



European Union setting itself up to fail

Comparative Analysis of EU Response on Gender Issues

Introduction

Poverty cannot be eradicated without addressing gender inequalities. Any strategy that aims to tackle poverty has to place the promotion of gender justice at its very core. Failure to do so inevitably means that any strategy to tackle poverty is fundamentally flawed.

Women are pivotal to achieving sustainable development. They are the backbone of family and community life. They are the principal carers of the young and the sick; they manage the household and provide the basis of stability in family and community; all too often they are also the producers and providers. While much progress has been made in recent generations towards promoting equal rights for men and women, substantial social, institutional and cultural barriers to the empowerment of women remain.

The role women play is largely assumed and unpaid; when employed they usually earn less than men, even for the same work; disproportionately women own and control fewer resources, less knowledge and less information than men; they are consistently excluded from formal decision making on matters that govern them, their families and their communities.

Since 70% of people living in poverty are women it is not difficult to understand that the promotion of gender justice and the eradication of poverty are inextricably linked.

This is widely and consistently recognized in declarations, policies and agreements whose stated aims are to promote and work for development. Development aid and cooperation commitments include the promotion of gender equality as key objectives. Yet it is not always evident how far these stated aims and commitments are reflected in practice.

This year, 2007, marks the beginning of a new seven year phase in the EU's development cooperation with countries in all parts of the world. Given the EU's commitment to promote gender equality we should expect this to be fully reflected in the planned strategies for the EU's cooperation for the coming 7 years. The purpose of the research on which this paper is based

was to see if this is borne out in reality, and as to how far the EU's gender policies and commitments are reflected in the country and regional strategies that define the EU's plans for its development cooperation from 2007 to 2013.

Gender Equality in the European Union's development cooperation

The European Union is the biggest donor in the world accounting for more than half of the world's official development aid. Collectively the European Union provides € billion in official development assistance (ODA) annually. The development programme managed by the European Commission is planning to use over 50 billion Euro in the period until 2013. Unlike the individual EU Member States the Commission manages aid programmes in almost every developing country in the world.¹

The principal objective of the European Union's development policy is the eradication of poverty². The promotion of gender equality is recognized as being essential to achieving this objective. Not only is this clearly identified in the EU's development policy statements, but it is also reflected in the numerous commitments that the EU has made to promote gender equality³.

Questions:

Lack of focus on gender suggests that poverty objective is not the principal interest of the EC in defining its cooperation?

In failing to put in place an effective means to implement the gender policies and commitments, despite rhetoric on gender and its importance, do the EU's strategies actually perpetuate and re-enforce existing inequalities?

Key Findings

The planning of the EU's cooperation strategies with developing countries, while being led by the European Commission, is meant to be carried out in cooperation and dialogue with a number of actors, not least the authorities of the developing countries themselves. It is repeatedly stated that the principles of "ownership" and "partnership" guide preparation of the country and regional strategies. That the choices made in defining the focus of these strategies reflect the wishes of the governments of the countries concerned.

Whether this is true or not, and there is considerable evidence that suggests that it is not⁴, the critical importance of addressing gender inequalities as part of credible development strategies, and the universal recognition of this within the international community, should mean that gender inequalities

¹ There are three principal instruments through which the EU's aid is managed. The European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument covering the countries of the Southern Mediterranean and Southern Caucasus. The Development Cooperation Instrument governing the EU's financial assistance to countries in Asia, Latin America and South Africa. The Cotonou Agreement provides the framework for the EU's cooperation with countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

² Treaty, Consensus...

³ References

⁴ We decide, you own...

are consciously addressed within all actions defined in the Country and Regional Strategies.

The policy of “mainstreaming” gender is supposed to be a way of ensuring that this is the case. Understandably this only works if strategies for gender mainstreaming are explicit and effective. Regrettably all too often this does not seem to be the case, Different analyses on approaches to gender in development demonstrate that while the need for gender inequality is increasingly reflected in development policy, in reality the gender focus quickly “evaporates” in the planning and implementation phases⁵.

The analysis of the country and regional strategies for the next 7 years suggests that for the vast majority of these strategies this is no different. In most country strategies there is some analysis of gender inequalities, no doubt in response to EC operational guidelines, but these appear minimally in the response strategies of CSPs. Most frequently it is identified as a cross cutting issue that will be mainstreamed, but lacks baselines and performance indicators to enable this to happen. Gender equality is never established as a focal sector and only considered one of the goals or indicators in a third of all the CSPs reviewed.

Mainstreaming approaches to gender is essential but is not in itself sufficient to respond to critical and rampant gender issues such as domestic violence or location-specific problems. For instance, countries in a particular region may share more common gender issues than those in another. A number of African countries practice female genital mutilation place young girls at higher health risks while it is essentially absent in Latin America and in most of Asia. In the ENPI region on the other hand, sex trafficking is most prevalent gender issue.

With the EU’s move towards providing a greater proportion of its aid through general budget support, it can be expected that the gender policy objectives and commitments will be even less evident unless there are substantial changes in the way in which the implementation of gender policies are managed. The results of the assessment are not encouraging.

Unless measures to address gender issues are fully and consistently in place in all programmes and phases of the EC’s programming processes and matched with budget allocations, gender equality will not be promoted.

The recent EC Communication on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment⁶ explicitly identified the need to establish a two pronged approach within CSPs: gender mainstreaming together with women specific actions. From the responses received from EC delegations in ACP countries, it was only possible to identify two countries that have defined concrete

⁵ Gender publications....

⁶ Title, date, etc

women's programmes that address women-specific issues. Since the ACP CSPs have yet to be adopted it is critically important that at the very least the draft CSPs should be reviewed so that appropriate changes can be incorporated.

Conclusions

Given the widespread recognition of the critical importance that diminishing gender inequalities plays in addressing poverty it is difficult to understand why the translation of gender policies and commitments into effective practice remains largely unfulfilled. Admittedly, it involves a political commitment to challenge the power relationships that maintain these inequalities, not just in developing countries but in Europe itself. However the failure to make progress raises questions about the real commitment to tackle poverty – the overarching objective of the EU's development policy. In these circumstances it would be easy to suspect that institutionally, the EU's real interest in its relationship with developing countries is not primarily based on its development policies.

Without doubt the process to achieve the changes necessary for promoting gender justice take time and involve challenging entrenched status quo. It is therefore vitally important that strategies to promote gender equality are clearly and consistently included at all levels of the EU development cooperation process.

Additionally there must be significant budget allocations specifically provided for the implementation of gender mainstreaming and women specific actions. Since 70% of people living in poverty are women, and women play a critical role in ensuring the achievement of sustainable development making resource allocations that support the effective implementation of gender policies has to be justified.

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