

**Gender Audit of the
Food and Agriculture Organization of the
United Nations**

**Final Report
Executive Summary**

February 2011

Executive Summary

FAO commissioned the gender audit in the context of reform, which included a renewed commitment to gender mainstreaming with the creation of Strategic Objective K (SO K), following the recommendations of the 2007 Independent External Evaluation (IEE).

The objectives of the audit were to:

1. Identify and analyze the strengths, good practices, weaknesses, gaps and challenges in the institutional mechanisms and processes for gender mainstreaming;
2. Assess FAO's institutional capacity for the implementation of its mandate and SO K pertaining to gender mainstreaming;
3. Draft an accountability framework to mainstream gender at all levels of FAO and recommend a process to institutionalize the framework; and
4. Make practical recommendations on how to strengthen FAO's institutional capacity for gender mainstreaming.

The central question for the gender auditors was: *What does FAO need to do to adapt its institutional mechanisms and processes to mainstream gender equality throughout the Organization?*

Although constrained by time and resources, the audit team took a forward-looking, participatory approach, to the extent possible, and utilized the following methodologies:

- Document review, including gender evaluations and audits of other United Nations (UN) organizations; lessons, benchmarks and good practices in gender mainstreaming; and relevant evaluation reports;
- Engagement with the Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division (ESW) management and staff working on SO K and a gender audit advisory committee;
- Facilitated group discussions with gender focal points (GFPs) and designates;
- Online survey targeting professional staff and long-term consultants;
- Self- assessments and divisional assessments by the staff of ESW;
- Discussions with the Office of Evaluation (OED), which was carrying out a gender evaluation; and
- Interviews and group discussions at headquarters, three regional offices, two sub-regional offices, and the Vietnam, Cambodia and Ghana country offices.

Although the audit found major impediments to gender mainstreaming at FAO, most are symptomatic of larger systemic problems common to many UN organizations, and the gender audit team found considerable potential for positive change. Many staff are committed to gender equality and aware that it is relevant to their work. FAO has embarked on a major reform initiative and has begun instituting new or revised systems of planning, oversight and project approval in the context of decentralization. It is engaging in United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and One UN processes where gender concerns are emphasized. It is making progress toward a more

equitable human resources policy, revamping its performance appraisal system, and becoming more results-oriented. These reforms provide golden opportunities to advance gender mainstreaming.

Despite this progress, the gender audit team finds the overall situation lamentable, as the following findings suggest:

- ◆ Perceived lack of leadership and political will for gender equality at senior levels and inconsistent support at lower levels;
- ◆ Weak enabling environment and an organizational culture that is at times an impediment;
- ◆ Widespread perception that those working on gender mainstreaming in ESW are solely responsible for achieving SO K;
- ◆ Absence of system-wide accountability for gender mainstreaming and gender-related results;
- ◆ No policy or action plan on gender equality with clear goals, development and organizational results, and adequate systems for monitoring, reporting and managing progress;
- ◆ Woefully meager financial resources for, and time allocated to, gender mainstreaming, including no professional to coordinate this work full-time;
- ◆ Extremely limited capacity at regional and country levels, owing to the decimation of gender specialist positions;
- ◆ Unclear roles and responsibilities of GFPs and inadequate support from ESW staff working on SO K and from their own divisions and units;
- ◆ Wholly insufficient capacity development for gender mainstreaming;
- ◆ Inadequate knowledge and information management systems;
- ◆ Underperformance, compared to most other specialized UN organizations, in relation to women's representation at professional and managerial levels (FAO ranks 23rd out of 30); and
- ◆ Within ESW, insufficient clout to adequately advance gender equality throughout the Organization, an unclear role in relation to gender mainstreaming, and too few people with sufficient time and expertise assigned to SO K.

The gender audit team believes that FAO is far behind many of its peers and nowhere near where it ought to be as the lead UN organization for agricultural development and food security. Although the creation of a strategic objective for gender mainstreaming marks progress, the divisions, other than ESW, have yet to assume responsibility for SO K. The team is concerned that SO K will come to little without adequate financial investments, clear goals and corresponding results, a critical mass of skilled and knowledgeable gender experts and system-wide accountability, along with much greater

clarity of goals, roles and responsibilities. In short, FAO is missing most of the core ingredients for successful gender mainstreaming found in organizations that are far more advanced in this endeavour.

Mindful of the FAO's financial constraints, the gender audit team makes nine recommendations that capitalize on FAO's strengths and progress to date, and that allow the Organization to deal responsibly with its shortcomings over time. Most are of a strategic rather than prescriptive nature. The first three are directed at the highest level of decision making in the Organization; the remaining six are intended for the Assistant Director-General (ADG) of the Economic and Social Development Department (ES) to take forward. The gender audit team encourages the ADG to hold a series of facilitated workshops to discuss the implementation and sequencing of the recommendations in detail.

Over the medium and long term, the audit team recommends:

1. *that FAO restore the lost gender specialist positions in the regions and create new ones in order to assist decentralized offices with planning, implementing and monitoring gender-related work with member states;*
2. *that FAO develop a gender equality policy and a gender mainstreaming strategy and action plan with clearly defined gender equality goals; and*
3. *that FAO create a high-level steering committee of ADGs, supported by a small secretariat reporting to the Director-General, to lead the gender agenda at FAO, provide quality assurance and ensure system-wide accountability.*

The gender audit team believes that the third recommendation is the key to sustainable accountability for quality work on gender issues. The gender audit team envisages the steering committee and its secretariat headed by a senior manager becoming FAO's oversight mechanism and the driving force for mainstreaming gender equality system-wide. The steering committee should oversee the evolution of the gender equality policy, the gender mainstreaming strategy and the action plan developed initially within ESW. With support from ESW management and staff working on SO K, it should set priorities, monitor results and prepare reports for Conference and the Programme Committee on the state of gender equality in FAO. It should establish quality standards and hold managers accountable for achieving gender-related results according to those standards. The committee should also play a major communication and advocacy role to reinforce awareness of the importance of the gender dimensions in the work of FAO and its partners.

Implementing this recommendation has obvious implications for ESW but does not diminish its continued importance in relation to gender equality and gender mainstreaming. The new, high-level committee would become the driver and oversight mechanism for FAO's gender equality agenda. However, ESW staff working on SO K would remain the primary implementers, playing critically important facilitation, coordination and capacity development roles, supporting gender-related work across the divisions and in decentralized offices directly and through a network of GFPs and gender champions.

Over the short term, the audit team recommends:

4. *that FAO appoint a senior professional with sufficient gender expertise and field level programming experience to lead ESW's work on SO K full time, with special attention to gender mainstreaming;*
5. *that ESW management give priority to focusing the efforts of ESW staff working on SO K on incorporating gender perspectives and the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment into all new and revised systems associated with reform, including inter alia job descriptions, competency profiles, performance appraisal, results-based management, project and programme development and appraisal, and monitoring and evaluation;*
6. *that ESW management and staff working on SO K take steps to strengthen support to gender focal points at headquarters and at decentralized offices, beginning by clarifying their mandate, role, resources and accountability;*
7. *that ESW staff working on SO K take stock of the gender work that is ongoing within FAO with a view to identifying priorities, lessons and successful practices;*
8. *that ESW management and staff working on SO K develop, in collaboration with key management and technical divisions at headquarters and decentralized offices, develop a process to establish Organization-wide responsibility for SO K; and*
9. *that FAO develop the capabilities of its staff by incorporating gender equality in all relevant training programmes and by undertaking new initiatives where*