



International Women's Day:

Time to indicate progress towards gender justice

Gender Equality Indicators in EU Development Cooperation Strategy

Poverty cannot be eradicated without addressing gender inequalities. Women are pivotal to achieving sustainable development. 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.

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. Therefore 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.

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

The principal objective of the European Union's development policy is the eradication of poverty. 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 equality.

The European Commission managed development cooperation is planned through the preparation of Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) and National Indicative Programmes (NIPs).¹ By developing a toolkit on mainstreaming gender equality and preparing programming guides for Strategy Papers that includes strong indicators on gender equality, the European Commission maintains the theory of promoting gender justice. Yet, analysis after analysis shows that little real progress has been made in integrating these indicators in CSPs and NIPs to make sure that the EU's gender equality goals are implemented.

The Commission has recently committed itself to the ambitious target of channelling 50% of government-to-government assistance through country systems, i.e. offering General and Sector Budget Support. Analysis of existing and proposed Financing Agreements² so far

¹ See also 'Gender and Sexual and Reproductive Health Indicators in the EU Development Aid', (December 2007) EEPA, briefing paper 8

² See also 'Administering aid differently. A review of the European Commission's general budget support.', (March 2008), EEPA

indicates that there are only a few indicators for gender in place to monitor outcomes related to gender justice.

Reviewing the Country strategies

The majority of country strategies for different parts of the world have been finalized. A review of the CSPs indicates that the EC's response to women/girl issues remains insufficient. This calls into question the ability of most country strategies to tackle poverty. The following findings reflect the key flaws in the CSPs:

1. Gender-based indicators common to the majority of the CSPs only relate to MDGs specifically on primary/secondary education, HIV/AIDS and maternal mortality and to a limited extent sexual and domestic violence, as well as to the number of women in parliaments.
2. Gender-based economic indicators are almost non-existent in the CSPs despite the common problems women face pertaining to access to credit and inheritance laws.
3. The lack of relevant gender indicators for the chosen focal sectors of most CSPs undermines any real possibility for mainstreaming gender.
4. While many National governments incorporate gender equality as objectives of their national development programmes, there are no pertinent gender indicators established on which to measure performance. With over 40% of aid allocated to General Budget Support, there is little possibility for assessing how EU aid will contribute to addressing the 70% of women living in poverty.

Conclusions

The EU's apparent failure to place the implementation of its gender policies at the centre of its development cooperation strategies suggests that targeting poverty is not the principal interest of the EU. In failing to put in place effective means and measurements to implement the gender policies and commitments, the EU's strategies may actually perpetuate and reinforce existing inequalities.

Addressing gender equality as a strategy to eradicate poverty is integral to achieving the MDGs. However, it should not be limited to the MDGs nor should the EC tolerate the lack of gender-based performance indicators in developing countries. The EC and national governments can draw upon existing systems and tools currently being used by various institutions. The Gender Equity Index (GEI) developed by Social Watch encompasses a broad range of indicators covering aspects of economics, education and empowerment that would be useful tools in the CSPs.

Gender issues, particularly in relation to poverty are complex and must not be confined to a few aspects of human development. Providing basic social services are necessary but without the political, economic, and legal mechanisms to promote gender equality across all dimensions of society, poverty will persist.

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See also:

www.eurostep.org
www.eepa.be