



Gender Review

Women's Rights and Gender Equality at
three selected embassies/missions

Peace, Gender and Democracy Department

August 2009

Norad
Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

P.O. Box 8034 Dep, NO-0030 OSLO
Ruseløkkveien 26, Oslo, Norway
Phone: +47 22 24 20 30 Fax: +47 22 24 20 31
www.norad.no

Norad has asked Marit Sørvald, consultant in Nordic Consulting Group, to make her assessment of three gender reviews carried out by Norad in 2008/9. Sørvald participated in the first gender review, at the Norwegian Representation Office in Al – Ram, and her note is interesting and useful reading for all Embassies, the MFA and Norad who want to strengthen their work in gender mainstreaming.

Oslo, August 2009

Björg Skotnes
Director, Peace, Gender and Democracy Department
Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad)

1 Summary

Norad has carried out Gender Reviews (“Gender Wash”) of the development cooperation portfolio in three selected countries in 2008/2009 (Ethiopia, Palestinian Territories and Zambia). The objective of the Reviews is to assess and strengthen the implementation of the *Action Plan for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality* (MFA, 2007), the *White Paper On Equal Terms: Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in International Development Policy* (2007-2008) and the *Norwegian Government’s Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security* (2006). The Reviews are based on an analysis of the work carried out at the embassies in their cooperation with partners. The methodology applied in the Gender Reviews includes document reviews, introductory gender training at the missions, and discussions with embassy staff and partners with a participatory learning approach. The Reviews are intended to initiate a process that will improve the work on women’s rights and gender equality at the embassies, with partners, and the administration of Norwegian development cooperation.

The term **gender** has caused confusions since the international community adopted the term in the 1980s. However, the term was introduced to avoid a limited focus only on *women in development*. The term gender, as an analytical and academic term, includes the relations between men and women and the engendered structural power relations in societies in which development interventions take place. This note argues for a pragmatic application of the term which in many contexts refer to the asymmetric relation between women and men and thereby unequal access to resources.

The Gender Reviews leave an impression that the cooperation in terms of promoting women’s rights and gender equality at an overall level is promising and dynamic processes are observed. However, the picture is mixed due to lack of a systematic approach. **Best practices** are identified in Zambia where Norwegian funded activities within Gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming are implemented with a professional approach and where the authorities have recognised the need to engender the work on HIV/AIDS. Another example is the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, a key institution in nation building efforts, which has a gender approach and produce gender disaggregated statistics in economic and social statistics.

Although improved policy environment, there are still evidences that gender mainstreaming is a challenge and that the integration of gender issues at embassy and partners’ level can be improved. This is especially so when it comes to the overall responsibility for gender mainstreaming at top management level both at the Norwegian missions as well as the partners’ levels, and available personnel resources allocated for implementation. Inclusion of gender issues in the dialogue with Development Partners’ (DP), and DP’s capacity and willingness to deal with and give priority to gender issues are all aspects that visualise unused potentials. Competence building among the partners is recommended as well as the importance to ensure integration of gender into the national planning frameworks such as Poverty Reduction Strategies, the national budget process, and the terms of conditions linked to budget support. Furthermore, sector programme support such as HIV/AIDS (Zambia), natural resource management/environment/food security (Ethiopia) and good governance/human rights/UNSCR 1325¹ (Palestinian Territories) have all potentials for taking advantage of improved gender mainstreaming efforts. Gender issues are brought up in the dialogue with the DPs. However, there is a need to visualise gender equality measures at

¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security (2000) is a framework for women’s participation in peace negotiations and special measures required for women in conflict areas. MFA published Plan of Action for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in 2006.

the political level, and especially so in conflict ridden areas where Norway has a political role in state building efforts, such as in the Palestinian Territories.

1. What is the purpose with a Gender Review?

Women's Rights and Gender Equality is one of the high priority areas in Norwegian development cooperation. Over the years it has been difficult to document positive changes for women's rights and gender equality as results of targeted development cooperation interventions. The *Evaluation of The Strategy of Women and Gender Equality in Norwegian Development Cooperation* (Norad, 2005) concluded that the work on gender was not visualised well enough and should be strengthened through competence building, increased resource allocation, improved use of planning tools and more specific requirements for reporting. As a response to the evaluation, the MFA has strengthened the policy level. The present policy is expressed in the *Plan of Action for the Implementation of the UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security* (2006), *Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality* (2007) and the White Paper "*On Equal Terms: Women's Rights and Gender Equality in International Development Policy*" (2008). The policy papers address the background for the importance to include women into all spheres of society as a prerequisite for poverty reduction and sustainable development and provide a frame for the development cooperation work on women and gender issues. The policy underlines the necessity to adopt a two-track approach, including women targeted interventions as well as gender mainstreaming in all development cooperation.

The term *gender* has caused confusions since the international community adopted the term in the 1980s. As an academic analytical term, it is widely discussed within scholars and the donor community. However, the term was introduced to avoid a focus limited to only *women in development*, and to include an analysis of the asymmetric relation between men and women in terms of access to resources in the development process. The term includes the relations between men and women and the engendered structural power relations in societies in which development interventions take place. The application of *gender* should be carefully considered when working on the ground and with partners where the term can result in distance to the defined political objectives, namely improving women's rights and gender equality. It is therefore in all interests that the term is used in a pragmatic way and avoided in contexts where the terminology could lead to a gap between the overall objectives and the implementers. In many cases application of terminology that people are familiar with such as *women and men* would ease the dialogue and provide the necessary base for communication.

This note aims at presenting experiences and best practices from the Reviews of three Norwegian embassies/missions' work and cooperation with DPs and seeks to provide a preliminary status for the implementation of the policies seen through the embassies' mode of work and cooperation with DPs. What has been done, what are the successes, what are the bottlenecks and what can the MFA, the embassies and its partners do better than presently in planning, implementation, monitoring and in dialogue with partners? Norad is offering the embassies technical assistance in the missions' efforts to improving gender mainstreaming and work on women's rights in their respective development cooperation portfolio. The Gender Review is trying to identify the successes as well as the obstacles met in gender mainstreaming methodology, and partners' ability to cope with the challenges that are faced in implementing development interventions with a gender perspective.

The Gender Review is an effort to develop a methodology specifically designed to assess the implementation of gender policies, strategies, programmes and projects funded by the MFA,

Norwegian embassies and representative offices. Norad has undertaken the Gender Reviews of the Norwegian Representative Office (NRO) in Palestinian Territories (July 2008), the Norwegian Embassy in Zambia (October 2008) and the Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia (February 2009). The duration of each country study was limited to one-week field visit. Norad staff members and embassy staff members, in cooperation with external consultants, have undertaken the Reviews.

The three cases represent distinct and different framework conditions in terms of social, economic, political and cultural circumstances, and the Norwegian development cooperation portfolio varies accordingly. The selection of projects and programmes reviewed are made by the embassies. In Ethiopia projects targeted improvements in natural resource management/food security/environment implemented by Norwegian and local NGOs were selected. The Zambian case addresses how Gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming can be improved and considers how gender mainstreaming can be integrated in terms of conditions for budget support. In the Palestinian Territories projects targeted good governance, human rights, and education were selected, as well as a special focus on UNSCR 1325. Norad further intends to develop the gender mainstreaming approach and the Gender Wash in close cooperation with the MFA. Relevant awareness raising and training activities will be carried out to strengthen gender capacities and responses to gender mainstreaming.

2. Methodology

The methodology applied in the Gender Reviews includes document reviews, introductory gender training at the missions, and discussions with embassy staff and partners with a participatory learning approach. The document reviews address how the analysis and considerations on women's rights and gender equality as well as gender mainstreaming efforts are visualised. Key documents such as Minutes from annual meetings between GoN and national authorities, project documents, appraisals, project annual reports, country strategic plans, activity plans, annual activity reports and reviews and evaluation reports.

The training sessions at the embassies have focused on gender mainstreaming methods, tools and application of gender analysis throughout the project cycle. Presentation of the policy has been an integrated part of the training sessions. Improvements in reporting on women's rights and gender equality have been highlighted as a necessary step for identifying and visualising what the embassies are focusing on in their dialogue and cooperation with partners.

The Gender Reviews also intend to identify practical as well as strategic needs in efforts to improve the work on women's rights and gender equality. The methods applied are opening up for looking into the different levels in which the Norwegian supported interventions are taking place. The three cases included are pilots and provide a base for further elaboration of the methodology.

3. Framework and Policy Environment for Successful Work on Women's Rights & Gender

Challenges that are met by Norwegian embassies in their efforts to reach the intended results for women's rights and gender equality are institutionalised in structural conditions in the respective countries. National legislations, policies and plans, as well as international legal instruments represent opportunities for successful implementation in this field. So where to address and target development interventions?

Ethiopia and Zambia have ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women - **CEDAW**. The Palestinian Territories does not have the status as a nation state, is not member of the UN and therefore lacks the formal status that is required for ratification of international legal instruments under the UN umbrella. Ethiopia and Zambia have ratified African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender and the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. In all three cases traditional and customary laws are in conflict with the overall national legislation and put limitations for the implementation of women's legal rights and gender equality. For instance in Ethiopia where female genital mutilation (FGM) is prohibited by law, this tradition is still widespread and represent a serious health problem for the majority of girls and women.

All three cases have a **Ministry for Women's Affairs** (MWA) or a government body that works for women's legal rights, gender equality and gender mainstreaming measures. However, the ministries and departments have a marginal role in the governmental structure, limited budget allocations and implementing capacity in their respective countries/territories.

MWA and government departments should have a mandate that includes facilitation of engendering national planning tools. The Norwegian embassy supports Gender in Development Division (GIDD) directly in Zambia, and is in principle an important measure in working on women and gender. In Palestinian Territories, NRO has decided not to support the MWA, arguing that the Ministry is marginal and lacks capacity and competence.² Ethiopian authorities have received the message from UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) that the MWA is suffering from insufficient decision making power and inadequate human and financial resources in order to implement gender mainstreaming, and is urged to upgrade accordingly.

In providing a government structure and national policy framework that facilitates gender mainstreaming, donors at a coordinated level could reach much further through their development interventions. Preconditions for successful gender mainstreaming efforts seem to be government planning and budget structures as well as donor coordination and harmonisation to provide linkages between a national system for gender equality planning and operational activities.

² The Palestinian context is representing extraordinary challenges. Norway supports Palestinian Authorities (PA) through budget support, which mainly is allocated salaries for key institutions in the public sector. Other direct support to PA is targeted Ministry of Education where gender mainstreaming is relatively well implemented.

4. How is the Work on Gender institutionalised at the Norwegian embassies?

According to the overall gender policy, the head of mission (ambassador or charge d'affaires) has the overall responsibility for implementing the GoN's policies in the respective country. Delegation of this overall responsibility takes place, and is sometimes delegated to the most senior advisor at the development cooperation desk. The embassies/NRO have all a staff member having the responsibility as **Gender Focal Point**. The responsibility as Gender Focal Point is added to other regular advisory project administration. The focal points are dedicated and qualified in taking the role as "watch dog" internally. However, it is observed that the tasks often remains with one local adviser, and that the responsible for overall political reporting and projects approached macro-economic cooperation see the women and gender perspectives as something limited to cooperation within the "social fields" such as education, health and human rights supported activities.

The **knowledge** about the status of women and gender equality at the embassies/NRO is satisfying, and the Review Teams were provided with well-informed analysis of the status of women by the embassies/NRO. It is therefore evident that there has been progress in the embassies' way of perceiving the importance of implementing gender policies. However, still the gender mainstreaming tools are to a limited degree applied in the regular planning and programming procedures. Unused potentials for improvements in the planning and implementation of gender mainstreaming methodology are identified. To improve the **competence**, training in gender mainstreaming tools is also identified as a need. In addition, the status of the national CEDAW reporting is not always in place. The CEDAW reporting in addition to the so-called shadow-reports³ contain interesting and valuable key information about the status of women and gender equality, as well as the gaps in the legislative system and should be an integrated knowledge at the embassies.

The Review Teams have observed that the **capacity** at embassy level seems to be stretched. In addition, the numbers of staff members tend to be reduced and individual staff members' are relatively stretched in terms of workload. This makes it difficult for the embassies to maintain the portfolio and integrate gender as a crosscutting issue. The way in which the gender approach is institutionalised at the embassies/NRO opens up for strengthening work on women and gender policies through reorganising the work towards more teamwork where the individual staff members would take advantage of each other's competence and to ensure that gender mainstreaming is addressed in sectors that traditionally appear to be gender neutral as for instance energy, environment, anti-corruption initiatives, private sector, and budget support.

In improving the implementation of the gender policy **measuring results** are of vital importance. To which degree are the objectives being reached through the Norwegian supported interventions? Results reporting on women's rights and gender equality should be addressed more explicitly in the embassies annual reports.

³ Shadow-reports elaborated by women NGOs are provided the UN Commission in addition to the national report submitted by the respective governments.

5. From Gender Blind to Gender Sensitive and Gender Transformativ

The Reviews show that improvements in women's rights, gender issues and gender mainstreaming have taken place, but still are challenging in the development cooperation. It is presumed that the positive dynamic processes observed at embassy level have potentials that could lead to improved competence in implementing gender-mainstreaming interventions. How is gender mainstreaming dealt with in the programme cycle? Looking into planning and programming procedures, and programme and project designs, there are still examples on projects that are **gender blind** (Ethiopia/food security, Palestinian Territories/Budget Support). The various tools available for mainstreaming gender are to a limited degree applied in the embassy staff's daily work. More importantly, how are the development partners dealing with gender issues? The implementing partners' commitment and dialogue with their Norwegian partner show that women's rights and gender equality are dealt with and perceived as important, but the measures for implementing a more **systematic approach** is often lacking. (Natural Resource Management, Food Security (Ethiopia), Good Governance, UNSCR 1325 (Palestinian Territories), Conservation Farming (Zambia). To avoid gender blind planning, implementation and documentation throughout the project cycle, it is important to initiate a process where elaboration of gender mainstreaming tools are explicitly included in programme design, appraisal, appropriation document and reporting procedures. If the top management level pursue a systematic planning approach with a gender integrated perspective it is expected that results would be enhanced in the dialogue and on the ground.

The role of the partners' capacity and competence to deal with women's rights and gender equality is a key issue in understanding where are the bottlenecks. The rationale and intention of the Norwegian policy are to provide support through cooperating partners so that women and men, girls and boys are provided equal access to resources (material or immaterial). Cultural sensitive conditions might be challenged by the Norwegian policy on gender equality since it is based on the objective to change the status of women and is by definition intended to transform the context in order to reduce poverty. If the partners involved initiate a dialogue that explicitly intends to transform gender relations in a given context, this could probably lead to improved results at various levels. Being **gender transformative** means that gender is central to promoting gender equality and achieving positive development outcomes. It takes on the task of transforming unequal gender relations to promote shared power, control of resources, decision-making, and support for women's empowerment.

The Gender Review of selected parts of the Norwegian development cooperation portfolio in Ethiopia shows that there are challenges in implementing gender mainstreaming in the **agricultural sector**. These project interventions comprise of research activities, food production and natural resource management and are implemented in dryland areas where the population is facing food shortages. Even where Norwegian NGOs are co-partners, programming of some activities reveals to be gender blind. Women's role in natural resource management and agricultural production are fields of cooperation that require gender mainstreaming. To put into practice gender mainstreaming a **household approach** should be applied since the production units have a division of labour based on gender. The partners involved should be trained in analysing women and men's different roles in the agricultural production to ensure that both men and women are targets for competence building. In order to influence decision-making structures at household level that aims at increase equality between women and men, the training should include awareness raising at village and household level.

The Zambia case reviewing **gender and HIV/AIDS** mainstreaming shows that there is high competence available, well qualified personnel involved among the partners and embassy staff, as well as well-qualified technical experts responsible for implementing the programmes. The Review Team comes up with detailed recommendations for improvements that link the structural conditions in Zambia to legal rights for women and gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming efforts. The Zambia Review also reveals that the macro-economic level including planning and conditionality has to be more elaborated in terms of gender mainstreaming to ensure that women's access to resources are equal to men's. The Norwegian embassy could facilitate exchange and experience sharing on gender budgeting and promote gender responsive budgeting in the dialogue with other donors, partners and the national authorities. In general, it is recommended that the gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming approach should be replicated in other countries with a high HIV/AIDS ratio.

Similar, the NRO and its partners in Palestinian Territories are working dedicated in cooperation with its partners on **human rights**. However, the partner admits that they do not emphasise women's human rights and gender equality to the extent that they should, and intends to do more on engendering their work. Likewise, the **anti-corruption** body supported by NRO also admits that the gender approach is inadequately reflected in their work, but has plans for improvements towards this end.

The increased emphasis on **macroeconomic measures** in Norwegian development cooperation, gender mainstreaming seems to be inadequately addressed. In elaborating conditions for Norwegian contributions to national budget support, it seems to be possible to put down conditions not only on specific economic measures, but also gender supportive budgeting. As shown in the Zambia case, this is possible, and future Gender Reviews should all look into the macro-economic level and address how the national macroeconomic conditions are targeting women's rights and gender equality, especially in countries where Norway contributes to budget support.

Support to **nation building** in Palestinian Territories has been the key element in the contributions to Palestinian Authorities. One key institution in this cooperation has been support to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). PCBS has developed a Gender Department and all economic and social statistics produced are providing gender-disaggregated data. One of the challenges for PCBS is to disseminate the data available and to get users to undertake analysis for national and international stakeholders. The Norwegian support to PCBS demonstrates an example where a key national institution has adopted a gender mainstreaming approach.

6. The Challenge with Engendering the Political Dialogue

In assessing the political dialogue it is important to question to what extent gender is brought up, how, by whom, and at what level. In male dominated cross-cultural contexts women and gender issues could be perceived as something not important enough to bring up, being peace negotiations, conflict prevention and macro-economic donor conferences. This is also one of the reasons for urging partners to bring women into all levels of political dialogue, including the highest level. For the Norwegian partner (embassies, politicians and government representatives) this would follow up the Plan of Action for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325. To bring gender into the core of political leadership would mean to engender the political dialogue. Engendering the political dialogue should be more explicit than what presently is the situation. It would be especially important in a case such as the Palestinian

context, where the discussions on the role of women in politics and women's political affiliation seem to be underestimated, and where the UNSCR 1325 is of special importance. The recent experience from the NRO in the Palestinian Territories illustrates that there are space for improvements.

7. From Projects to Politics - Future Scope of Work

There has been a change in the Norwegian development cooperation towards a more conscious awareness that without women and gender equality no sustainable development is achievable, as also stated in the Millennium Development Goals. This is both referring to the Norwegian policy framework, counterparts' policies and partners' willingness to work towards women's rights and gender equality. The dynamic processes invented are also expressed in the dialogue between the partners. However, while the policy environment has been changed, there are still challenges that should be overcome both in the political dialogue and in applying available gender mainstreaming methodology and tools. In general, the Reviews show that there are unused potentials and room for improvements. Preconditions for successful implementation of gender mainstreaming interventions that leads to a process where linkages between policy and implementation are shaped could be summarised as follows.

National Authorities

In efforts to succeed in gender mainstreaming there is a need to support the national gender machineries, although for many years it has not been Norwegian policy to support Ministries of Women's Affairs. The Zambia Review shows that support to GIDD opens up for a broader dialogue and more specific technical discussions on gender. But considering support to this kind of ministries and departments requires specific targeted interventions to avoid supporting government structures without a specific mandate. Support to developing government bodies' mandate could be considered.

The Poverty Reduction Strategies for Zambia, Ethiopia and Palestinian Territories do to a limited extent reflect gender concerns. This is something that should be brought up and challenged by the embassies in their dialogue with the respective national authorities. Gender responsive budgeting is a tool that should be addressed in the dialogue between donors and national authorities. Conditions for budget support should also to a larger extent visualise targeted gender mainstreaming interventions.

In countries with a high level of HIV/AIDS ratio the national authorities in cooperation with stakeholders should continue and strengthen the efforts in mainstreaming gender into the HIV/AIDS strategic planning, implementing and monitoring tools.

Partners' level

There are signs that development cooperation on women's rights and gender mainstreaming are improving, at the same time the conditionality for work on gender still meets various forms of resistance due to political and cultural conditions, as well as structural bottlenecks due to limited competence among the implementing partners. It is recommended that partners are urged to give priority to provide gender training and could be earmarked in annual budget allocations. In developing project designs and appraisals the partners should be aware that Norwegian authorities do not accept gender blind approaches.

Embassy level

The improved policy environment in which the embassies operate stimulates their work on women's rights and gender equality. Strengthening of the work at embassy level could take place by *reorganising the way of working on crosscutting issues*. To provide synergies a new internal organisation of the staff's mode of cooperation would ease this work. By introducing teamwork and staff meetings that brings up the situation on women and gender within each programme area is recommended. To bring this knowledge into regular reporting to the MFA would be a step forward. The individual project responsible would take great advantage from the colleagues working on different sector programmes/projects.

The overall *political reporting* prepared at the embassies should to a larger degree reflect the status of women's rights and gender equality in the country. All annual reports include a specific section on women and gender, as well as UNSCR 1325, where relevant. However, the role of women in politics, and how the political dialogue brings up and include women should be visualised in the overall political reporting. To institutionalise an engendered political dialogue, the embassy staff should have specific teamwork and present a joint elaborated report when required.

Norad

Norad's role as technical adviser for the MFA and the embassies should be given a mandate to regularly undertake Gender Reviews, not only based on requests from the embassies. In present division of roles between the MFA and Norad there is a danger that the MFA to a limited degree get the information from the reviews executed by Norad. Further, based on the information gathered through the Gender Reviews, Norad should come up with recommendations on specific evaluations where gender mainstreaming is identified as marginal.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)

The MFA has put women's rights and gender issues high up on the political agenda. This requires following up, not only by the administration, but also by the politicians themselves. The MFA should to a larger extent engender the political dialogue with national counterparts. To put gender at the highest political agenda is seen as an important way of strengthening the policy environment and ease the process for the embassies' cooperation as responsible for implementing policies on the ground. This is especially important in conflict-ridden areas where Norway has a particular political role and where UNSCR 1325 has a clear mandate.

The Gender Reviews already undertaken and those that are in process should be shared with the MFA and its Regional desks, as the overall responsible for institutionalising crosscutting policy issues. The foundation of the work on women's rights and gender equality requires that the MFA be updated on this kind of results reporting.

Regional Gender Advisers placed in the key regional areas for Norwegian development cooperation would ease the process of improving the work on gender. The MFA should consider recruiting 3 – 4 Regional Gender Specialists to improve the role of Norwegian contributions toward women's rights and gender equality and thereby strengthen the efforts in poverty reduction.

Norad in cooperation with the embassies and MFA arranged a regional seminar on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Sub-Saharan Africa (Kampala in 2008, and Maputo 2009). These exercises revealed that there are still challenges in working on gender, but that the embassies in the region are in process of improving work in this field. Fruitful exchange of experiences took place and regional cooperation brings dynamics into the embassies work. Regular regional meetings should be institutionalised as part of the following up on the implementation of the gender policy.

