting into place a gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation system (with indicators).

Finally, and most importantly, for effective mainstreaming, the Gender Action Plan states that political commitment must go hand in hand with technical capacity.

The Gender Action Plan concentrates on nine specific objectives, selected on the basis of existing resources, instruments and mechanisms where the EU sees it has a clear comparative advantage (see box). Under each objective, it proposes a series of actions, each with indicators and timing, to be carried out by EU Delegations, the EC and Member States in the period 2010-2015 (see Annex 1). All nine objectives and related actions and indicators are process-oriented.

Box 2: EU Gender Action Plan: nine objectives

- Strengthen the lead role of the EU in promoting gender equality in development;
- Build in-house capacity on gender equality issues in development;
- Place gender equality issues systematically on the agenda of political and development policy dialogue with partner countries;
- Ensure gender is mainstreamed in EU-funded projects and EU-funded general budget support and sector support programmes (sector-wide approaches) use gender-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive performance indicators where relevant;
- Prioritise in-country civil society participation, capacity building and advocacy on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE);
- Improve EU monitoring, accountability and transparency on allocation of funds for gender equality in development;
- Strengthen EU support to partner countries in their efforts to achieve MDG 3 and MDG 5;
- Strengthen EU support to partner countries in combating gender-based violence in all its manifestations, as well as discrimination against women and girls; and
- Support partner countries in fully implementing UN Security Council Resolutions (SCRs) 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889, including through the development of national action plans and policies on women, peace and security.

Actions and related indicators for the first six objectives include, for example, ensuring high-level political commitment to and follow-up on the Gender Action Plan, identifying an EU lead donor on gender equality in each country, strengthening cooperation with the African Union and the UN and using sex-disaggregated data in annual reports on the EU's development and external assistance. Actions designed to mainstream gender in policy and political dialogue and in budget support and sector-wide programming comprise, *inter*

alia, updating Heads of Mission on gender issues, greater participation in gender coordination mechanisms in-country and incorporating an assessment of gender equality in Country Strategy Papers and National Indicative Programmes. Building EU in-house capacity on gender equality issues is to be achieved by integrating gender perspectives in all training programmes and making gender expertise a core competence of EU Heads of Mission. Civil society participation, capacity and advocacy are to be enhanced through at least one annual policy dialogue on gender in each country and making thematic calls for proposals more gender-sensitive. In order to improve EU monitoring, accountability and transparency on the allocation of funds for gender equality and women's empowerment, the Gender Action Plan calls for the systematic application of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Gender Equality Policy Marker.⁵

The final three objectives of the Gender Action Plan focus on supporting partner country action on, respectively, MDG 3 (promote gender equality and empower women) and MDG 5 (improve maternal health); gender-based violence; and UN SCR 1325⁶ (on women, peace and security) and related resolutions.⁷ These objectives are to be achieved through EU influence in UN High-Level Meetings on the MDGs and summits on aid effectiveness, measures to improve partner government capacity and local calls for proposals, for example in the area of human rights.

Together, the objectives, actions and indicators represent a comprehensive plan, but there are some significant gaps. There is no objective, for example, on policy coherence, although this is emphasised in the 2007 Council Conclusions. Importantly, there is also nothing specific on changes in institutional working methods, which the Gender Action Plan itself regards as necessary for gender mainstreaming. A third shortcoming, which relates more to the political and strategic underpinning of the Gender Action Plan, is the non-acknowledgement of men and boys and masculinity issues.

With the exception of the final three objectives mentioned above, the Gender Action Plan does not directly address thematic areas, such as women's economic or political participation. Women's economic empowerment features prominently in many country reports⁸ and is a priority area for many Member States, for example Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK. At least eight Member States, including Spain and the UK, focus particularly on private sector development and public-private partnerships in relation to promoting gender equality and provide technical support and guidance on this. There is scope in the reporting on specific indicators,⁹ and more broadly within policy and political dialogue, to highlight economic activities and perspectives. Furthermore, the Gender Action Plan emphasises gender mainstreaming in macro-level policymaking, including on general and sector budget support.¹⁰ Ensuring women can participate in decision making on politics, economics and justice is the focus of a joint EU/UN Women programme.

2.1 Reporting and monitoring process

Implementation of the Gender Action Plan is monitored jointly by the EC and the Council of Ministers, with Member States and EU Delegations asked to report progress annually against the objectives, actions and indicators. A total of 93 EU Delegations and 16 Member States¹¹ submitted reports in 2012 (many after the deadline); the numbers for 2011 were 77 and 18, respectively. These are summarised by DEVCO officials into a single Implementation Report, which is then signed off at Director, Director-General and Commissioner level and presented to the Council Committee on Development (CODEV). The Implementation Report is then

⁵ The OECD Gender Equality Policy Marker is a means for OECD donors to report on whether their development projects and programmes have gender equality as a 'primary' or 'significant' objective.

⁶ SCR 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security reaffirms women's roles in the 'maintenance and promotion of peace and security' and the need to protect the rights of women and girls during and after conflict.

⁷ SCR 1820 (2008) reaffirms that sexual violence as used as a tactic in war is a security concern and affirms that sexual violence is a war crime; SCR 1888 (2009) 'demands measures to protect civilians, including women and children, from all forms of sexual violence'; and SCR 1889 (2009) calls for measures to improve women's engagement in political and economic decision making at early stages of recovery processes.

⁸ For example Mozambique, Senegal, Benin and Central America (2012 Implementation Report: EC, 2012).

⁹ Indicator 3.3.2 includes the improvement of economic and political empowerment, land and property rights; Indicator 7.3.2 covers ensuring the gender dimension is taken into account in the EU approach and interventions in private sector development (at macro, meso and micro levels).

¹⁰ Objective 4 and related action: Include gender issues in the permanent dialogue on sector and macroeconomic policies.

¹¹ With the exception of Germany and Portugal, all Member States that are members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) reported.

discussed by the EU Gender Expert Group, an informal group of officials from DEVCO and Member States that meets each year.

To date, the role of the EEAS in relation to the Gender Action Plan appears to have been concerned mainly with actions around SCR 1325. Responsibility rests with EEAS for a number of training-related indicators, for example gender training for EEAS staff pre-posting and for Heads of Mission. As yet, it has not acted explicitly to ensure gender analysis and gender equality issues are mainstreamed systematically in political dialogue and reported on annually. Neither of the two Implementation Reports prepared to date has been presented to the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC).¹²

Although the Gender Action Plan is included as Chapter 5 in the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015 (EC, 2010b), there is no coordination or exchange between EC officials working on the domestic and external gender equality agendas. The Inter-Service Group on Gender Equality,¹³ composed of representatives from all EC services, does not engage with the Gender Action Plan. Likewise, the High-Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming¹⁴ does not discuss gender equality in external relations. These are missed opportunities to foster exchange of lessons and strengthen the EU's overall progress on gender equality.

¹² The Implementation Reports are 'Staff Working Documents' and hence do not reach the FAC.

¹³ Its tasks are to plan gender mainstreaming, coordinate activities, monitor implementation of the Strategy, facilitate exchange of know-how and good practices etc.

¹⁴ An informal group, chaired by the EC (Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship), comprises high-level representatives responsible for gender mainstreaming at national level. It supports the trio presidencies in identifying policy areas and topics to be addressed etc.

3 Progress on implementation

The Gender Action Plan is a technical and practical operational plan to implement agreed policy, but in practice it has become delinked from the goal of gender equality and the policy frameworks that underpin it, leading to its side-lining (or neglect) by political leaders and senior management and hence the perception that it is not a political or policy priority. This affects directly the resources allocated to implementation and reporting. To date, two annual Implementation Reports have been prepared, 2011 (EC, 2011) and 2012 (EC, 2012). Both include an analysis of actions taken by EU Delegations, the EC and Member States. The second Report is more comprehensive and detailed than the first.

Evidence from the Implementation Reports, interviews with key informants and desk research indicate progress across the three prongs of the approach. The Reports contain instances of gender equality being discussed within political and policy dialogue, illustrations of gender mainstreaming and numerous examples of interesting specific actions. Performance on the Gender Action Plan varies considerably between Member States, their Embassies or Country Offices and the EC and EU Delegations. Determining factors here appear to be levels of commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment at political and senior management level, and capacity on gender analysis and mainstreaming.

The scope of this paper does not allow for a full analysis of the implementation of every aspect of the Gender Action Plan.¹⁵ What follows is a brief analysis of progress on some selected indicators regarded as critical to its implementation, namely, political and policy dialogue, programming, specific actions and coordination.

3.1 Political and policy dialogue

Overall, less progress is recorded on political than policy dialogue. Integrating gender equality issues into political dialogue can be challenging for senior officials who are not equipped or committed to it. The 2012 Implementation Report records an increase in the number of occasions of gender equality being on the agenda of political dialogue (61 countries) and in sector and macro policy dialogues (48 countries), but provides little detail on what issues were raised with whom, when and with what results. Only Sweden met the target of ensuring that gender equality issues were addressed in 50% of its political dialogue. EU Delegations appear reluctant to report on this aspect of the Gender Action Plan in detail: no EU Delegation prepared a specific report on including gender in political dialogue in 2011 or in 2012, on the grounds that 'they already report on it in other documents' (EC, 2012: 36-37). However, coverage of gender issues in political dialogue in, for example, human rights reports, is minimal. Only 9 out of the 93 reporting EU Delegations in 2012 included it in their Human Rights Country Strategy, 3 of these in their general human rights report (ibid.: 7). Very few Member States report separately on the inclusion of gender equality issues in political dialogue.¹⁶

There are some valuable examples of good practice of more structured dialogue on gender equality issues that could be adopted by other EU Delegations and Member States (see box). Two of these focus on gender-based violence but could be replicated for other gender equality issues.

¹⁵ The 2011 and 2012 Implementation Reports include detailed assessment of progress on each indicator.

¹⁶ Belgium and Austria report that they include women's rights in human rights reports. The UK reports that its Embassies have a responsibility to monitor and raise gender equality issues but it has no specific reporting mechanism (EC, 2011: 20).

Box 3: Structured dialogue: some examples

In **Tanzania** in 2010, EU Heads of Mission launched an EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, which received official support from the Ministry of Gender Affairs. Gender equality issues are now placed systematically on the agenda of EU–government dialogue (EC, 2011: 8).

In **Senegal** since 2011, Italy has supported the Ministry of Gender in its fight against gender-based violence and for a parity law. It has supported the institutionalisation of gender at all levels and in all sectors by providing technical expertise on gender mainstreaming to the Ministry of Gender (EC, 2012: 5).

In **South Africa**, gender-based violence has been discussed in the EU–South Africa Human Rights Dialogue. This dialogue may have contributed to the new Draft Bill on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, which was published for public comments in August 2012 (EC, 2012: 6).

Political dialogue in fragile, post-conflict countries presents different challenges: the 2011 Implementation Report notes that, in these contexts, political dialogue on gender equality issues is 'very limited or non-existent', as priority is given to dialogue on the political crisis and 'general human rights' issue. There appears to be little read-across to commitments of gender equality and women's rights or to the UN SCR's on women, peace and security; this is a missed opportunity.

Greater progress is reported on policy dialogue. In 2011, 32 EU Delegations reported some discussion of gender issues in sector/macro policy dialogue (EC, 2011: 8). The number increased to 49 in 2012 (a little over half of the 93 EU Delegations that prepared reports). In 2012, six countries reported that gender was included in all sector/macro policy discussions on, for example, education, water and sanitation and rural development, and there are one-off examples of gender issues being included in policy discussions on private sector development, justice, governance, access to financial services and sectoral budget support (EC, 2012: 9-10). However, as a comment in the 2012 Report points out, 'Some Delegations still think that certain fields are not concerned by gender equality, or that there are "other priorities"' (EC, 2012: 9).

3.2 Programming

The 2012 Implementation Report finds that gender equality is 'gradually' being included in non-traditional sector programmes (that is, beyond health and education) and suggests that the design of programmes provides a good entry point to address gender equality issues where these are not included in political or policy dialogue (EC, 2012: 5). Some progress is also registered with regard to the availability of sex-aggregated indicators and their use in different aid modalities, including in general budget support (ibid.: 4) and in the screening of projects by EU Delegations and Member States for gender sensitivity; 10 Member States report systematic screening (ibid.: 10). The Implementation Reports also express greater confidence that EU Delegations are better prepared to mainstream gender equality in the 2014-2020 programme period (a mandatory requirement).

3.3 Specific actions

The 2011 and 2012 Implementation Reports contain numerous examples of interesting and innovative specific actions that they suggest are significantly easier to support and more likely to deliver tangible achievements if well funded and staffed. Specific actions are good entry points to highlight and partially address aspects of gender-based inequality, for example girls' access to education, sexual and gender-based violence, women's security and participation in peace-building and politics. Specific actions are excellent in themselves, but, as the Reports make clear, they are not sufficient to tackle structural and systemic gender-based discrimination.

3.4 Coordination

The 2012 Implementation Report records greater participation by EU Delegations and Member States in existing gender coordination mechanisms, and their setting-up where none previously existed. Lead EU donors have been appointed in 36 of the 93 reporting Delegations, representing an increase from 28 in 2011 (EC, 2012: 5). Slow progress here reflects the wider issues facing the EU in terms of donor coordination and division of labour.

The requirement to submit annual reports is a valuable incentive to EU Delegations and Member States to improve implementation and a spur to greater collaboration and coordination. The 2012 Implementation Report found that progress had been made towards EU Delegations, in cooperation with EU lead donors, preparing a single country report.¹⁷ 'Though further progress is needed to fully realise coordinated reporting from the field, the collective efforts accomplished for this year's report have reportedly contributed to strengthening the potential for further coordination and joint efforts on the GAP [Gender Action Plan] objectives' (EC, 2012: 3).

Much more needs to be done to fully implement the Gender Action Plan, and the challenges to comprehensive implementation are many. The EC and Member States expect the 2013 Implementation Report to show marked progress.

¹⁷ The proposal to prepare a single partner country report was made by the UK.

4 Challenges to implementation

The Implementation Reports cover development cooperation primarily, and certain aspects of foreign policy related to peace and security and human rights. They focus almost exclusively on dialogue and programmes within partner countries; policymaking and negotiations at the higher levels of the EU are not included. We analyse the challenges in implementing the Gender Action Plan here under three headings: political challenges; policy and strategy challenges; and practical challenges.

4.1 Political challenges

'*Gender is never the priority*' is the clear message from key informants and the desk research. This inferred, if not explicit, 'low priority' influences the profile of the Gender Action Plan, its leadership within the EEAS, the EC, EU Delegations and Member States' Head Offices and Embassies (with some notable exceptions),¹⁸ the performance of senior officials and the financial and human resources allocated to implementation.

Although underpinned by Council Conclusions and Communications, the importance of the Gender Action Plan is rarely articulated by senior leadership in the EU or in Delegations and Embassies. The Implementation Reports indicate weak buy-in by Heads of EU Delegations and Member States' Embassies and Country Offices. This lack of ownership and emphasis sends a signal to staff members that gender equality is not a top priority. Importantly, the new Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy (2012) (Council of the EU, 2012) includes specific references to gender-based discrimination and has a specific women's rights outcome with five gender-related actions, including a direct reference to the Gender Action Plan.¹⁹ This is a welcome sign of greater coherence. Statements by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy²⁰ should raise the profile and importance of efforts on gender equality and the rights of women and girls. However, there is no evidence of gender mainstreaming across the EEAS in its political affairs and geographical departments. Ensuring gender analysis and gender equality issues are integrated in political dialogue with partner countries, and in programming, and reported on annually, should be an EEAS priority.

4.2 Policy and strategy challenges

The EU's policy on gender equality and women's empowerment and the Gender Action Plan are not widely understood within the EC, EU Delegations and Member States' Head and Country Offices, aside from those working specifically on gender matters. There is greater clarity on specific dimensions of gender inequality, such as sexual and gender-based violence, girls' access to education, maternal health, low political participation etc., but little overall comprehension of the deep-rooted and widespread nature of gender inequality, its implications for development and what needs to be done in every sphere to eliminate it.

There appears to be little read-across in dialogue with partner countries from EU policy on gender equality to policy on security, macroeconomics, trade, budget support or specific sectors. Similarly, the Gender Action Plan seems to have little influence on higher-level deliberations in Brussels and other capitals on top policy agenda matters, such as foreign and security, trade, environment, agriculture, food security, science and research policy. For example, the Gender Action Plan does not feature in non-governmental organisation (NGO) discussions with the Directorates-General for Agriculture, Trade or Research.²¹ Given that effective gender mainstreaming requires designing policy in all areas (as listed in the Gender Action Plan), this is a major shortcoming and serves to highlight the ongoing challenge of policy coherence and consistency.

¹⁸ Sweden stands out as the Member State that gives high priority to gender equality.

¹⁹ Outcome 20 Action (d) is 'Implement the nine specific objectives of the EU plan of action for gender equality and women's empowerment in development 2010-15'.

²⁰ See, for example, the statement made on Human Right Day, 10 December 2012, and on the conviction of a Somali journalist and alleged rape victim by a Mogadishu court, 6 February 2013, at http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/index_en.htm

²¹ Key informant.

The 2012 Implementation Report remarks on the separation of foreign policy and development policy in relation to political dialogue: 'At EU level, the coordination between foreign policy and development policies and implementation still needs to be improved, particularly in EU Delegations, to fulfil the political commitments in the GAP' (EC, 2012: 5). High-level political leadership is required to address this policy and practical challenge, to meld all policy areas (foreign and security, macroeconomic etc.) more closely with development policy and practice (including gender equality policy). The division of responsibility and labour between EEAS and DEVCO, whereby EEAS leads on programming and DEVCO on policy, represents yet another challenge to implementing the Gender Action Plan and highlights the need for an inter-service mechanism.

4.3 Practical challenges

Staff members working on the Gender Action Plan within EEAS, the EC, EU Delegations and Member States are highly committed but inadequately supported and resourced. Staff capacity is the primary practical challenge to implementing the Gender Action Plan, and in particular its gender mainstreaming prong. At present, there is insufficient gender analytical capacity to guarantee systematic and comprehensive implementation. There are a number of aspects to this: too few gender experts/advisors in Head and Country Offices, and mostly not in senior influential positions in the hierarchy;²² and insufficient gender expertise among staff in partner countries managing policy and political dialogue, general and sectoral budget support and large-scale sectoral programmes. The 2012 Implementation Report states that, 'Insufficient technical capacities and knowledge to act as informed interlocutors with partner countries impede progress in terms of advancing the GEWE [gender equality and women's empowerment] agenda at country level. More and better training, both of gender focal persons and sector specialists, remains a priority' (EC, 2012: 5). Face-to-face and web-based training, a helpdesk and networks have been set up to assist with implementation in addition to a range of guidance notes and tool kits. However, it is clear much more needs to be done to build capacity.

The 2012 Implementation Report also highlights the increasing number of short-term contractual staff in EU Delegations dealing with gender matters (EC, 2012: 5). Short-term temporary contracts result in high rates of staff turnover and consequent losses of continuity and institutional memory. Furthermore, the relatively low status of many gender focal persons within EU Delegations severely limits their ability to influence decision making; until recently job descriptions and performance assessments did not reflect the gender focal role. In addition, local staff members are not permitted to participate in EU Delegation dialogue meetings with partner government officials.

Another practical challenge is insufficient donor coordination within partner countries, particularly on integrating gender issues into policy and political dialogue, mainstreaming and innovative specific actions. Inadequate attention to providing opportunities for donor sharing of experience limits lesson learning on good practice. Political leadership on the Gender Action Plan and increased gender expertise capacity would go a long way towards addressing these two shortcomings.

²² There are instances of responsibility for the Gender Action Plan being allocated to staff with no gender experience or expertise.

Box 4: Conditions for effective gender mainstreaming

Experience and research suggest a number of factors are essential:

- Political leadership and senior management active support;
- Clarity on concepts, goals, policy, strategy and desired outcomes;
- Coherence between gender equality policy and all other policies;
- Human and financial resources: dedicated gender specialists, strong gender analytical expertise in all key staff, budgets to build capacity, opportunities for cross- and inter-agency learning;
- Willingness to change organisational culture, ways of working, decision making etc. to enable the agency to pursue and achieve gender equality and equity outcomes;
- Links to external sources of knowledge, expertise and partnerships;
- A gendered political economy analysis of each context;
- Availability and use of sex-disaggregated data; and
- Accountability and monitoring of organisational, senior management and staff performance.

5 Conclusions

Successful implementation of the Gender Action Plan in general and its gender mainstreaming prong in particular require high-level political leadership and senior management support. Research on efforts (with limited success) to mainstream gender within Member States, the EC and large international NGOs demonstrates this.²³ An African Development Bank synthesis of donor evaluations carried out the period 1990-2010 concludes that, 'Leadership has not consistently supported the implementation of gender mainstreaming policy, resulting in what has been widely described as "policy evaporation"' (African Development Bank, 2011: 33). The report points to the failure of senior management to move beyond policy rhetoric to actively commit to the concept of gender mainstreaming and put in place the necessary organisation-wide systems and resources to make gender everyone's business. Experience from Sweden and the Netherlands offer ideas to other EU Member States. Likewise, a recent statement by the US government shows what could be done at the EU level.

Box 5: High level leadership on gender mainstreaming: some examples

Sweden shows that the adoption of gender equality as a top priority for the whole of government releases resources and brings results. The government increased its spending on gender equality tenfold between 2007 and 2010 (OECD DAC, 2012: 6). Analysis of the OECD Gender Policy Equality Marker showed that, in 2010, gender equality was a primary objective in 11% and a significant objective in over 80% of Sweden's development cooperation (far ahead of other EU Member States) (ibid.: 5).

In the Netherlands, support from the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for European Affairs and International Cooperation is opening opportunities to advance the gender equality and women's rights agenda, for example on women, peace and security issues and women's sexual rights.²⁴ In addition, the Netherlands leads the way in support to organisations working on gender equality and empowerment.²⁵

A 2013 Memorandum from the US President sets out a framework for coordination of domestic and international policies and programmes across the US government to promote gender equality and empower women and girls (Office of the Press Secretary, 2013).

If the Gender Action Plan is to be implemented comprehensively and effectively, it needs political and senior management will and leadership. Promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls and achieving progress towards gender equality and equity comprise a complex and long-term political project requiring debate at the political level. It is not a bureaucratic exercise.²⁴ International human rights agreements provide standards. The EU can foster and support action by partner governments and civil society, including women's organisations, through 'a whole-of-EU' approach covering foreign and security, development cooperation, trade and other policies and practice. To do this, the EU needs to set ambitious, explicit and unambiguous gender equality and equity objectives and resource their achievement.

Political leadership and senior management backing of the EU policy on gender equality and the Gender Action Plan would manifest priority, stimulate staff buy-in and enthusiasm, free up staff and financial resources and accelerate action. Reiterating and publicising agreed policy, and its rationale, would ameliorate the situation of low understanding of the relevance of gender equality to 'mainstream' programmes, such as general budget support and budget support to sectors other than health and education.

Gender mainstreaming is not the low- or no-cost strategic option some senior managers believe. Comprehensive implementation of the Gender Action Plan, and especially the political dialogue and mainstreaming prongs, requires specialist gender expertise capacity backed by senior management.

A key strength of the Gender Action Plan is the role it can play as a mechanism to enhance donor collaboration, coordination and lesson learning at country and EU level, and advance aid and development

²³ See, for example, *Gender & Development Journal* (2012); African Development Bank (2011); and Norad (2006).

²⁴ For a useful discussion of gender mainstreaming in the EU, see Walby (2005) and Verloo (2001), among others.

effectiveness for gender equality and poverty reduction outcomes. Collaborative, multi-donor efforts are likely to be more successful in challenging the structural and systemic causes of gender inequality than separate one-off actions.

5.1 Recommendation for post-2015 action on gender equality

As the Gender Action Plan 2010-2015 is now in its third year of implementation, opening discussion on significant amendments would seem untimely,²⁵ and may divert attention from implementation. Many EU and Member State officials in partner countries have now become familiar with the Gender Action Plan and its reporting format and are making progress in implementation and reporting.

The EU should begin discussions early in 2014 on the policy and strategic framework for gender equality and equity for the period beyond 2015, in alignment with the post-MDG deliberations, the aid effectiveness agenda and international conventions and agreements (e.g. CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action). The post-2015 plan should set objectives for action in the arenas of foreign and security, trade, environment, agriculture etc. in addition to development cooperation. It should also be linked directly to the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015 (and follow-on plans covering gender equality within the EU) to build coherence between the EU's internal and external agendas.²⁶ The mid-term review of gender mainstreaming scheduled for mid-2013 will provide useful starting points.²⁷

5.2 Recommendations to accelerate Gender Action Plan implementation

This paper proposes two main recommendations,²⁸ as follows:

- Strengthen political leadership and senior management support to EU policy on gender equality and the Gender Action Plan; and
- Build greater capacity.

Political leadership and senior management support

*'Make people aware, and make it important'*²⁹ EU political leaders and senior management (EEAS, DEVCO, Member States and Ambassadors) should be encouraged to give far greater **prominence and priority** to EU policy on gender equality and the Gender Action Plan. Attention to gender equality and women's rights by political leaders puts and keeps gender on the agenda,³⁰ legitimises the agenda as **a core business** of the EU and as **integral to effectiveness** in all other policy areas and sends **a clear message** about expected action.

The following are some specific actions to move forward on the above recommendation:

- 1 Progress on the Gender Action Plan should be **discussed annually** at the FAC, at regular Directors-General meetings and at the annual meeting of EU Ambassadors. The findings of the 2013 mid-term review of gender mainstreaming should lead to a Council Conclusion in late 2013 or early 2014.³¹ Consideration should be given to holding an EU summit on gender equality in 2015.

²⁵ Interviews suggested little appetite for rewriting the Gender Action Plan at this stage.

²⁶ The UK Equality Duty is a useful model requiring all public bodies to work to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity between women and men, plan and publish goals and conduct gender impact assessments.

²⁷ There is a discrepancy between the Gender Action Plan text, which refers to a mid-term review in mid-2013, and the Plan Matrix, which refers to a review of gender mainstreaming in mid-2013. As gender mainstreaming is a key prong of the Gender Action Plan, overlap in the review is likely.

²⁸ Based on interviews with key informants and research.

²⁹ Key informant.

³⁰ For example, inclusion of women's rights issues in foreign policy and security dialogue by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (see, e.g., <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2012/12/201618.htm>); and the EU's High Representative (Baroness Ashton) (see footnote 20).

³¹ This was proposed at the DEVCO Working Group meeting of 10 December 2012.

- 2 An annual top-level **Gender Equality in External Relations Dialogue**, involving the European Parliament, Council presidencies and civil society should be held to discuss progress on the Gender Action Plan.³²
- 3 Urgent consideration should be given to formalising the **mandate of the EU Gender Expert Group** and its position within EU structures, to raising its status to a high-level group and to ensuring it meets at least twice each year and establishes working relations with the High-Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming.
- 4 Knowledge of gender issues should be regarded as a **core competence** of all Ambassadors, Heads of Delegations³³ and Country Offices and EC and Member State Directors-General; an objective on implementation of the EU's policy on gender equality and the Gender Action Plan should be incorporated into their job description, work plan and performance assessment, with the necessary training provided. Willing Member States and individuals can lead by example on this. *'If Heads of Mission demand reports then it will be done.'* *'Show people that gender equality and gender mainstreaming are good for their career.'*³⁴
- 5 The human rights of women and girls and gender equality should be an obligatory agenda item for **political dialogue** with partner countries, and be treated within the spirit of Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement.³⁵
- 6 **An inter-service group on the Gender Action Plan** should be established composed of officials from EEAS, DEVCO and the Directorate-General for Trade, as well as other relevant Directorates-General, such as those for Research and Innovation and the Environment.

Building greater capacity

Senior managers in EU Member States and Delegations should:

- Provide **strong and explicit support** to existing gender experts and focal persons to raise the profile and influence of this expertise within the agency and enable them to work effectively; and
- Build, through learning and training, **expertise in gender analysis** and in the collection and use of **sex-disaggregated data** among staff members managing policy and political dialogue, budget support and sectoral programmes to enable them to implement the Gender Action Plan.

What follows are some specific suggestions to action the above recommendations:

- 1 **Allow gender focal persons to work full time** on gender matters, including on effective coordination of actions and reporting on the Gender Action Plan; and **change procedures** so local gender experts can engage effectively in policy and political dialogue;
- 2 Set a clear plan and timetable to **recruit additional full-time gender experts/advisors** at senior (First Secretary) level by 2015;
- 3 Give priority to providing **training and learning opportunities** to staff managing policy and policy dialogue, sectoral programmes and general and sector budget support to build their capacity to integrate gender analysis;
- 4 Ensure the **work plans of senior and middle managers** in Head and Country Offices contain an objective linked to the Gender Action Plan, with clear lines of accountability;
- 5 Instruct human resource departments in donor capitals and Country Offices to include gender expertise in the **person specification** when recruiting staff for policy, research and operational posts;
- 6 Ensure gender perspectives are integrated into all **training** programmes by 2014;
- 7 Give priority to creating spaces and opportunities³⁶ for cross- and inter-agency **learning and reflection** on achievements, shortcomings and lessons; and

³² This would parallel the annual top-level Gender Equality Dialogue on the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&langId=en&newsId=890>).

³³ Making gender expertise a core competence of Heads of Mission is included as an action in the Gender Action Plan to be achieved by 2015. This needs to be extended to others, including Ambassadors, and earlier.

³⁴ Key informant.

³⁵ Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement between the EU and the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific group of countries establishes the objectives, content and modalities of political dialogue.

³⁶ For example, monthly two-hour informal sessions, lunchtime talks etc.

- 8 Consider each EU Delegation commissioning a short **mapping of available gender expertise** in country (Member States' Offices, other donors, academic institutions, women's organisations and other civil society organisations) as a resource.

Some points on reporting

Some Member States raised these important points on reporting on the Gender Action Plan:

- 1 Progress on political dialogue should be recorded fully in Implementation Reports.
- 2 A short version of each Implementation Report covering the main political and policy conclusions should be produced each year for discussion at EU Council level, and by Commissioners, Ministers and senior management.
- 3 Implementation Reports should be shared with partner country governments and the findings integrated into policy and political dialogue.
- 4 The 2013 and following Reports could usefully annex tables summarising actions taken by the EC and Member States (alongside the table for EU Delegations).
- 5 The Gender Action Plan should be seen as a learning process implemented and reported on with flexibility relevant to each context while retaining sufficient comparability; indicators already achieved could usefully be replaced with others to ensure a dynamic plan.
- 6 For the post-2015 Gender Action Plan, reporting should be at calendar year-end and be closely aligned with other major annual reports.³⁷

³⁷ Some Member States would like to see implementation reporting moved immediately to the year-end.

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