PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH UNICEF-SUPPORTED POLICY ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

UNICEF’s 2010 Gender Policy mandates that all UNICEF-assisted programming, including in emergencies, contribute to gender equality in clearly defined, measurable ways. This brief provides basic information on why gender matters to Focus Area 5, Policy Advocacy and Partnerships for Children’s Rights, of the Medium-Term Strategic Plan and offers practical tips on how to advance gender equality through programming in this area. For a more detailed treatment of this topic, see the Operational Guidance on Focus Area 5; for an overview of key concepts related to gender equality, see Promoting Gender Equality: An Equity-Focused Approach to Programming (Operational Guidance Overview).

Key concepts

Policies are key to fostering gender-equal societies. Overcoming the gender and age barriers that sustain discrimination and inequity requires setting new policy directions through advocacy grounded in evidence and gender-balanced participation. It also requires translating these policy directions into concrete measures that make a difference in peoples’ lives. Human rights-centred legislative and policy reforms can set parameters for more equal and child-friendly societies that fully uphold the human rights of children and women, providing them with equitable opportunities to live, thrive and make their own choices.

Addressing gender disparities makes for more effective development policy. Women, girls, men and boys are entitled to equality as a right, but equality is also good for development. More powerful and far-reaching public policies – whether on education, economics, political participation or climate change – result from including measures to correct gender disparities.

Advocacy work should always be grounded in strong evidence. Where evidence on gender is not available, as is often the case, it should be sought, including through qualitative research that captures the perspectives of women, men, boys and girls. Quality data is more than just disaggregation by sex; collection and analysis should focus on issues pivotal to gender equality.

Equitable participation is integral to informing and carrying out policy advocacy. It captures diverse perspectives that can make advocacy more effective and models the principle that men, women, girls and boys should all have a voice in decisions that affect them. At the same time, the assumption that women and girls will automatically think differently or look out for their own interests needs to be handled with care, given the fact that gender discrimination can be deeply internalized in those who live under it.

The drivers of gender discrimination are many and widely varied. They are typically reflected in institutions and policies, but their roots go much deeper into culture, tradition and people’s...
perceptions. Policy advocacy related to gender will rarely be a mechanical or technocratic process, where simply presenting the right evidence will be enough to make a difference. Equally important is convincingly framing the argument for gender equality. Doing so requires sensitivity to what people already think and how much they might be willing to start thinking differently.

**Policies, laws and systems for providing evidence must be connected to implementation**, including through the concrete provision of new resources and mechanisms for delivery and accountability. Many commitments have now been made regarding gender equality, both at the national and international levels, but the record on fulfilling them lags far behind. Policies and evidence provide valuable impetus and set a new direction as a beginning, not an end.

**Key programming opportunities**

Within the Medium-Term Strategic Plan for Focus Area 5, three areas provide strategic entry points for promoting gender equality: information, policy advocacy, and laws and participation.

**Gender-sensitive data collection, research and analysis.** Disaggregating data by sex and age is important for formulating accurate human development policies and programmes and for assessing the equity of development outcomes. Sex-disaggregated data reveal whether or not women and men, and girls and boys, in a country or region have the same opportunities in terms of survival, nutrition, education, protection, work or participation in decision-making. But while the overall lack of sex disaggregation in data is often an impediment, the availability of data on issues pivotal to gender equality is what really matters. Progress calls for more than just disaggregating available data by sex. Contextual analysis is also needed to identify key gaps in knowledge and actions to fill them. Household surveys and multidimensional poverty analyses are incomplete without attention to gender disparities and contextual issues.

**Gender-responsive policy advocacy.** Poverty reduction strategies, social protection policies and budgets are priority areas for gender-responsive policy advocacy.

- In the **poverty reduction strategy** process, a situational analysis on poverty can draw on gender-sensitive data and analysis to inform policy frameworks and programmes. Gender-responsive costing and budgeting should guide implementation, and monitoring and evaluation can incorporate indicators to measure progress towards gender equality objectives and changes in gender relations.
- In the **social protection** process, initiatives often focus at the household level without explicitly considering intrahousehold dynamics that work against gender equality. Integrating gender analysis into programme design, implementation and evaluation is critical to achieving gender objectives.
- **Gender-responsive budgeting** places specific emphasis on examining how budgets affect women and girls differently than men and boys. It avoids the assumption that public spending is gender-neutral and advocates deliberate steps to correct disparities. To determine variations between male and female members of the household, for example, gender budget analysis challenges conventional economics based on using the household as the smallest unit of analysis, and draws in long-neglected issues such as women’s unpaid work and the care economy.

**Laws and participation**

While many judicial systems are in theory oriented around a principle of neutrality and equality before the law, in practice, gender discrimination means that laws and their implementation can differently affect women and men, and boys and girls. Mainstreaming gender is therefore important at all stages and across all aspects of legislative reform.

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the principle that children should be listened to regarding any matter that concerns them, and that their views should be given due consideration in accordance with their age and maturity. Providing equal opportunities for children to speak and be heard, regardless of age, race, gender, religion or other parameters of human diversity can be a means of modelling democracy and the values of gender equality and respect for diversity. In addition, girls and boys are usually in the best position to provide information on their own situation. Taking time to understand and follow their lives can provide insights on what questions to ask and how to interpret the answers. When working on gender issues, it is important to be aware that even as boys and girls can be agents of change, their views are formed by their experiences and backgrounds, including ideas about gender roles and expectations.