

REPORT ON AGE, GENDER AND DIVERSITY MAINSTREAMING¹

I. OBJECTIVES AND FOCUS

1 Between 2001 and 2003, UNHCR undertook three evaluations on the implementation of its protection policies on women and children and its community services functions.² The results illustrated the need for improved participation by displaced women and children in programmes and decisions affecting them; systematic analysis of the protection situation with partners; enhanced coordination between protection, programme and community services staff; and greater accountability by senior management for policy implementation in these areas. In response to these findings, UNHCR established the Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) strategy to protect and empower disenfranchised groups. UNHCR's AGDM strategy supports the meaningful participation of women, girls, boys and men of all ages and backgrounds, using a rights and community-based approach, in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of UNHCR policies, programmes, operations and activities on their behalf.

2. This paper starts with a brief description of the overall aim and key components of the AGDM strategy. It then provides an update on the implementation of the strategy and an assessment of the achievements to date. Drawing from this analysis, the third part of the paper identifies six areas where further attention is required. Finally UNHCR's plans for continuing action in respect of these and other issues are outlined. This part of the paper also describes a plan to ensure further implementation and mainstreaming of the strategy more broadly throughout the organization.

II. AGDM STRATEGY: OVERALL AIM AND COMPONENTS

3. The overall goals of UNHCR's AGDM strategy are to ensure gender equality and the enjoyment by persons of concern of their rights, regardless of their age, gender or background. The strategy involves the following:

¹ An information sheet on *Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming*, containing a summary of activities from 2004-2007 as well as examples of good practices from field offices, will be made available at the 42nd meeting of the Standing Committee.

² See: *UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women and Guidelines on their Protection: An assessment of 10 years*, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, May 2002; *Meeting the Rights and Needs of Refugee Children*, Valid International, Oxford, United Kingdom, May 2002; *The Community Services Function in UNHCR*, CASA, Montreal, Canada, March 2003.

- promoting a multifunctional team (MFT) approach under the leadership of the head of every UNHCR office to bring together the expertise and skills of all staff and partners to enhance effectiveness in fulfilling UNHCR's mandate;
- undertaking regular participatory assessments with persons of concern to analyse their protection risks, concerns, priorities, capacities and proposed solutions, and evaluating the outcomes in partnership with them;
- putting persons of concern at the heart of operational planning by ensuring that findings from participatory assessments are analysed from an AGDM perspective, and that they form the basis of protection strategies and programming for solutions;
- identifying where targeted actions are required to address inequalities and support the empowerment and protection of discriminated groups, in particular women and girls at risk;
- mainstreaming age, gender and diversity analysis into all activities such as policy development, manuals and guidelines, capacity building and training, and in the design and delivery of programme assistance and sharing lessons learned; and,
- holding staff accountable for mainstreaming and targeted action through an AGDM accountability framework.

III. ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

4. In 2004, 14 countries piloted the methodology of setting up MFTs, undertaking participatory assessments, analysing the findings and developing work plans. By the end of 2007, over 100 country operations had completed the roll-out, and all but one country operation³ had actually mainstreamed the strategy across the entire spectrum of activities. Over 1,300 MFT members have participated in AGDM workshops and almost 100 facilitators have been trained.

5. The AGDM strategy is reflected in UNHCR's Global Strategic Objectives.⁴ It has also been incorporated in a number of the Office's key operational guidelines and instructions. For example, the revised version of UNHCR's Standards and Indicators now incorporates an increased number of indicators disaggregated by sex, age and diversity. UNHCR's manual on programming has also been revised to reflect AGDM and a community-based approach. Likewise, reporting on participatory assessment findings is required in the operational plans submitted by country operations (COPs), and a matrix has been developed to guide systematic reviews at Headquarters of the implementation of AGDM in the COPs.

6. A review of these plans for 2006 and 2007 revealed that the majority reflected the participatory assessment findings and linked them to the objectives of the operations. Targeted actions were designed to address the identified protection risks. Particularly noticeable was the improvement in the level of activities for the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence.

³ For security reasons, the roll-out was postponed in Pakistan.

⁴ Global Strategic Objective 7 focuses specifically on guaranteeing an age, gender and diversity perspective in operations.

7. After an initial pilot phase, the matching accountability framework for the AGDM strategy was launched globally in May 2007.⁵ The submission rate was very high, with 94 per cent of participating country representatives, and 100 per cent of accountable staff at Headquarters, submitting their completed accountability frameworks. The first global analysis of this framework is expected to provide a baseline for measuring future progress by UNHCR senior staff in complying with minimum standards of practice conducive to achieving equitable outcomes for all persons of concern.

8. With the AGDM roll-out nearing completion, a consultative process with internal and external stakeholders was initiated in 2007 to assess progress on AGDM and plan the way forward (see Section VI). The results of this process have demonstrated that incorporating participatory assessments as a standard feature in all operations has led to significant changes in protection and programme planning. In some cases, the implementation of the AGDM strategy has helped to refocus attention on people of concern, while in others it has resulted in better understanding of the specific needs of diverse groups. The consultations with persons of concern underlined the fact that not everyone enjoys equal access to essential services. There was also widespread recognition that the process strengthened partnerships by bringing people together around a common platform, and thereby improved the implementation of policy priorities.

V. CHALLENGES

9. Notwithstanding the significant progress to date, a number of challenges persist. The consultations with stakeholders as well as the analysis of the first global overview of progress towards completing the accountability actions for AGDM have highlighted outstanding challenges in six principal areas, as outlined below.

A. Attitudes, leadership and accountability

10. The consultations confirmed that there are many highly committed staff with the right approach. However, organizational culture and staff attitudes are still evolving. Staff also need to develop better understanding of the importance of treating persons of concern as equal partners with rights, rather than as passive beneficiaries of aid. This is particularly important when the complexity of protection problems, the scarcity of assistance, or staffing constraints, threaten to become overwhelming.

11. Partners and staff have called for increased transparency with persons of concern through regular feedback on the follow-up to participatory assessment findings, including the sharing of information about the Office's mandate, role and policies. Mechanisms for ensuring accountability to persons of concern, such as confidential community suggestion boxes or other channels for feedback also need to be developed.

12. With the MFT approach central to achieving age, gender and diversity mainstreaming, many representatives, heads of offices and managers need to provide more proactive leadership in a consistent manner. Many had delegated responsibility for coordinating MFTs to community services or other staff who were not necessarily empowered to ensure the full participation of other staff covering protection, programme or other functions, or to provide the leadership

⁵ With the exception of some advocacy-focused countries (in Europe, North America and Asia). A separate set of actions was developed subsequently and piloted for advocacy countries in 2007, for use in 2008.

required for these purposes. Thus, some teams were reportedly dissolved owing to lack of guidance. Ongoing leadership and follow-up on accountability actions in country and regional offices will thus remain crucial for the sustainability of the AGDM approach.

13. The AGDM Accountability Framework was welcomed as a step in the right direction by those involved in the 2007 stakeholder consultations, but this was considered insufficient to address the leadership issue. Managers were called upon to engage directly and regularly in participatory assessments in line with the accountability framework. UNHCR staff, in particular, expected senior managers to lead by example and to ensure the meaningful implementation of AGDM, notably through effective multifunctional teams.

B. Coordination and partnership

14. More effective impact was noted when partners were part of the MFTs. However, partners expressed concern that they were not always treated consistently as equal members of the team. In addition, some highlighted that UNHCR could benefit from learning from experienced partners, many of whom have the skills and tools to support AGDM and a community-based approach. Likewise, participation by regional and Bureau staff in the work of the country-level MFTs greatly enhanced effective follow-up and support at the headquarters level, when it came to the development of Country/Regional Operation Plans and the annual resource allocation process.

15. Governments, in particular, requested greater use of the AGDM strategy in inter-agency work, particularly in the context of the cluster approach in situations of internal displacement. As indicated in a study by the Women's Commission,⁶ this requires the raising of awareness on UNHCR's AGDM strategy, the sharing of experiences, and greater coordination with sister agencies and NGO partners, in order to align approaches in areas such as IASC guidelines/tools, and the United Nations Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP).

C. Targeted actions for empowerment

16. While the AGDM strategy has led to the identification and analysis of protection gaps that impact on various groups of persons of concern, it has been less used in the development of targeted interventions to remedy gaps in the longer term. Hence, COPs have not always resulted in sufficiently targeted actions to address gaps and support people's empowerment. Staff have requested greater guidance on how to formulate targeted actions to address gaps and support persons of concern to claim and exercise their rights. Increased technical support is also called for, notably in the development of livelihood strategies, women's empowerment, improved integration of older persons, a systematic approach to persons with disabilities, the creation of safe school learning environments, and adequate child protection systems,⁷ as well as individual case management systems.

⁶ *Gender and Child Protection Policies: Where do UNHCR's Partners Stand*, Study by the Women's Commission for Women and Children, July 2006.

⁷ The analysis of participatory assessments from 2005 and 2006 highlighted these areas and in particular the fact that persons of concern consistently prioritized livelihoods and education.

D. Integration of AGDM into UNHCR's work

17. As mentioned in paragraph 5 above, the AGDM strategy forms part of the organization's Global Strategic Objectives. Regular participatory assessments and age, gender and diversity analyses serve as the basis for country, regional and global priority setting. However, in 2007, only 45 per cent of country budgets and plans fully integrated participatory assessment findings, according to the Accountability Framework analysis. New tools have been designed to support mainstreaming, such as UNHCR's Protection Gaps Analysis Framework and the Results-Based Management system. The Focus software, which supports the Results-Based Framework, has incorporated objectives and outputs which will facilitate AGDM and appropriate planning, as well as budget tracking. While ensuring that AGDM is considered part and parcel of UNHCR's operations management, AGDM components, especially the use of participatory assessments, should also be routinely included in sub-agreements with partners.

18. A key element highlighted in this area was the importance of the Bureaux and regional offices championing AGDM. An active role by desk officers, senior legal advisers and regional representatives and their teams is considered essential in this respect. One recommendation was that Bureaux and field staff should monitor the follow-up to participatory assessment findings and that COPs should review the outcomes and impact in relation to AGDM.

E. Organizational capacity building

19. The most daunting challenge for staff is how to manage the expectations of people of concern when first introducing participatory assessments, especially in the face of limited resources. One of the areas where the staff and partners requested support, was in the identification of what community capacities and resources already exist, as well as how the community can cope and manage itself, in order to support protection and durable solutions strategies. Staff frequently commented on their own frustration at not being able to deliver the desired responses. The need to continue with training in managing expectations and facilitating participatory assessments; to improve age, gender and diversity analysis; and to achieve greater clarity on the rights and community-based approach, including community mobilization and outreach strategies, was also highlighted.

F. Non-negotiable standards of assistance

20. The lack of financial resources to follow up on participatory assessments was presented as the principal concern by all stakeholders. Budget cuts were often seen as impacting disproportionately on areas crucial to the protection of women, children and persons with specific needs, leaving them exposed to a variety of protection risks. The situation is further exacerbated by extremely limited access to livelihood and education opportunities in general, especially for young people, resulting in increasing exposure to problems such as sexual exploitation. One measure proposed to address these issues, was to adopt a system whereby basic priority items or activities could be labelled as "non-negotiable", so that country offices would be responsible for funding these first. Those offices opting not to do so would be required to provide a justification for their decision.

VI. NEXT STEPS

21. In response to the above findings, UNHCR has developed a three-year ACTION Plan. ACTION: Attitudes, leadership and accountability; Coordination and partnership; Targeted actions for empowerment; Integration of AGDM into UNHCR's work; Organizational capacity building; and Non-negotiable standards of assistance. ACTION builds on UNHCR's AGDM strategy and the Accountability Framework, and comprises concrete activities set out in the six thematic areas identified in the consultations process as requiring specific attention in the next phase of the strategy implementation. The Plan focuses primarily on work at Headquarters (Divisions and Bureaux) but is expected to eventually cover regional and field offices to ensure a consistent approach throughout policy development and field support services. In particular, it tackles the situation which has prevailed since the inception of the AGDM strategy, whereby the Community Development, Gender Equality and Children Section (CDGECS) of the Division of International Protection Services has borne the principal responsibility, with support from Bureaux and other Divisions, to follow up on and ensure the achievement of the AGDM approach. The ACTION Plan seeks to ensure a system according to which these responsibilities, particularly that of providing support to field operations, are assumed across the organization in a corporate manner. The findings and recommendations of an evaluation of the AGDM strategy to be undertaken in 2008 will be fed into the ACTION Plan to strengthen concerted and consistent corporate efforts on AGDM implementation and follow-up.