

Gender Equality Mainstreaming in UNHCR in the Americas 1997/1998 Report

Introduction

During the last nine years, UNHCR offices in the Americas have undertaken different activities to support refugee/returnee and IDP women and more recently to promote a gender equality perspective in protection, programme, durable solutions, public information and administration. The objective of this report is not to inform on these, as offices do this through normal reporting procedures, but rather to analyse the gender equality mainstreaming process developed in the region during the last two years with a view to drawing conclusions for the work in 1999/2000. The report highlights how the process has evolved and the direction it should take in the immediate future.

What do we understand by gender equality mainstreaming?

UNHCR in the Americas has based the process on the 1997 ECOSOC definition of and principles for mainstreaming a gender perspective: *“Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension in 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**”..... **“Responsibility for translating gender mainstreaming into practice is system-wide and rests at the highest levels. Accountability for outcomes needs to be monitored constantly.”***

You will note that throughout the document the word “equality” is included in the term, as there has been a tendency to use the term and to apply gender analysis, i.e. the differential impact without necessarily incorporating actions which promote equality of opportunities. To avoid any misunderstanding and in line with the clearly stated ECOSOC objective, we have adopted the term gender equality mainstreaming. There is an ongoing debate around the use of the terms “equality” and “equity”. Our task is to work towards recognising, respecting, understanding and making visible the differences between women and men in distinctive contexts, whilst ensuring that these differences do not become the basis for inequalities. We should strive to create equal opportunities for women and men and seek an equitable impact in the outcome.

A gender equality perspective goes beyond the realms of women, children, community services and environment as it affects each of these areas and all others. Gender is not about “taking care of a sector of the population”, or setting up projects for a certain group, or who is responsible for women (e.g. the senior co-ordinator or community services). Gender affects girls and boys, women and men, elderly women and men, whether in the field of policy making, protection, programme, community services, PI, durable solutions or any area of technical assistance. Using a gender equality perspective implies understanding each of these areas in relation to how they affect women and men of all ages

differently and the inequitable relationships that may arise or be reinforced through UNHCR interventions. Part of the gender equality mainstreaming process is ensuring effective access to protection and assistance for persons of all ages. In those cases where this standard is not met, corrective actions should be undertaken based on an awareness of the relationships between women and men in any given cultural context, whether one is a community services officer, a children's policy adviser, the head of programme, the regional representative or the Head of DIP. How one works with the population will depend on the cultural, social, economic and political context, there are no recipes. As stated by ECOSOC: the final goal is to achieve gender equality.

Working from a gender perspective is not necessarily equivalent to working on projects with women, although the latter may often be required in order to enable women access to equal opportunities. To look at refugee/returnee/IDP women in isolation of men may lead to changes for women over the short-term, but they are difficult to sustain over the long-term because any effective change requires an understanding of inter-gender power relations. Positive actions in favour of boys or adult men are also to be considered, for example in the areas of sexual violence the focus is often on women, leading to potential gender blindness in relation to men's needs.

Working on gender equality mainstreaming requires that all staff understand: what gender is; how we become aware of gender, how we undertake an impartial analysis of gender issues, inequalities and power relations; how we take this analysis into account when determining UNHCR policies and actions; how we transmit gender awareness in daily contacts, in training and negotiations with government and non-government counterparts; how we evaluate from a gender perspective; how we consider affirmative action when necessary; how we transmit gender issues in a policy, speech, in the media, in a document or manual. Gender affects one's personal life as people begin to review how they relate to partners, children, colleagues and friends.

Whilst few have a problem with recognising children's rights, opposing racial discrimination or saving the forests, no other subject gives rise to such levels of resistance world-wide as gender equality. **Therefore, it is one of the MOST DIFFICULT POLICIES TO APPLY IN PRACTICE**, even though it is simply the implementation of Articles 1 and 2 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 1: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". and Art. 2: entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

UNHCR

The headquarters based post of Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women was created in 1989. Numerous instruments were developed, amongst them: UNHCR's policy on refugee women, the protection guidelines for refugee women, people oriented planning training, the guidelines on prevention and response to sexual violence, etc. and EXCOM issued numerous clear statements to UNHCR on the importance of improving the way it provided protection to women. Seven years later four Senior Regional

Adviser for Refugee Women's posts (currently 5) were created to cover different regions. At that time, the approach to be taken by the Senior Regional Advisers had yet to be fully defined.

When the ECOSOC conclusions were issued in 1997, many agencies working in the field of humanitarian aid and development initiated the shift from women to gender equality mainstreaming, and some even before. Unfortunately, a similar change in direction was not noted within UNHCR. Although the term is sometimes used, a close analysis of our practice demonstrates that we still have quite a way to go. Whilst UNHCR's policy on refugee women and the Senior Regional Adviser for Refugee Women's posts call for gender mainstreaming the titles do not reflect this for reasons that were clearly necessary at that time. Therefore, as we try to build on the important gains that have already been achieved, implementation becomes more difficult whilst these issues remain confused.

UNHCR's commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action clearly demands affirmative action for women of concern to our agency, but in order to enable greater clarity and to be able to move forward, we may need to analyse the implications of making a clearer distinction between our ECOSOC responsibilities and those of the Beijing Platform for Action. UNHCR has the task of complying with both, but they require different, although complementary, strategies.

The experience in the Americas

A number of assumptions as well as lessons learned have guided the thinking behind the approach adopted by UNHCR in the Americas which, with the benefit of hindsight, we can now share.

- It is part of UNHCR's mandate, as a UN agency, to work towards gender equality in a culturally sensitive manner and all staff members are individually responsible. For effective mainstreaming to take place, management, particularly at the highest levels, must provide strong, outspoken, pro-active leadership. **It is mandatory, not optional.**
- Gender mainstreaming is not the final objective, but is a means to ensuring that all staff apply a gender equality perspective in their work. The expected outcome is that UNHCR's activities will guarantee access to and equitable control of services by refugee/returnee/IDP women and men of all ages, as well as contribute to reducing the inequalities between them in different cultural and social settings.
- The process demands ongoing training and studying in different forms. Gender awareness often requires a commitment to changing one's way of thinking. It is not merely a question of learning and implementing a new method. It requires doing the same work in a different way and promotes other key UN values/principles such as democracy, tolerance, respect for the difference, solidarity, etc..
- Protection must take a lead role in incorporating a gender perspective, as it is not simply a programme issue. UNHCR's mandate should be understood from a gender perspective and there must be a shift from viewing men, and women in particular, as a vulnerable group to a rights based approach to their reality. Only in this way can effective protection be offered to the entire population.
- The process is a long-term one and requires accountability mechanisms to speed it up and to sustain it, but **institutional and individual conviction, commitment and leadership are the most effective instruments.**

- The application of a gender perspective is of benefit to UNHCR because it improves the quality of its work, ensuring greater efficiency in the use of resources and a greater positive impact in the population. When management can effectively demonstrate how their operations and programmes impact on 100% of the population, i.e. detail the differential positive impact on women and men, girls and boys, UNHCR will be clear that it is using its resources efficiently and fulfilling its objective of covering the needs of the entire population. Applying a gender perspective in UNHCR's work strengthens the population's capacity for independence, self-sufficiency and greater empowerment.

Implementation

Following the first six months of visiting offices in the Americas in 1996, a number of difficulties were detected to fulfilling the responsibilities attached to the post, which can be broadly divided into two areas.

Responsibility

- * Established headquarters policies, guidelines and recommendations conflicted with reporting requirements and the vision handed down by different sections at headquarters. This often confused efforts to mainstream, for example: requests to devote a specific paragraph to women and children, with no reference being made to how all the other areas should reflect the different needs and experiences of women and men of all ages, and what actions will be taken to ensure an equitable impact in relation to the overall objective.
- * The Senior Adviser lacked legitimacy in making proposed changes within those offices where the post was not based.
- * Confusion reigned among staff regarding the role of the Senior Adviser i.e. initially many considered the role to be one of taking care of all matters relating to refugee women, whilst the Senior Adviser understood the task to be one of **building up regional capacity for mainstreaming a gender equality perspective**. Some suggested that child policy/children should also form part of the role. This then led to the link with education and finally, some saw the role as covering community services (when there was no community services officer present), which also required providing attention to the elderly and vulnerable groups. Hence, the Senior Adviser could have been made responsible for the policy and programme response to some 85% of the population. This line of thinking clearly demonstrated the lack of clarity regarding gender policies and gender equality mainstreaming.
- * Management's role was not defined vis-à-vis gender equality mainstreaming, nor was there any expectation that they were responsible for the outcome.
- * The bureau had no specific expectations regarding the post, other than the need to provide a plan of action and results. Guidance and a briefing at headquarters were provided, but developing appropriate strategies and the urgent need to distinguish between gender and women came later.

Programme staff were more responsive to gender concerns in the light of POP and other training than protection staff in the region. Protection work, which focused mainly on refugee status determination, durable solutions, harmonisation of the law and training, had gone largely unquestioned in relation to its practice and the differential impact on women and men.

Capacity

- * As the post covered some 17 offices it was impossible for the senior adviser to be in a position to intervene in policy making and other key decisions in each office, particularly the regional ones.
- * There was no active demand for introducing gender issues by staff members, as many were uninformed.
- * A focal person had been named in each office, but they were unclear on what to do, no time was officially allotted to the task, it was not reflected in job descriptions, it was an informal role without managerial support, they were often isolated, under motivated, under trained and embarrassed by the role or by the reaction of others, and more often than not they did not have the decision making capacity to intervene at crucial moments.
- * Therefore, during and after each mission there was not necessarily one person responsible for providing active follow-up to the discussions and recommendations.
- * Many staff highlighted that they did not want to be burdened with extra work and they wanted to know what added value the senior adviser's post brought to their work.

The above situation confirmed:

- *The absence of clarity in the concept and a strategy for initiating a gender equality mainstreaming process;*
- *That despite UNHCR's policy on refugee women, which strongly advocates mainstreaming, and the protection guidelines as starting points for gender equality mainstreaming, effective implementation was still particularly weak and staff did not consider themselves responsible for the process.*

Nonetheless, in the majority of cases staff and management were willing to take on gender, particularly when they had grasped the issues. Many expressed relief on discovering that it had to do with both women and men, and not just work with women. Many objected to the portrayal of women as “helpless creatures” and to the apparent exclusion of male colleagues and the male population. The understanding was emerging that we cannot look at women in isolation to men.

Faced with the above situation, a strategy was developed to: a) build awareness at a grass roots level; b) break the isolation of the senior adviser; c) provide the focal persons with clear tasks; d) involve management in the process; e) give visibility and importance to the subject; f) increase the potential for raising awareness among staff; g) establish capacity for timely interventions.

Regional gender team

The first mechanism for putting this into operation was the creation of a regional gender team. Early in 1997, the approach was explained to representatives and they were asked to implement adequate selection criteria when designating the team members. At the same time, efforts were made to bring gender issues to the attention of representatives by raising their profile in regional management meetings.

Criteria were supplied for the selection of a regional gender team and each office was requested to send a staff member to the first regional team workshop in April 1997. During a one week training and planning session the regional team built its mission and objectives and assumed joint responsibility for initiating a gender equality mainstreaming process, but not for its outcome as this was a management responsibility.

The discussion and analysis demonstrated the need to work at multiple levels in order to achieve the required changes:

a) Institutional

- The revision of policies, structures, norms, as well as raising staff awareness and the provision of ongoing training;
- The application of protection, programme and COP guidelines developed by the team, which provide a step by step guide to applying a gender perspective in many of UNHCR activities;
- The recognition of the importance of the subject and of the regional team's efforts;
- That management become responsible for the process and provide active support;
- Clarity by all that the team's role was to raise awareness, stimulate the discussion and monitor results, but not to assume responsibility for the work.

b) Population

- Review methodologies and approaches to protection and assistance needs identification, refugee status determination procedures, project design, durable solutions mechanisms and evaluation tools;
- Ensure initial participative diagnosis of the situation, including an analysis of the organisational and structural aspects of the community, and women's and men's degree and type of participation;
- Study inter-gender power relations and access by women and men, girls and boys to resources and economic spheres and their long-term organisational capacity for sharing control of these;
- Evaluate the need for affirmative actions in favour of those in a disadvantaged position;
- Establish gender impact evaluation mechanisms.

Following the workshop, team members provided feedback to their offices and enlisted support for the process, whilst drawing up initial work plans. The senior adviser followed up with visits to the offices to discuss work and to assist in training workshops. The emphasis was on the reviewing of current activities in each office to identify gender gaps in relation to women's and men's access to and control of services and resources. Parallel projects with women were not encouraged, unless as a positive action to ensure equal opportunity. The focus was on ensuring that daily activities do not exclude through gender blindness and in helping staff to become aware of this. Nonetheless, because of real inequalities projects to raise women's potential, information levels, skills, etc. are often required in order to ensure that they can benefit from equal opportunities in UNHCR's programmes. Each office was responsible for financing any activities introduced using already existing budgets, as well as the participation of their staff in the regional team's workshops.

In November 1997, a second team meeting was held for evaluation and planning purposes. The team provided feedback on their experience and highlighted the major problems and areas of progress. On this

occasion, the team drew up terms of reference for its members, for management and the Bureau, as well as national plans. The team carried out a self-evaluation, which among other things highlighted that whilst it had been able to raise the profile of gender issues within each office, the responsibility had not been shared by staff members, leading to overworked team members. The task was still seen as extra and not as an integral part of UNHCR's work, optional rather than mandatory, but awareness of the gender equality mainstreaming task had increased.

The results of this workshop clearly spelt out that we had created an increasingly critical demanding group, which was actively putting pressure on others to respond. We now had to reach those who were ambivalent, sceptical and disinterested, whilst continuing to motivate those who had responded well. More intensive negotiations with management were required, as well as a pro-active role by the bureau. The information provided enabled the regional adviser to go back to the representatives and Director and share the feedback with them on what progress was being made in relation to gender mainstreaming. The team provided sufficient first hand information to be able to demonstrate to management that whilst they had all agreed in principle and did not place obstacles in the way, this was insufficient. Major problems included:

- ◆ A strong leadership role was urgently required by senior and middle management (Bureau, representatives and heads of units) through a) formal official support to provide legitimacy to the gender equality mainstreaming process, b) active representation on the subject and c) full backup for activities.
- ◆ Managers had to fully understand gender equality mainstreaming in order to be effective supervisors and implementers.
- ◆ Managers had to work towards the shift of responsibility from the gender team member to all staff.
- ◆ Gender mainstreaming needed to be reflected in CMS as a means to accountability.

A third workshop was held in November 1998 for evaluation and planning purposes. The evaluation in this workshop was based on the 83 responses to an individual questionnaire sent to ALL staff in the Americas. In addition, each head of unit was requested to fill in a questionnaire together with her/his team, regarding the progress made in terms of gender mainstreaming in the corresponding area.

On the positive side the individual results showed that gender mainstreaming is beginning to be accepted by most staff, the work is gradually expanding to all the units, there is a greater demand for more training and user friendly tools, other actors are becoming involved, there is an active demand for increased male participation, there is more dissemination, awareness and knowledge about the subject within and outside UNHCR, at all levels.

On the down side some highlighted: resistance is now demonstrated in a different way or repressed, greater impact is required in counterparts, there is a need to articulate more clearly the link between the conceptual and the operational, some consider that there is an overdose of gender, it is still perceived of

as an extra burden, it sometimes has to compete with other priorities rather than being seen as an integral part of the mandate, and the evaluation process has not yet directly included the population.

With the wealth of experience accumulated in the team, together with the information provided by the questionnaires, it was possible to analyse the overall situation in relation to gender mainstreaming within UNHCR, from the perspective of the Americas. On the basis of this analysis, the team has embarked on a plan for improving the situation in 1999 and the main actions are highlighted later under "Immediate

The presence of the Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women in the last two regional gender team workshops has been extremely important in order to provide a headquarters' perspective, raise the profile of the team's work and to motivate both the team and staff in the region.

The role of management

Whilst management had been aware of the process, it was only in February 1998 at a regional representatives' meeting for the Americas that their potential role in the process was really highlighted, using the feedback obtained in 1997. A discussion was held on the weaknesses in the process and what managers could do to support it. The Director of the Bureau personally committed himself to achieving gender mainstreaming by the end of 2001. The response throughout 1998 was particularly positive and the individual and unit feedback in November 1998 demonstrated that nearly all regions had noticed a significant change.

1998 included an agreement for the Senior Adviser to review all the Country Operation Plans submitted by the Americas from a gender perspective. Strenuous efforts were made by staff throughout the region to comply and a significant improvement was noted. The Senior Adviser forwarded comments on all COPs for the forthcoming year and further follow up will be provided in 1999.

Annual protection reports revised to date also demonstrate a change in approach and reflect efforts to comment on the position of women and men, as well as how they are affected as refugees. The protection unit evaluation questionnaires (Nov. 1998) revealed that 70% of the units considered their application of a gender perspective to be good due to an internalisation of concepts, efforts to apply the regional gender team guidelines and the inclusion of gender in discussions and planning, although one unit did highlight that it had taken no action and this will be followed up on in 1999. One main concern for 1999 is to develop training on interviewing techniques which consider gender and cultural awareness and how to respond to sexual violence cases.

Some unit managers are now beginning to monitor documents more closely and certain countries report an improvement in project descriptions and reporting exercises. The programme unit questionnaires were more modest in their evaluation of implementation from a gender perspective, with some 50% viewing their practice as good with serious discussions internally and with counterparts. One unit considered its performance to be poor. Programme demanded: a) further systematic training; b) more instruments; c)

more changes in attitudes; d) greater backup from management. Both programme and protection highlighted a lack of actions in relation to children and gender issues.

These small, but significant changes reflect a) the work by the regional gender team in filtering and incorporating information in documents, as well as in promoting gender, and b) increased awareness by managers as they gradually assume responsibility for monitoring gender mainstreaming in the contents.

Despite cutbacks and pressure to reduce the training for Senior Management in September 1998, it was possible to include a training session on “The role of management in gender mainstreaming”. During this session, the representatives committed themselves to taking two concrete and immediate actions:

- The application of the criteria for evaluating gender awareness and the operationalisation of a gender perspective by staff, agreed upon in the training session, in future CMS exercises.
- The mainstreaming of gender throughout the CMS objective setting exercise (or a CMS objective to achieve gender mainstreaming). Ideally one probably needs both.

Whilst these expressions of commitment have been very positive, the real outcome can only be measured during the current CMS cycle. Ongoing follow up action must be taken by the Bureau for the field not to have any wavering doubts about the importance of the issue.

Impact on UNHCR’s activities

A fuller evaluation of the impact of the introduction of a gender perspective into UNHCR’s activities on the population of concern to UNHCR is required and must necessarily directly involve the population. This is a priority for 1999, using previously agreed upon indicators. Nonetheless, the workshop evaluations have provided some degree of information which help us to assess the benefits obtained to date. Some of these include: increased protection of women, separate RSD interviews for women and men, greater women’s rights awareness and some acknowledgement of their capacity by men, the introduction of awareness training for men, increased income for women, active participation by the population in planning, training on self-esteem for women, increased access to child care facilities, awareness on domestic and sexual violence, and an improved response to gender related individual cases. Perhaps the most significant change to date is that women’s voices, together with men’s, are being heard more consistently and that their concerns are being reflected in planning actions. Gradually, the women of concern to UNHCR are obtaining greater visibility.

A change in working methodologies has been noted among some non-government counterparts, particularly those working with refugees living in urban settings in Costa Rica, Bolivia, Argentina, Guatemala and Mexico. This change has led to a different approach to refugee problems including more focus on self and mutual support, and group work rather than the one-to-one more assistance oriented support, with the emphasis on the building up of women and men’s individual capacity to become self-reliant.

At a government level change is naturally slower, however, within the context of post-Beijing, governments throughout the region are pushing forward on reviewing legislation and campaigning on domestic violence. This enables protection staff to discuss gender related persecution and gender sensitive legislation when promoting the harmonisation of refugee law, as well as discussing these aspects in training sessions with government officials.

In Mexico and Guatemala, UNHCR has undertaken numerous measures to create the conditions for women to exercise their right to co or direct ownership of land, as well as to review documentation procedures. In the US, detention conditions for female asylum seekers are being looked into. The Mexican government implementing agency (COMAR) has recently signed a plan of action jointly with the National Commission for Women (CONMUJER), UNICEF and UNHCR for ensuring a gender perspective in its integration policy for Guatemalan refugees.

The Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women has rightly observed that the approach and the changes introduced in the region, highlight far more benefits for women than for men. This could be due to a bias in favour of women at the time of analysis, which has led to us overlooking the situation of men, and/or that the outcome of the gender inequalities analysis has led to more emphasis on affirmative actions for women. The potential for a biased analysis, based on an automatic presumption of inequality on the part of women is something that we should be aware of in the future, so as to ensure that we do not simply replace one inequality with another.

Immediate challenges

To date we can conclude that:

- 4 the conditions are being created for achieving a gender equality mainstreaming process.
- 4 leadership is still required at a higher level and it should be more actively cascaded down to other levels.
- 4 intensified training programmes are required (local or regional) with emphasis on practical user friendly instruments and operationalisation, as well as an impartial approach to the analysis.
- 4 The process is very fragile and requires constant official support and back up in order to ensure long-term sustainability, accompanied by an unwavering message that this is an integral part of UNHCR's mandate . At present, the responsibility for convincing colleagues still lies largely with the gender team.

Therefore, in 1999 this region will focus on the following:

- The continued shift of responsibility from the gender focal persons to senior and middle management and all staff.
- The incorporation of gender mainstreaming into the CMS objective setting exercise, cascading from RBA downwards, with an active role by the bureau staff in representation of the Director, in ensuring fulfilment of these objectives through monitoring.

- Accountability mechanisms at a programmatic level with an adequate use of indicators, and at a personal level through CMS.
- The consolidation of the necessary user friendly tools and corresponding training programmes.
- Participation by male colleagues.
- The active incorporation of PI and administration in the process.
- The inclusion of the vision of the refugees/internally displaced/returnees in the next evaluation and how gender equality mainstreaming affects their lives in order to feed the results back into the strategy planning for the year 2000, using agreed upon indicators.
- The further development of the reasons/explanations behind the need for and the beneficial impact of gender equality mainstreaming.
- Finally, the team members must promote an active shift by staff towards other actors in the process, particularly government partners (national ministries for women, human rights institutions), UN agency systems and national women's networks. These relationships should include follow up to world conferences and the inclusion of the refugee population in these and national agendas. This will provide an external mechanism for sustainability in relation to the refugee population.

Terms of reference for the regional adviser for refugee women

On the basis of this experience, it is now easier to clarify the role of the Senior Regional Adviser for Refugee Women, if the principal task is understood to be “**Building up regional capacity for mainstreaming a gender equality perspective in UNHCR's activities**”. The following might be considered:

- Create an ongoing grass roots critical mass (which might be a team or a group of interested UNHCR staff) to provide UNHCR in the region with a group of staff who will work towards and demand changes. This involves identifying interested personnel situated within different UNHCR units, including those with decision making capacity or influential access to those who take the decisions. The strong support of management should be negotiated from the outset.
- Train the group/team on gender awareness and instruments for applying a gender perspective, build up a team spirit and assist participants in developing the skills needed to negotiate gender equality mainstreaming effectively, and to provide visibility to gender issues and the progress achieved.
- In co-ordination with the group/team create an appropriate intervention strategy based on an internal understanding of the institution and where energies should be focused in order to influence/change attitudes at a decision making level and to ensure that all staff become actively responsible for the process.
- Develop, in co-ordination with the regional team, representatives and bureau an appropriate and comprehensive training programme for all personnel.
- Establish gender impact indicators for each area.
- Provide the back up and legitimacy required to the team in the initial stage, visibility to gender issues and activities and demonstrate the impact.
- Involve all levels of management with a transfer of responsibilities for the outcome of the process to management, and support the bureau in defining its pro-active leadership role.
- In co-ordination with all, establish evaluation and accountability procedures.

- Facilitate exchanges and information flow through different mechanisms (e.g. workshops, newsletters, lessons learned, etc.), as well as ensuring that gender mainstreaming is incorporated into all regional forums.
- Liaise with all other regional entities in order to introduce a gender perspective, with particular emphasis on training, with the aim of influencing all training programmes.
- Assist offices in assuming their responsibility by providing policy and technical advice as needed.
- Consolidate a mainstreaming structure which consists of: a) gender aware managers responsible for ensuring the application of UNHCR policies on refugee/returnee/IDP women, through gender equality mainstreaming accompanied by effective accountability mechanisms; b) UNHCR staff actively responsible for applying a gender equality perspective and for monitoring its impact, c) an ongoing critical mass or team responsible for updating theories and approaches.

The role of Headquarters

At a general level leadership by senior management and headquarters is essential and requires a great deal of strengthening if the long-term ECOSOC goal is to be achieved. The regional gender team's analysis of the obstacles to gender mainstreaming highlighted the fact that *“Gender is not perceived as an integral part of UNHCR's mandate”* as the major obstacle to the implementation of the High Commissioner's policy on refugee women.

Discussions in Headquarters to cut or down grade the Senior Co-ordinator's post, or to place it at a technical level rather than a policy level within UNHCR's structure can seriously undermine efforts being undertaken at a field level to implement the High Commissioner's policy. For some time now the field has had to try and maintain the profile of gender mainstreaming in such adverse conditions. It is clearly the responsibility of Headquarters to give the required profile to the Senior Co-ordinator's post and ensure that the post is located in such a position as to enable gender equality mainstreaming to take place at headquarters and the field. This requires that:

- 4 Within the hierarchy, the incumbent has the capacity to intervene and negotiate with directors on an equal footing with relatively easy access to them.
- 4 The policy advisory nature and functions of the post be clarified (this is further compounded by the title Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women, rather than Senior Gender Policy Advisor). Within the house, there also appears to be confusion in some cases that gender/gender equity only refers to achieving a balance between sexes at a posting level and has little to do with persons of concern to UNHCR.
- 4 An institutional commitment as to the real impact that gender equality mainstreaming can have on the lives of refugee women and men be clearly demonstrated, rather than remaining as a statement of good intent.
- 4 A clear strategy be jointly developed by the different actors involved at a Headquarters level, together with senior and middle management. This must then be officially communicated to all staff. In order for the field to be able to continue to advance, gender mainstreaming has to take place at headquarters, i.e. all staff at Headquarters need to be gender aware and have the technical knowledge and skills to apply a gender perspective.

- 4 The emphasis be shifted from women to gender, so that UNHCR can clarify the difference between other specialist posts (namely children and community services) and provide a basis for building on all areas in a harmonious manner. This may require a further definition of roles and responsibilities in relation to ECOSOC and the Beijing Platform.
- 4 Gender awareness form part of the criteria for selection and promotion within the APPC and APPB, as well as the inclusion of gender issues and the application of a gender perspective in job descriptions and CMS functions.
- 4 Within a context of down sizing, a gender staff balance must be maintained throughout and the gains of the last few years must not be lost.

Final comments

Whilst the process in the region is still extremely fragile, it is fair to conclude that we have begun to break through the barriers highlighted in the 1996 report prepared by Catherine Overholt on “Introducing a gender approach into UNHCR programming”. However, it must be recognised that there are at least two key advantages in the Americas : a) the work is not emergency driven and b) there is a cultural background of human rights. Under challenges for the future, Cathy Overholt notes the progress in UNHCR, but states:

“The challenges inherent in changing the approaches and behaviour of an organisation and the individuals within it are formidable, and progress is constrained by long-standing organisational barriers. Changes are still required in UNHCR’s management systems to ensure that all programmes and staff are held accountable for integrating a gender focus into the agency’s work and monitoring the impact on women”.

These two and a half years represent an attempt to try and come to grips with these challenges and to directly tackle the implications of seeking to change staff members’ behaviour and the organisational barriers. Staff from all different levels have contributed to and are participating in this dynamic process, which is key to its development. However, it remains fragile, partly because of rotation and down sizing, but also because change processes, as Delphi showed, are painful. A gender equality perspective means taking us closer to the population we work with and looking at their reality and suffering. Inevitably, there is some tension and conflict, particularly given the nature of UNHCR’s work. Therefore, ongoing negotiation capacity is key. For it to be a healthy process there has to be a clear vision from the top down, as well as ongoing pressure, analysis and input from the bottom up.

The gender equality mainstreaming process in this region still requires a great deal of nurturing and strengthening to ensure its long-term impact. Some staff are beginning to react automatically with a gender perspective and have discovered the importance not only for their work, but also at a personal level, which is vital to achieving sustainability. Others still have some way to go. Only once all staff have acquired an “instinctive” gender equality perspective, apply it in practice and consider it to be an integral part of our UNHCR mandate will we be able to say that it has been institutionalised and mainstreamed. The process depends on three crucial elements: 1) a critical team/group with the capacity to keep the pressure on management; 2) an abundance of managers capable of defending, explaining and promoting

gender equality and 3) clear, ongoing, visible institutional commitment from headquarters and the bureau. We now have concrete examples of the first two in the Americas (or people who have passed this way) and growing support from the Bureau. Therefore, we have demonstrated that some of these formidable challenges cited above can be overcome. However, this is a long-term process which will only survive, if Headquarters takes a much stronger, active leading role with a steady unwavering commitment to implementing the first two articles of the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the High Commissioner's 1990 policy which calls for gender equality mainstreaming.