



Gender Equality and Development Cooperation in the European Union

by Veronique Dion

Gender equality and women's empowerment have come to be understood as prerequisites to just and sustainable development. Formally anchored in the development strategies of the international community, equality between women and men also forms an undeniable part of Europe's *acquis communautaire*¹. The integration of gender equality in internal and external matters of the EU was formalised in 1997 with the Amsterdam treaty (Article 3 (2))², which mandated a progressive commitment to the principle of gender equality in development cooperation.

Providing 60% of the world's overseas aid³ (in 2010 Member States' ODA and ODA channelled through the EC totalled 53.8 billion euros), the EU is also the main trading partner of many developing countries. It is thus well-placed to support Southern countries that have been affected to a great extent by the financial, environmental, fuel and food crises. However, to have a long lasting impact, the EU must maintain its commitment to eradicate poverty and most importantly fulfil its commitments to women and girls.

This brief provides an overview of the gender and development architecture at the European level by presenting the policy, legal and financial frameworks governing gender equality and development cooperation. It also explores opportunities and possibilities for civil society to engage and influence the implementation of gender equality commitments at the national and regional levels.



The EU's approach to Gender Equality

Over the past decades, the European Community has played a key role in building international commitments to promoting the advancement of women's rights and gender equality (box 1). Conversely, these instruments served to inform legislations at the European and Member States level, which must be *"in accordance with the object and purpose of these treaties and conventions"* (Article 6, par. 1).

Work for gender equality and women's empowerment takes place under the auspice of the EU **2010-2015 Strategy for equality between women and men**. This document provides the overall policy framework for the coherent integration of gender equality in all areas of EU policies, including external policies (development cooperation, trade, agriculture, migration, etc.) and encourages the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. It reaffirms the EU's approach to gender mainstreaming into development, meaning the integration of the gender dimension in all policy areas, as well as specific measures to redress inequalities (Box 2). Although it aims to improve coherence between internal and external matters, discrepancies remain, particularly in the area of trade and security and the lack of legislation and financing mechanisms attached to the strategy hinder its potential for change.



Box 1 – Main international agreements for gender equality/development cooperation

- Established in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), also described as the ‘international bills of rights for women’, provides the basis for realising equality between women and men.
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) was adopted at the 1995 World UN Conference on Women. It is an international agreement aiming to remove all obstacles in all spheres of public and private life, based on a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making.
- Since 2000, the Millennium Development Goals is the primary global framework for international development aiming to reduce poverty by 2015. A specific goal on women’s empowerment (goal three) and the recognition of gender as key to achieving the seven other goals demonstrate the global recognition of the centrality of gender equality to development.
- In 2005, OECD countries signed the Paris Declaration (PD) on aid effectiveness which profoundly transformed the delivery of aid, around five principles. The absence of commitment to women’s empowerment and gender equality has been highly criticised. The 2008 Accra Agenda for Action , resulting from the PD review contained a statement on Gender Equality as a cross-cutting issue.

Box 2 – Definition of Gender Mainstreaming

The ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2 are the most widely accepted and define 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 programmes 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. (UNECOSOC 1997)



Gender equality in European Development Cooperation: legal and policy framework

The EU recognises that development is about poverty reduction, the realisation of human rights and that gender equality is fundamental to this. Enshrined in the Treaty of the European Community (TEC), the complementary nature of EC Development Cooperation is established in Article 208. Rather than replacing Member States' efforts, EC development cooperation seeks to complement it. It also obliges the European Community to take poverty eradication, gradual integration into the world economy, sustainable economic and social development as the primary objectives of the "policies it implements which are likely to affect developing countries." The legal basis for the EC's external assistance policies on gender equity lies in the 1998 Regulation "on the integration of gender issues in development cooperation."⁴ In 2004, the European Parliament and the Council also approved a new Regulation "on the promotion of gender equality in development cooperation."⁵ These obligations informed the development of policy documents which frame development cooperation and ensure that the EU and Member States' development cooperation supports women's empowerment.

EU Consensus on Development (ECD) (2005) & Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change (2011)

Development cooperation at the EU level is governed by the European Consensus on Development (ECD). Jointly adopted by the Council and the Parliament in 2005, the ECD represents a common vision of development within which gender is recognised as a crucial goal and not solely as a means to achieving poverty reduction. The 'EU will include a strong gender component in all its policies and practices in relations with developing countries' (art. 19). Priorities of the ECD are poverty eradication and promotion of good governance, democracy and human rights and to increase the value of official development assistance to 0.56% of its GDP by 2010 and 0.70% by 2015. It also provides a framework for aligning and harmonising the MS and EC's bilateral development work, which, in the context of the Paris Declaration was considered a breakthrough. The ECD is politically binding and constitutes the basis for future financing instruments of the EC and more consensual cooperation between EU institutions.



The periodic review of the ECD started at the end of 2010 with a green papers⁶ consultation and recently a 'new Agenda for Change' for EU Development Policy was proposed in October 2011 by the EU Development Commissioner. The 12-point Agenda for Change will increasingly shape policy and aid programming. Development Ministers will discuss the Agenda for change in May 2012 at the Foreign Affairs Council Meeting. Once adopted, it will replace the ECD. Retaining poverty eradication as an ultimate goal of EU development policy, there is a clear shift toward the private sector and an economic growth model. This has severe implications of women and girls. The new Communication will furthermore inform negotiations on the post-2013 Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) and subsequently influence funding for gender equality.

Communication on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation (2007) and related Council Conclusions (2007)

Based on the European Consensus on Development's principle that gender equality is a fundamental human right and a precondition for sustainable development, the Communication presents a common vision on gender equality and calls on the Commission and Member States to "promote clear objectives and indicators on gender equality by assigning clear tasks and responsibilities to lead donors to this effect in all sectors." Reasserting the necessity of a twin-track approach to gender mainstreaming, specifically by re-committing to specific actions towards women's empowerment, it also goes beyond the MDGs in the sense that it encompasses important facets of gender inequalities such as female genital mutilation, gender-based violence in all its manifestations and trafficking. Although this is a 2007 communication, it remains a vital guiding document.

Related to the 2007 Commission Communication is the document "Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States", also known as the Council Conclusion. It recognises the Member States' "specific responsibility to support developing country partners in eliminating discrimination and gender inequality by increasing visibility and accountability on gender equality and women's empowerment in development cooperation and to promote and engage in an enhanced political dialogue at all levels, including the highest political level, which incorporates gender equality explicitly as a central theme."⁷



EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development (2010-2015)

Adopted in June 2010 as part of the Council Conclusions on achieving the MDGs, the EU Action Plan aims to be a parallel guide for the implementation of the 2007 Communication on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The Action Plan has a coordinated approach to deliver on gender equality commitments and increase impact on the ground. Focussing on (1) political and policy dialogue with partner countries; (2) mainstreaming of gender in all programmes and (3) specific action requiring targeted support, the plan establishes concrete steps to be carried out jointly by the Member States and the Commission and requires annual reporting against set targets.

Lack of transparency and accountability around the elaboration stages and the roles of CSOs in the process undermined the legitimacy of the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development. Furthermore, limited financial resources attached to the Action Plan seriously hinder implementation.

EU-ACP Partnership Agreement (The Cotonou Agreement)

The Cotonou Agreement outlines the political and economic relationships between Europe and 79 countries from Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific (also known as the ACP⁸). Aiming to increase political dialogue, as well as ownership and participation in the planning and implementation of EU-ACP development cooperation, the Cotonou Agreement holds strong commitments to gender equality by requiring the "systematic accounts (...) of the situation of women and gender issues in all areas – political, economic and social" as well as specific measures aimed at redressing inequalities between women and men. While gender is presented as a cross-cutting issue, there are few guidelines on how it translates into practice." Furthermore, the Cotonou Agreement opened the doors to the negotiations of new trade agreements.

Joint EU-Africa Strategy

Relations between Africa and the EU are also informed by the joint EU-Africa strategy. Adopted in 2007, it is the most recent framework for EU Africa relations, aiming to foster dialogue between the EU and the African Union (AU) and to strengthen relations between the two continents. While gender equality is to be addressed as part of key development issues, it was not part of the EAS Action Plan for thematic partnerships, which was adopted along with the Strategy. The Joint EU Africa



Strategy is financed through the European Development Fund (EDF), the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), and the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI) (North African Countries), the Instrument for stability (IFS) as well as various thematic programme instruments.

Key financing instruments

The European Development Fund (EDF)

EDF is the main instrument for providing Community Aid for development cooperation in the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries under the Cotonou Agreement. It is funded directly from Member States' contributions, which are voluntary. The EDF does not come under the Community Budget and therefore does not come under the scrutiny of the European Parliament.

Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI)

DCI is a legally binding instrument constituting the main funding tools for development cooperation with non-ACP countries. It provides funding both thematically (non-state actors, food security, investing in people, environment, Asylum and migration, compensation) and geographically (Latin America, Central Asia, South Africa and the Middle East). Prior to the adoption of the DCI in 2006, there was a specific budget line for gender equality work. This now falls under one of the five core themes of the budget line 'investing in people'. Resources allocated are extremely low with only 5% of the total resources available for the thematic programme for the whole 2007-2013 period. It is part of the Community Budget and therefore the European Parliament has the right of scrutiny over it.

The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)

Covering the neighbourhood countries, including North Africa, ENPI is part of the Community Budget and therefore the European Parliament has the right of scrutiny over it.



Main EU actors for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Development Cooperation

Institution	Roles & Responsibilities	Development cooperation & GE	Points for engagement
<p>European Parliament (EP) The EP is the only institution directly representing the interests of European citizens.</p> <p>MEPs work in Political Groupings and in Committees (e.g.: Development Committee (DEVE) and the Committee on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (FEMM)) for effective scrutiny of legislation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passes legislation together with the Council in most EU policy areas – this is called “ordinary legislative procedure” (OLP). • Holds the so-called ‘power of the Purse’, meaning that it has the right to reject the overall budget of the EU. • Exercises an democratic supervision by way of questions, hearings, debates, etc. over the EC and the Council. 	<p>Development Committee (DEVE)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handles Communications and proposals of the European Commission. • Drafts reports regarding development issues at its own initiative. • Supervises the EC aid budget and the Cotonou Agreement . • Coordinates the work of inter-parliamentarian and ad-hoc delegation within its scope. <p>FEMM:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines, promotes and protects women's rights in the Union and related Community measures. • Contributes to reports of other Committee by way of ‘Opinions’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a committee authors a report on an issue or on an EC's communication, a report will be written and a rapporteur appointed. They are the most important dialogue partners for NGOs. Conveying relevant information and knowledge is key. • Once adopted by the Committee, the report is presented for voting in plenary, where all MEPs have to vote. Make contact with your MEPs first. • Briefing and informing committee members: Priority should be given to a full member of a committee over substitutes. • It is also useful to find out if your MEP chairs a European Political Group or if s/he is a spokesperson for their national party in the EP on development or gender.
<p>European Commission (EC)</p> <p>Both a policy-making agency and a bureaucracy, the EC is composed of 26 Commissioners, the President and the Vice-President (who is also the Council's foreign policy chief see EEAS). Commissioners are responsible for a specific policy sector (Trade, Enlargement, etc.) and are assisted by a Directorate General (DG).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposes new laws and policies to EP and ensures implementation at the Member States level. • Sets up and manages the EU budget and supervises spending. • Attempts to coordinate and harmonise the policies of the 27 MS. • All instruments and budgets on development cooperation are the responsibility of the Commission, with budgetary scrutiny by the Parliament with the (exception of the European Development Fund). 	<p>The ‘RELEX family’ is the group of Commissioners dealing with third countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EuropeAid Development and Cooperation (DEVCO) Devises and draft development policies/strategies and delivers aids through programmes. • Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO) Provides emergency assistance, food aid, and aid to refugees. Funded from EDF and EU budget. • DG Trade Leads the development of trade relations and the development dimension of trade. • DG Enlargement Conducts negotiations for EU accession and in charge of the European Neighborhood Policy covering North Africa to Eastern Europe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging with the Commission is key, as it is at the origin of both the EU legislative and policy-making processes. • Green papers: discussion paper on a specific policy area, inviting interested parties to participate in a process of consultation and debate. • White papers: proposal for community action in specific area, i.e. for new EU legislation or policy, usually following a Green paper. • The European Citizens' Initiative. A million citizens representing ‘a significant number’ of EU states can now ask the Commission to bring forward any ‘appropriate proposal’ on the functioning of the EU.



Institution	Roles & Responsibilities	Development cooperation & GE	Points for engagement
<p>The European External Action Service (EEAS) New EU body, it serves as a foreign ministry and diplomatic service.</p> <p>Officials from the Council, the EC and MS form the EEAS and support the High Representative (HR) of the Union for Common Foreign and Security Policy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implements the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and other areas of the EU's external representation. • Covers six geographical departments. • EU delegations will be replacing the Commission's delegations in developing countries and they will be under the authority of the EEAS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some aspect of development have been "surrendered" to the EEAS – Stages one to three of the programming cycle are now the responsibility of the EEAS (Stage four and five – DEVCO). • Proposal under the EDF and DCI are prepared jointly by the relevant services in EEAS and EC under the responsibility of Development Commissioner, and then presented by the HR to Commissioners. 	
<p>The Council of the European Union (the Council) Representing the interests of MS, the Council is the highest decision-making body of the EU.</p> <p>Composed of ministers from each MS (depending on the issue discussed), the President of the Commission and the HR of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Public Security (see EEAS).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decides on legislations proposed by the EC, together with the EP. • Approves the overall budget, jointly with the EP (Replenishes the European Development Fund). • Defines and implements the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. • Concludes international agreements between the EU and other countries or international organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) (formerly General Affairs and External Relations Council) handles development cooperation, trade, humanitarian affairs, Humanitarian Policy, etc. • They meet in May and November to discuss development issues and also every 6 months in 'informal development Council'. The meeting is chaired by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. • This is when communications are adopted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing the Council Conclusion in the run up to FAC in May and November is an effective way to push for a certain issue. • Preparatory work for FAC and Informal Council meeting is done by the Committee of Permanent Representative (COREPER) and this meeting is in turn prepared by working groups. CODEV and the ACP are the most relevant working groups. • Get in touch with the Presidency of the Council, which is responsible for proposing the work programme, agenda and overall coordination of the work of the Council. The Presidency always prepares the work 6 months in advance.
<p>The European Council Became a full institution with the Lisbon Treaty. Composed of Heads of State or Government and an elected President.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is the EU's supreme political authority. • Does not legislate, but sets the goals of the EU, defines the general guidelines and priorities, amending treaties, etc. • Settles outstanding discussions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings are called EU Summit and occur once a Presidency. • Conclusions are adopted after these meetings and they set policy guidelines on specific issues, in relation to gender equality and development cooperation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing the Conclusions in the preparation to Summit – through the delegation.



Advocating for EU Gender Equality in Development Cooperation

As a shared competency development, both Member States and the Commission are responsible for implementing policy approaches on gender and ensuring that its financial instruments are supporting gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment and gender equality. Given this complementarity, engagement of civil society organisations at one level cannot be done in isolation from another.

Member States' Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)/ Development agencies

By accessing to the EU, Member States accepted to transpose and implement the *acquis communautaire*. Improving the institutional framework and increasing resources (financial and human) for the implementation of gender into overseas development aid and programme is critical. In the process of developing and implementing programmes, Member States must place gender equality at the centre of their development cooperation. Providing specialist knowledge in these areas is a comparative advantage that NGOs must build on.

Beyond advising and briefing members of MFA/Development agencies, pushing for the establishment of formal consultative processes with civil society and women's organisations is critical for greater transparency and the recognition of NGOs as development actors. Working in networks and associations can be useful at this stage, as it increases the legitimacy of civil society voices. These processes should be inclusive of NGOs and women's organisations from recipient countries, as it provides greater awareness of effects on the ground and working with partners to gain a multiplier effect in promoting gender perspectives.

Member States development cooperation should reflect the twin-track approach to gender mainstreaming adopted by the EU and contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development.



Members of the European Parliament

As mentioned earlier, engaging with your MEPs is of key importance, especially those serving on Standing Committees or as party spokesperson on specific issues, because they will be voting on key policies and areas, such as budget, etc.

Media and other Civil Society bodies

Informing and promoting MS responsibility as part of the European Union, particularly around Gender Equality and Development Cooperation is also key to build public support, and thus increase pressure for the translation of political commitments into practice.

Brussels-based institutions

Across Europe and in Brussels, there are many platforms of organisation advocating for gender mainstreaming. Networks provide a way to address the EU multi-level of governance more efficiently. These arrangements actually have the advantage of enhancing the NGO's credibility, as the network represents their constituencies/memberships. It also helps to maximise their effectiveness when they influence the EU agenda, shape legislation and provide policy alternative. CONCORD, or the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development, is the most important network dedicated to Development Cooperation at the EU level. The NGOs network at the Member State level also acts as the CONCORD national platform. CONCORD also has a Gender Working Group. More specific to Women's Equality in Development Cooperation is Women in Development Europe (WIDE).

EU institutions have increasingly recognised the role of Civil Society in their work. Some structured forms of dialogues between various institutions and NGOs have been developed. Regular consultations between various European Networks and responsible Directorate Generals were established, by way of white and green paper consultations. Other spaces also do exist, such as the Civil Society Dialogues and Quadrilogues.



(Endnotes)

- 1 Acquis communautaire is a French term referring to the body of rights and obligations, to which all member states are bound to comply with.
- 2 Article 2 and 3 of the Amsterdam Treaty requires all Member States to mainstream gender equality throughout their relations and activities and to introduce specific measures in favour of women to eliminate serious inequalities.
- 3 <http://www.ecdpm-talkingpoints.org/european-development-cooperation%E2%80%93new-challenges-new-beginnings/>
- 4 EC/2836/98
- 5 EC/2836/98
- 6 Green papers are discussion paper on a specific policy area, inviting interested parties to participate in a process of consultation and debate.
- 7 <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st09/st09561.en07.pdf>
- 8 Most of these countries are former colonies and they comprise both developing countries, as well as Least Developed Countries (LDC).

KARAT Coalition

Since 1997, KARAT has been running a network of women's NGOs from Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) aimed to ensure gender equality through monitoring the implementation of international agreements and policies. It advocates for women's human rights, economic social justice and gender-focused development cooperation with a strong focus on the perspective from CEE and CIS. KARAT has built up a strong network over the past decade and is currently composed by approximately 60 members.

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One World Action (OWA)

OWA was a civil society organization established in 1989 to work alongside rural and urban women's organizations and networks across Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Through capacity-building, networking and advocacy, it worked on issues such as women's rights, participatory governance and social exclusion. It was advocating and campaigning in the UK and Europe to challenge international policies to make and keep people poor. OWA has ceased operations and it closed its office in September 2011.

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