

**Promoting Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in the UN System:
Policies/Strategies and Action Plans**



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Abstract

Despite over a decade of gender mainstreaming mandates and action plans, the UN system has not achieved equal levels of success with regards to gender mainstreaming. Our research seeks to isolate the actions taken by UN departments that further Sustainable Development Goal 5 (gender equality), as well as the challenges, or institutional blocks, which inhibit progressive action on gender mainstreaming.

The objectives of this paper are to collect and analyse the UN policies, strategies and reports on gender mainstreaming and analyze best practices and challenges for institutional structures for gender mainstreaming issues.

This research paper consists of two major parts – theoretical background and comparative analysis. Theoretical framework includes general information about gender mainstreaming and short comparative analysis of existing policies/initiatives. The main sources of our research are the United Nations System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP), the UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator (EPI) and UN Women's Technical Notes.

Comparative analysis provides the results that were received via surveys from various Focal Points of different UN bodies such as WHO, UN AIDS, UNICEF, ILO, and the FAO. By comparing the different strategies of the bodies, we are able to examine the quality of execution of these programmes in practice. In our comparison we concentrate mostly on those agencies who exceed expectations according to SWAP EPI Ratings.

Our final analytical paper can be used as an overview of best practices and challenges on gender mainstreaming in the UN System. In addition to furthering gender mainstreaming in UNODC, other UN agencies would have an access to the recommendations for building their own gender architecture and creation of policies.

KEYWORDS: *gender mainstreaming, UN system, policies, UN-SWAP, EPI, gender parity.*

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List of Acronyms

FAO – *Food and Agriculture Organization*

ILO – *International Labor Organization*

SDG - *Sustainable Development Goal*

UN - *United Nations*

UNICEF - *United Nations Children's Fund*

UN-SWAP - *(United Nations System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women)*

WHO - *World Health Organization*

UNODC - *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*

ECOSOC - *Economic and Social Council*

EPI - *Evaluation Performance Indicator*

Promoting Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in the UN System: Policies/Strategies and Action Plans

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1. Introduction

Gender mainstreaming is promoted by the United Nations as a successful strategy for achieving the goal of gender equality. It was established in the Beijing Platform for Action from the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. It is an evolving concept in public policy which focuses on the different implications among genders of any planned policy action, including legislation and programs, across all areas and levels. Mainstreaming strives to offer a multifaceted lens that highlights the unique challenges faced among both men and women within a society.

Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is not only a stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, but also recognized as a driver of progress across all the SDGs, including the goals that are relevant to UNODC's mandate, specifically Goal 3 on ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; Goal 8 on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; Goal 10 on reducing inequality within and among countries and Goal 16 on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

The main topic in this research project is devoted to gender mainstreaming within the UN system.

The first section of the research project provides the theoretical background of the crucial aspects for the research. Thus, the main definition of the gender mainstreaming and introduction to the SWAP framework is presented there.

UN Women has confirmed, using practical evidence in UN-SWAP reports, that there is a clear link between existence and implementation of gender policies/ strategies and institutional change. It follows that entities with gender policies are, on average, “meeting” or “exceeding” double the number of indicators than those without a gender policy. Moreover, gender policies/strategies act as road maps for the achievement of gender related mandates.

Additionally, the theoretical framework includes the comparative analysis of existing policies/initiatives and gender architecture within UN entities, which are tasked to operationalize the gender policies.

The United Nations has a robust collection of literature and resources available through the various organizations and departments. Specifically, our crucial sources are the United Nations System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP), the UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator (EPI) and UN Women's Technical Notes. In principle, the UN-SWAP serves as a comprehensive accountability framework to accelerate the UN's efforts to advance the agenda for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women through the practical implementation of the globally agreed commitments contained in the outcomes of global United Nations conferences and summits and their follow-up, in particular the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, the outcome of the 2005 World Summit and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

The second section presents the research questions, motivation, previous evidence as well as research design and methods. This research attempts to provide an overview of the best practices and challenges on gender mainstreaming in the UN system. Data is collected through surveys with a select number of gender focal points, working in various UN System entities. In order to provide an in-depth analysis to our research, in our surveys we have asked about the existing structures for gender mainstreaming projects; about the location of Gender Advisors and Gender Teams within entities' gender architecture; how gender analysis is used in policy and project development; what are the practical steps to mainstream gender throughout activities in their organization; and what has the UN-SWAP framework achieved today, etc.

The core strategy for our research is surveys with Gender Focal Points, Gender Experts, Women Focal Points, and Gender Advisors. With these expert interviews, we got closer to determining if gender policies/ strategies constitute a key driver of institutional change for entities to successfully mainstream gender in the activities of the entities in both: (i) achieving parity (equal representation of women, at all levels of the organization) and (ii) programmatic/ operational/ normative/ research/ technical assistance work, and whether UN-SWAP (since its introduction 5 years ago) has indeed served as an accountability framework to accelerate the UN's efforts to advance the agenda for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The third section includes the evaluation and analysis of the results. The answers to the surveys were thoroughly analyzed and compared. Some citations can be found in this chapter.

The fourth section covers findings and recommendations.

At the end, a conclusion presents the summary and the relevance of the research

2. Theoretical background

Gender mainstreaming is an evolving concept in public policy which focuses on the different implications among genders of any planned policy action, including legislation and programmes, across all areas and levels. Mainstreaming strives to offer a multifaceted lens that highlights the unique challenges faced by both men and women within a society. The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defines gender mainstreaming as “...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality... Gender mainstreaming does not replace the need for targeted, women-specific policies and programmes or positive legislation, nor does it substitute for gender units or focal points” (UN Swap Report, 2016).

In addition to furthering gender mainstreaming in UNODC, other UN agencies would have access to the recommendations for building their own gender architecture and creation of policies. Our comprehensive theoretical framework includes the comparative analysis of existing policies/initiatives and gender architecture. Using both interviews and background research, this paper attempts to synthesize the two elements through a comparative analysis of policy and strategy frameworks on gender equality and empowerment of women (GEEW) in the UN system. We would like to emphasize the best practices implemented within the UN institutional structures and in gender mainstreaming programs and projects

The preliminary discussions with our UN Mentor, Marian Salema, highlighted the hypothesis that there is an unequal distribution of success of Gender Mainstreaming across the United Nations system. This initial hypothesis was confirmed by the UN Women Technical Notes, UN Women annual report, a comprehensive breakdown and analysis of the UN system-wide progress on gender, as well as the report the Secretary General on Gender Mainstreaming in the UN System (published on the 27.10.2006) – which presents the aggregated system-wide UN-SWAP (United Nations System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women) reporting results by indicator.

The UN-SWAP rating system is composed of a performance scale of five levels. The ratings are self-assessed according to set criteria, and allow UN entities to report on their status of achievement on each indicator. “...the process of determining the ratings is expected to generate awareness and analysis of both past performance and future performance expectations. As such, the rating system is intended as an aid to promote leadership and direction and enhance coherence. The five levels of the rating system are: Exceeds requirements, Meets requirements, Approaches requirements, Missing, Not applicable”

We believe the research will show that the research a strong correlation between development and implementation of gender policies/ strategies and UN entities’ performance in attaining GEEW development results and the composition of the gender architecture, and where the

groups/ individuals are placed within the organizational structure. Additionally, we hypothesize that Gender Focal Points who report both 1) Adequate time to devote to gender mainstreaming projects and 2) Managerial and financial support for gender mainstreaming projects, to achieve higher levels of success than those who do not have enough time or support.

3. Motivation and research questions

Our main motivation was to collect and analyze the UN policies, strategies and reports on gender mainstreaming and collect best practices and challenges for institutional structures for gender mainstreaming issues (such as gender focal network, senior management involvement in gender issues, inter-agency/organization collaboration) as well as best practices and challenges for gender mainstreaming of programs and projects in regard to entry points for gender mainstreaming; at what point in the proposal process and levels of decision-making.

The research seeks to further the understanding on the following research questions:

1. What policies and strategy frameworks on gender mainstreaming exist in the UN system? What has worked and what are the challenges?
2. Where are the Gender Advisors and Gender Teams located in the gender architecture and how are they used? What are the existing structures for gender mainstreaming projects? How is gender analysis used in policy and project development?
3. What are the best practices and challenges to implement the commitments on gender equality and gender mainstreaming across the UN system?

We want to concentrate on these research questions because we believe that it will help us to provide an overview of best practices and challenges on gender mainstreaming in the UN system.

Our hope is that the final analytical paper could be used as an overview of best practices and challenges on gender mainstreaming in the UN.

4. Previous evidence

Since the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, the United Nations system has increased attention to gender inequalities both within its own organizations and externally, in programmatic areas. The General Assembly has passed 22 resolutions addressing gender mainstreaming and inequalities across all organizations (United Nations System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women).

The most recent report on system-wide efforts of gender mainstreaming in the UN was published in June 2017. Pursuant to the implementation of resolution 2013/16, the Secretary General submitted a report detailing progress made in the realization of the Action Plan. The entire United Nations system reported over two consecutive years on a common set of performance indicators with regard to gender mainstreaming. While the results displayed substantial progress in the performance of the United Nations system on gender mainstreaming, gaps nevertheless remain.

Using previous research conducted by the UN Economic and Social Council, we developed a baseline of previous gender mainstreaming efforts. Most organizations, reported having gender focal points or equivalents in place (96 per cent). Issues within the gender focal point (GFP) system are apparent when examining the seniority of GFPs (only 53 per cent of focal points are

at the P-4 level and above). Additionally, GFPs face difficulties with concise and formalized work plans dedicated to gender programming “(only 42 per cent of departments with focal points have written terms of reference and only 31 per cent have at least 20 per cent of their time allocated to focal point duties);” (Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective into All Policies and Programmes in the United Nations System, United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2014).

5. Research Design and Methods

Our research is fundamentally based around examining existing strategies and policies of gender mainstreaming. Explicitly stated, we are concentrating on the practices' effectiveness and usefulness.

Our topic is not very suitable for a quantitative research, as we are not focusing numerically on the data available. The results of gender mainstreaming programmes are hardly comparable. Usually, we have access to the Gender Policies, but not to the practical measures. Meanwhile, the gender parity is more expressible in numbers, the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming programs is not clearly shown in numbers.

That is why we decided to turn rather to **qualitative methods**. Our aims are to explore gender mainstreaming, getting to know its significant tools, the practical measures, understanding its functionality and highlighting the successful initiatives.

The main sources of our research are: the United Nations System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP), the UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator (EPI) and UN Women's Technical Notes.

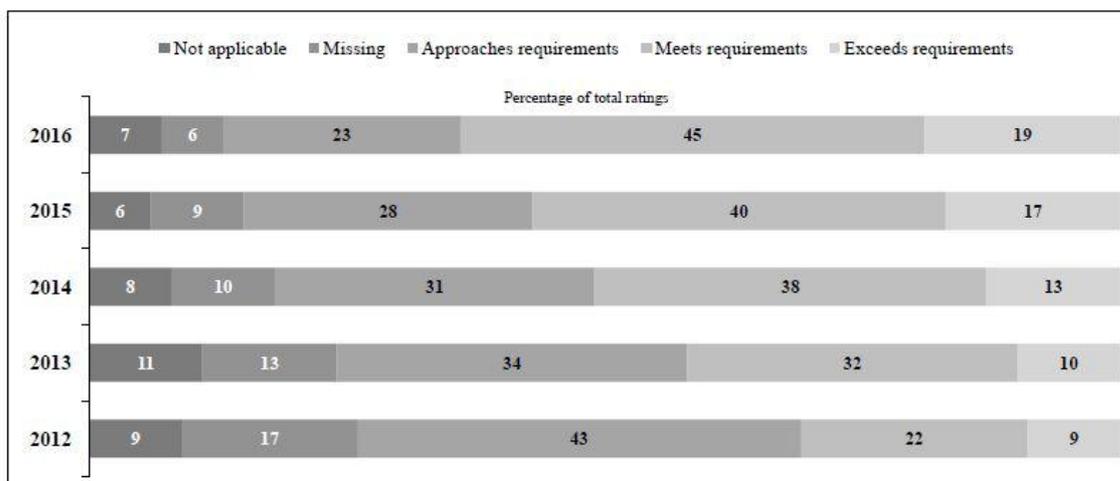
We are also concentrating on the Policies, Strategies and Action Plans on Gender Mainstreaming within the United Nations System to examine particular UN bodies such as WHO, UN AIDS, UNICEF, ILO, FAO etc.. By comparing the different strategies of the bodies, we are able to examine the quality of execution of these programmes in practice.

Our strategy's core will be the **surveys** with Gender Focal Point members, Gender Experts, and Gender Advisors. With these expert interviews, we will get closer to determining if gender policies/ strategies constitute a key driver of institutional change for entities to successfully mainstream gender in the activities of the entities in both: (i) achieving parity (equal representation of women, at all levels of the organization) and (ii) programmatic/ operational/ normative/ research/ technical assistance work, and whether UN- SWAP (since its introduction 5 years ago) has indeed served as an accountability framework to accelerate the UN's efforts to advance the agenda for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. Data was collected through interviews with a select number of gender focal points, working in various UN System entities.

After completion of interviews and background research, we composed a **comparative analysis** of policy and strategy frameworks on gender equality in the UN system. Our analysis **emphasizes the best practices** in conformation with institutional structures and in gender mainstreaming programs and projects.

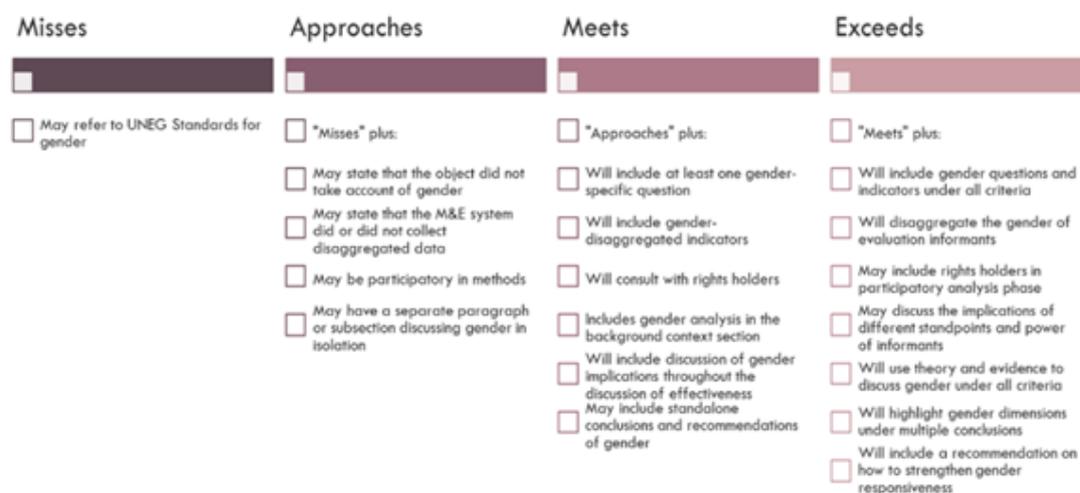
6. Evaluation and analysis of results

Comparative analysis of overall ratings for the United Nations system, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016



Note: Calculations for the United Nations system are based on 975 individual ratings, from 65 entities reporting on 15 performance indicators.

Source: Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system, 2017



Source: Synthesis Report: Review of UN SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator Reporting

Survey question 1 - What is the accountability framework and oversight mechanisms in your organization established to support and monitor the implementation of the gender equality strategy/policy/action plan? While 100% of responses highlighted a reporting system in place, the extent and depth of the system varied across organizations. Data collected highlights the importance of including gender as a performance indicator and in corporate reporting systems, as well as achieving high visibility for gender programming. For example, one organization highlighted its reporting system, which is delivered to the Executive Director, ensuring that senior management are involved in the success of gender programming. Furthermore, over half the responses listed “evaluations and audits” as part of a holistic accountability framework.

Survey question 2 - What structures have been put in place to ensure that gender equality and empowerment of women is integrated into every aspect of your organization’s programmes, policies and organizational practices? The collected responses almost unanimously highlight the importance of gender focal points, and emphasize the utilization of US SWAP report recommendations. Our data shows that organizations from the “exceeds expectations” category of the UN SWAP report evaluation also highlight the importance of involving the Human Resources (HR) team in integrating a gendered perspective in policies and organizational practices. However, forty percent of responding organizations did not outline structures for gender architecture, pointing to the hypothesis that improvement in this area could greatly benefit departments.

Table : Survey question 3 - What examples of the best practices and challenges to implement the commitments on gender equality and gender mainstreaming in your agency could you provide? Survey data confirmed our hypothesis that funding underpins a major obstacle for gender mainstreaming, with lack of support from colleagues and supervisors as a close second. Additional challenges mentioned point to a non-supportive culture or environment for implementing changes towards achieving gender programming. Most respondents referenced the need to change the underlying societal issues which are ingrained in society and which may inhibit gender programming, which was referred to as the need for a “cultural shift”. Best practices highlight the importance of accountability; both from senior management and from the gender focal points. An emphasis on a results driven program and a systematic approach to identifying and removing obstacles are additional best practices. Of particular note, organizations from the “exceeds expectations” category also discuss the importance of flexible work arrangements and creating an enabling and safe work environment.

Survey question 4 - What are the tools, processes and methodologies used to monitor, evaluate and report on gender mainstreaming? The data collected shows that reporting of gender mainstreaming is happening in all organizations which participated in the survey. Of particular interest to best hiring practices, one respondent drew attention to the importance of informing the hiring department of the existing gender distribution of the office, and are held accountable for hiring decisions made with this knowledge. Most commonly mentioned are departmental-specific reporting on gender programming within individual frameworks.

Survey question 5 - What is your feeling whether the UN-SWAP goal was achieved or not? The majority of the answers reflects the positive effects of the SWAP Reports. The SWAP could serve with instances of the “institutionalized gender measures and good practices”. Moreover, it draw the attention to the work of gender specialists and highlighted a common understanding of gender

issues. They have experienced great and effectual changes since the SWAP system exist. SWAP system has a chance to be a good indicator of the development of gender parity.

Survey question 6 - What are the structural locations of the gender focal points within your organization? What is the job description for that? What are the resources and time allocated to fulfil the role? In the environment of the respondents a quite large scale of gender representation can be experienced (10%, 20%). They are mostly located in the HR section, but their place in the structure depends on the different offices. Organizations in the “exceeds expectations” category overwhelming reported that their gender focal points where established as UN system P4 or higher, indicating a larger scope of responsibility and opportunity within the organization. However, organizations in the lower categories reported GFPs in field offices or in HR, both which have limited interactions with higher management and limited capacity for organizational and programmatic initiatives.

Survey question 7 - Does the organization track the proportion of funds devoted to advancing gender equality? Do they have a financial target for implementation of the gender equality mandate? According to the interviewees, the issues related to the funds and financial targets for the advancement of gender equality, there is currently a great lag from the expectations. Most of the cases, there is no or only a minimal financial target established. As it seems, most of the time they turn to the Gender Marker system, which is a scale of gender codes to identify where are the funds needed the most.

Survey question 8 - Do you feel you have the full support of upper management in implementing gender related projects? Unanimously, the respondents stated that implementation of gender related projects enjoy the full support of the upper management. Consequently, according to these answers, the gender related ideas can be easily applied in practice, or at least they are not hindered from the upper levels.

7. Conclusions

According to our data, our hypothesis was correct on some aspects on best practices and challenges faced with regards to gender mainstreaming in the UN system. Common challenges have been confirmed to include a lack of time available to dedicate to gender programming, a lack of accountability, and insufficient funds allocated to gender programming. However, individuals participating in our survey unanimously reported that they feel they have support from upper management, which contrasts to our former hypothesis.

An important consideration for this report is the limitations our data presents. Firstly, the results reported display a low return rate for our survey. Surveys were distributed to nearly 30 individuals across the UN system, yet we received only five responses. The responses were overwhelmingly submitted by organizations which had achieved “exceeds expectations” within the past year on the UN SWAP report. The lack of full and robust representation of all levels of UN SWAP report indicator levels could affect the results and recommendations of the support network within their immediate office for gender architecture. Many individuals pointed to a lack of time as a major obstacle in completing gender programming, which would affect the time available to engage in surveys and reporting.

Further research in the area of best practices and common challenges of gender mainstreaming in the UN system is necessary. Possible areas of research could expand upon the findings presented in this paper, and address the issues of reporting and time poverty of gender focal points when collecting data. A holistic comparison of the level of seniority of each departmental gender focal point, as well as the specific location of their job position within the department, could provide additional information about barriers faced while implementing gender programming.

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