



Advocacy Card

Addressing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Estonia's Development Cooperation

International Gender Policy Network

November 2008



Project Development Cooperation and Gender funded by the Presidency Fund

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's empowerment have come to be understood as crucial prerequisites to development, and have been included among the ambitious UN Millennium Development Goals, which were signed by 189 governments in 2000. These commitments have been declared to reduce the gender gap and empower women in the developing world. The situation in developing countries, nonetheless, remains critical: women are the poorest of the poor; they are largely excluded from decision-making processes; they often lack equal access to resources, land, credit, education, and health care. Civil society organizations (CSOs) across Europe have emphasized that governments are failing to deliver on their promises. According to the Concord report of 2008, the situation is more critical in new EU Member States where the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment is "a secondary element for the moment" (Romania) or "non-existent in the development aid agenda" (Latvia).¹

The International Gender Policy Network (IGPN) has examined gender equality and women's empowerment in the development cooperation of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia as part of the project Development Cooperation and Gender. Within the framework of this advocacy activity, IGPN has prepared twenty two Advocacy Cards for individual countries and one Regional Advocacy Card. The documents demonstrate that gender equality and women's empowerment are not integrated into all phases of the development processes in this region, and a more intense and determined approach is needed from the development actors. The aim of this advocacy work is to call for action by reminding the national as well as European representatives of their formally anchored commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Advocacy Card for Estonia focuses on its role as an emerging donor country. This document provides a review of Estonia's key political and legal commitments, and examines the gender aspect of bilateral development cooperation. On the basis of these reviews, recommendations are made to the national government, and to the European institutions.

COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

- ❖ Estonia's commitment to gender equality is reflected in a **number of politically and legally binding documents** of the EU and EC (Treaty of Amsterdam, Maastricht Treaty, Charter for Fundamental Rights of the EU, CEDAW, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals).
- ❖ In terms of the EU development cooperation policy implemented by the institutions as well as by the Member States, the crucial policy framework for promoting gender equality is the **European Consensus on Development**, agreed upon in 2005 by the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament, and the representatives of the member states, where gender equality is defined as a cross-cutting issue.² Furthermore, the **2007 Commission Communication on "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation"** is the first step towards a coordinated European approach to promoting gender equality and empowering women through development cooperation.³

¹ No Time to Waste: European governments behind schedule on aid quantity and quality, *Concorde*, 2008, p. 15 <http://www.concordeurope.org/Files/media/extranetdocumentsENG/NavigationSecondeaire/WorkingGroups/Aidwatch/Aidwatch2008/Light-Full-report.pdf>

² "EU Policy Framework for Promoting Gender Equality," *European Commission*, http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ_en.cfm

³ "EU Policy Framework for Promoting Gender Equality," *European Commission*, http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ_en.cfm

- ❖ 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**. One of the conclusions is the following: “The Council recognizes the Commission’s and 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.”⁴
- ❖ In line with these documents, the EU (and thus the Member States) has supported a **twin-track approach: gender mainstreaming** (mainstreaming gender issues into all aspects of development policy) and **specific measures** aimed at socioeconomic and political empowerment of women.

GENDER IN ESTONIA’S ODA

Estonian official documents concerning ODA (Official Development Cooperation) refer to gender issues in several instances. Gender equality is generally mentioned in the Principles of Estonian Development Co-operation. Furthermore, according to the Strategy for Estonian Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Aid 2006-2010, one of the goals of Estonian development co-operation across the areas of activities is to support human development in developing countries, contributing to increased availability of education and to the improvement of the status of women and children. Throughout, Estonian development co-operation intends to address: human rights; gender equality; environmental friendliness. The most important measure in implementing this goal is supporting the work of multilateral organizations. Estonia contributes to programmes involving the promotion of educational issues through UN agencies, including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

Some references to gender issues can be found also in the practice of Estonian ODA. Gender mainstreaming is taken into account in the project selection process. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) does not have statistics about the gender balance in its grants, although the ministry insists on selecting half of the women among participants from the target countries. Gender equality projects are promoted by some Estonian CSOs which are member organizations of the national platform of development cooperation CSOs – the Roundtable of Development Cooperation. The MFA consults with the Roundtable of Development Cooperation about issues concerning legislative changes, strategies, and the priorities of development cooperation. The MFA sees the partnership with NGOs vital for initiating new policies, and for planning resources and funds more efficiently.

The priority partner countries of Estonian development assistance are Afghanistan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Although all bilateral projects are listed on the webpage of the Estonian MFA, only two projects seem to be by title-related directly to gender. Firstly, a three-year (January 2008 – December 2010) project Improvement of Georgian State administrative capacity in domestic abuse prevention and victim support by the Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, which focuses on applying the Estonian domestic abuse prevention and victim support system to Georgian conditions and assuring its gradual

⁴ Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting with the Council on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Development Cooperation, *Council of the European Union*, 15 May 2007, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st09/st09561.en07.pdf>

implementation. As a result of the project carried out by the Estonian Institute of Open Society Research, Georgian State institutions should be capable of effectively controlling the spread of domestic abuse and providing professional support for the victims. Second is the Project on presenting the experiences of Estonian reforms to Georgian NGOs and the public sector, implemented by the Estonian Women's Training Centre in 2004 in co-operation with Georgian women organizations. The central themes of the project were women's political participation, women running for offices in local government and the influences of social reforms on women.

Even though some projects are gender related, it is difficult to evaluate the impact of the projects on men and women, as the data is not gender segregated. The projects' final reports are the most common way to assess the quality of the projects and the gender impact of them. The MFA also asks for feedback from partners in the target countries. The officials are generally aware that it is important to assess the gender impact. Furthermore, the Roundtable is also not ready to evaluate the gender impact (also environmental impact, etc) of the ODA projects, admitting to having too little knowledge of it as the theme is new and the evaluation criteria need to be developed first.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT:

General Recommendations:

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To comply with the Consensus on Development and the Commission Communication and place gender equality and women's empowerment at the center of Estonia's ODA
- To comply with the Council Conclusions and make gender equality a core aspect in the development policy's programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and to provide special support for women that enables their economic and political empowerment

Concrete Recommendation:

- To analyze the needs of priority countries and capacity building related to gender equality for MFA officials and for the NGOs
- To include gender perspective in all funded projects, to develop mechanisms on monitoring and evaluation of the gender aspect in ODA projects
- To support more specifically gender-related projects
- To ensure close cooperation with NGOs, including women's rights organizations, in terms of policy and strategy formulation
- To ensure an increase in awareness among the Estonian population about development problems including gender issues

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION:

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To press for EU Member States' development cooperation policy to include a gender equality perspective consistent with EU-level policy and commitments
- To provide information to new EU members on older EU donor states' experiences and good practices in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in development, and to distribute them through the development cooperation networks
- In relation to gender mainstreaming, the EU should be leading by example. European CSOs say that the EU is failing to deliver on its promises. Implementation of the gender

mainstreaming strategy is still hindered by a number of factors (mainly, the inadequate allocation of human and financial resources, the evaporation of policy commitments at the level of program implementation, limited gender competence among staff members, and the absence of political will) and is undermined by other EU policy initiatives, most importantly by the neo-liberal economic policy approach.⁵

Contacts:

Selve Ringmaa

Open Estonia Foundation

Email: Selve@oef.org.ee

International Gender Policy Network

Web: www.igpn.net

⁵ Who decides? Gender mapping the European Union's policy and decision-making in the areas of development, external relations and trade, *WIDE*, 2007, p. 7