

Financing for gender equality: are we reaching a global consensus?

Ana Lydia Fernández-Layos
Consultant, Gender and Development

Hundreds of representatives of women's and civil society organisations that work to promote gender equality in different contexts took part in the 52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) held in New York from the 25 February through to 7 March 2008. The main objective was to demand that governments all around the world ensure the necessary finance is available to end discrimination and guarantee the rights of women and children. After more than one week of negotiations, it became patently clear that the goals for furthering gender equality agreed over the last decade are not being met. These include agreements like the Convention on the Elimination of the Discrimination against Women (or CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and the Monterrey Consensus. This means that governments prepared to put their money where their mouths are and implement specific actions are still very much required. These are priority measures which, in this instance, the majority of the governments attending this year have failed to advance in a coherent and efficient way.

What is the CSW?

The CSW is a commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), dedicated exclusively to promoting gender equality and the advancement of women. The CSW is made up of representatives from the 45 member states chosen by the Council in line with an equitable geographical representation; there are 13 members from Africa, 11 from Asia, nine from America, eight from Western Europe and four from Eastern Europe. Members are chosen for a four-year period.

- **The CSW was established in 1946** with the aim of preparing recommendations and reports for the ECOSOC on promoting women's rights in the political, economic, civil, social, and educational fields and with respect to urgent problems requiring immediate attention.
- **In 1987, the CSW's mandate was widened** to include the task of promoting equality, development and peace, and to follow up on the implementation of measures for the advancement of women. It was also tasked with reviewing and evaluating the progress made at the global, national, regional and local levels.

- **After the IV World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing**, the General Assembly entrusted the CSW to integrate an ongoing follow-up process into its action plan, regularly reviewing the degree of fulfillment of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as advances in relation to areas of special concern which had been identified as obstacles to women and children fully exercising their rights. The CSW was also entrusted with playing a leading role in ensuring the United Nations adopt gender mainstreaming in all of its activities.
- The ECOSOC **modified the reference terms of the CSW once again in 1996** to include the identification of emerging issues, and new tendencies and perspectives which affect equality between men and women such as, for example, HIV/AIDS, and women and children hostages.

The CSW meets once a year for a period of approximately 10 working days, from the end of February to the beginning of March. The purpose of these meetings is to evaluate progress made in matters of gender equality, identify the main challenges of the day, establish global norms and formulate specific policies to promote gender equality and the furthering of women at the global level.

The main results of these CSW sessions are the so-called *“agreed conclusions”* - priority matters established each year (in 2008, financing and empowerment of women). These conclusions contain an analysis of the priority matter at hand and a series of specific recommendations to be carried out at the local, national, regional and international levels, aimed at governments, inter-governmental organisations and actors from civil society. The CSW acts as a watchdog, checking the degree of implementation of these recommendations in the subsequent annual sessions based on information sent from different governments.

Besides the agreed conclusions, the CSW also adopts a series of recommendations on different issues. In 2008, for example, the recommendations were related to the situation and assistance provided to Palestinian women and women and girls affected by HIV/AIDS. The final report by the CSW is sent to the ECOSOC for its approval.

52nd session of the CSW: debates and results

The 52nd Session of the CSW was held in New York in the headquarters of the United Nations from 25 February to the 7 March 2008.¹

Representatives of organisations within the United Nations system, such as the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) took part in the sessions alongside UN member states, as well as observers from non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations, amongst others. This year, according to non-official sources, there were 1,600 delegates from civil society, the highest number registered to date and 30 percent more than were present in 2005 during the revision of Beijing 10+.

An official delegation from Spain took part, headed by the Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and made up of representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. These included the Ambassador for the Special Mission for the Promotion of Gender Equality Policies, and representatives from the Spanish Mission to the United Nations, the Bureau of Human Rights, and from the General Directorate of Development Policies, along with representatives from the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs, and the Women's Institute's General Secretariat of Equality Policies, as well as individual Members of Parliament.² In addition, various representatives from Spanish society were present, including representatives of the Spanish platform of the European network WIDE, and the Catalan Women's Council.

The priority subject of the CSW this year was the *financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women*. One of the issues highlighted was the importance of an adequate and steady supply of resources in order that governmental institutional mechanisms as well those within civil society can deliver on their pledges and translate political will into practical and effective measures to eliminate gender discrimination in all its contexts.³

This is the first time financing for equality has featured as the priority subject, despite the matter having been analysed in various contexts whenever it has cropped up in the years since 1995. The question will be raised again in two or three years time in order to revise the degree of implementation of policy recommendations and identify shortfalls and existing challenges. The negotiations used two reports compiled by the Secretary General of the United Nations on the financing for gender equality and empowerment of women as their starting point; the first, (E/CN.6/2008/2) which identified key aspects and served to get the debate started, suggesting policy recommendations; the second (E/CN.6/2008/5) offered an overview of the efforts made in gender mainstreaming, equality and empowerment of women by different governments.⁴

The main problems detected with respect to financing for equality are the need to mainstream gender into the agenda of the Paris Declaration, and to eliminate the enormous gulf which exists between political-theoretical commitments and reality on the ground. The Paris Declaration does not include measures to promote the empowerment of women, gender equality or human rights, nor does it evaluate the impact of policies or new aid mechanisms based on these premises, despite it being recognised internationally that the Millennium Development Goals will not be accomplished without promoting gender equality.⁵

¹ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/52sess.htm>

² With respect to the participation of the Spanish government, it is worth highlighting the fact that in the 52nd Session, Spain was a member of the CSW, something which means it had a right to vote on issues when consensus could not be reached.

³ De la Cruz, Carmen., "De Beijing a París: La relevancia de la igualdad de género para la eficacia de la ayuda", FRIDE Comment, April 2008 www.fride.org/publicacion/400/

⁴ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw52/OfficialDocuments.html>

⁵ See the AWID reports "Where's the money for women's rights?" http://www.awid.org/go.php?pg=fundher_2, and other resources http://www.awid.org/go.php?pg=aid_effectiveness. See the reports compiled with WIDE and the meetings on aid efficiency and civil society which was held in Ottawa http://www.awid.org/go.php?pg=ottawa_papers

For example, the new cooperation architecture establishes that aid ought to be distributed in line with national development priorities. However, if national development strategies fail to identify gender as a priority area, there will be no finance to further gender equality, as the majority of aid is channeled through direct budgetary support. Some women's organisations are lobbying for the establishment of direct departmental funds in order to obtain finance aimed squarely at the promotion of gender equality, something they would otherwise not be able to access due to the absence of gender mainstreaming in other budgetary lines. This underlines the need to support national gender and empowerment strategies in countries where they exist, and that part of civil society which promotes gender equality in countries where they don't. Women's organisations should therefore be supported so as to make Southern governments accountable over the commitments made in the Beijing Platform for Action and the CEDAW. In addition, no mechanisms are being put in place to measure the impact of gender in different development activities or processes, nor are gender responsive budgets being incorporated, something which is high on the women's movement's list of demands. Finally, much more could be done to foment the participation of women's organisations at, for example, the Accra or Doha negotiations, something which is vital for there to be effective democratic ownership.

The key elements identified when tackling the matter of financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women were:

- Speeding up the implementation of commitments made at the national level through the sharing of experiences, lessons learnt, and good practices.
- Resolving the need to have access to more information and statistics.
- Increasing the capacity to apply gender mainstreaming.
- Identifying key policies and initiatives to enhance the degree of fulfillment of the agreements undertaken to date.

Demands from civil society

In the 52nd session of the CSW, one of the main discrepancies between theory and practice was that organisations from civil society were suddenly shut out of the informal negotiation sessions between governments, preventing their access to meetings where the importance of women and the participation of development NGOs in all decision-making processes was the issue being discussed. For example, the influence of CSOs on EU Member States was severely limited by the fact the EU formed a bloc with only one voice and a unanimous vote based on the consensus reached in their meetings prior to the CSW. Many of the proposals which some individual governments brought to the table (for example, the Spanish government's proposal that a minimum percentage of finance be earmarked for gender equality) were not included because unanimity could not be reached by the 27 Member States. The only way organisations from civil society could relay their position was through lobbying the more progressive governments with an individual vote (for example, Canada) which might then be able to suggest amendments to the text and re-open negotiations.

CSOs from the North and South presented their positions and proposals and agreed upon a set of demands through their regional caucuses, devising a common position which was relayed to the CSW.

The main demands of the international feminist movement were the following:

- To obtain a commitment from governments that **ensures sufficient and adequate resources for gender equality and the empowerment of women** with special emphasis on direct financing of the organisations which work to promote gender equality.
- The urgent need to **guarantee the participation of organisations from civil society which work to promote gender equality in all decision-making processes**, at the local, national and international levels.
- To obtain the commitment of all governments for the **development of coherent policies** on sustainable development and gender equality in all contexts.
- To obtain adequate **accountability** from all actors, governments, aid donors and recipients.
- To achieve **gender mainstreaming in all budgets** (gender responsive budgets), with information broken down by sex and the use of **gender indexes** in all phases of planning, follow-up and evaluation.
- The establishment of a strong gender body at the highest level of the United Nations structure with greater political power and resources to ensure gender equality and policy coherence at the international level.

Results of the 52nd Session of the CSW

Some crucial aspects of the “agreed conclusions” of the 52nd session of the CSW were:

- **Reaffirmation of the commitments** which were previously given by the international community, for example, the Declaration of Beijing, Monterrey and CEDAW, amongst others, and the verification that they haven’t been fulfilled.
- **Governability, democracy and gender equality:** An appeal to states as the main actors responsible for guaranteeing a gender-based approach, calling on them to both increase finance for gender equality through gender mainstreaming and a gender approach to budgets, while also ensuring the necessary resources are available to carry out specific actions. A call to all actors to take economic decisions which ensure that economic growth benefits men and women equally.
- **Institutional mechanisms:** Recognition of the important role which the United Nations, international financial institutions, the private sector and governmental and non-governmental organisations and institutions play in the advancement of women.
- **Poverty and development:** Mention was made of the need to put poverty eradication strategies and activities into practice in order to reduce the feminisation of poverty.
- **Public finances and gender mainstreaming:** To improve the institutional framework, accountability mechanisms and the strengthening of capacities to begin incorporating systematically a gender perspective in all budgetary policies and processes at all levels of administration.
- **Statistics, analyses and tools:** To put methodologies and tools into place with which to evaluate progress in the financing of gender equality and analysis of gender in macroeconomic policies through process and result indicators.
- **Access to opportunities and resources:** Guarantee full and equal access to both men and women of economic resources (inheritances, land ownership, credit, natural resources and technology) through legislative reform if applicable.
- **Political, social and economic participation:** Increase the participation of women in economic structures and decision-making and eliminate all obstacles to gender equality and empowerment.
- **Coherence:** The recommendation that the gender impact differential be tackled in trade policies and that development aid be specifically focused on furthering gender equality and the empowerment of women and children.
- And, finally, the request that CSW member states **integrate gender perspectives in the preparation and results** of the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Qatar in 2008.

Most relevant and controversial points:

Something worth highlighting is just how complicated it was to reach consensus on a set of agreed conclusions, due to the high number of modifications to the original text suggested by different governments. One of the main debates centered on the contrary positions held by the European Union and the G77⁶ countries regarding the central focus of the “agreed conclusions”. The European Union placed great emphasis on the promotion of a gender-based approach in all national economic policies and official development aid, whilst the G77 maintained that poverty and an increase in development aid was its cornerstone, attributing less importance to a gender-based approach and the importance of empowering women and children.

Other particular, controversial points were:

- **Emphasis was placed on the need to reinforce the assignation of adequate finance in order to promote gender equality. The general resistance to making specific pledges, with concrete figures for increased aid, was also singled out.** These issues were reflected in debates on the language to be used: “to ensure and guarantee” versus “promote and boost” (Spain tabled a proposal to the EU which would have committed Member States to earmarking a percentage of ODA specifically to gender equality, something which was rejected by other governments, meaning the EU common position during the CSW did not include the initiative).
- **Recognition of the role of civil society organisations as partners in promoting development and gender equality, while also undertaking specific commitments to ensure their participation in all processes** (in its additional declaration, the EU reflects its discontent that this is not mentioned in the final text).
- **The introduction of sexual and reproductive rights in the Millennium Declaration** (the USA made clear it would not support this initiative). The term reproductive health was finally agreed upon, with the US demanding that international consensus agree abortion could not be understood as being included in that term.
- **The establishment of policies of conditionality for the promotion of gender equality from a human rights focus** (governments from the South were in the main opposed to this, considering it a mechanism which would be employed unilaterally by donor countries to pressurise recipients).
- **Make a specific commitment to creating a body at the highest level of the United Nations dedicated to promoting gender equality vs. reinforcing existing agencies (UNIFEM, INSTRAW).** Some countries tabled concrete proposals with this end in mind (Ivory Coast, Liberia and Switzerland amongst others) but the majority of G77 countries opposed it. The EU and MERCOSUR were more flexible in this regard. Spain, as one of their main financiers, supported the recognition and reinforcement of INSTRAW and UNIFEM, and also defended the creation of a high-level gender body within the UN. The campaign “Gender Equality Architecture Reform” (GEAR) for the reform of the UN and the creation of an organism at the highest level to further gender equality was one of the main ways in which civil society influenced policy, especially US NGOs. Another of the relevant matters for this campaign was the pressure brought to bear to immediately name an Executive Direction for UNIFEM.

⁶ The G77 is a group of developing countries which was created in 1964 by 77 countries in order to support each other in UN de-liberations; today 130 countries are members.

Additional declaration by the European Union

The European Union delegation had some issues with the “agreed conclusions” and underlined the lack of collaboration and reluctance some governments showed in reaching the commitments required to take real steps forward in gender equality financing.⁷ As a result of this, the EU felt the need to present an additional declaration which placed emphasis on a contribution from civil society and women’s movements in the world, something which had not been duly acknowledged in its eyes, nor sufficiently supported in terms of the future promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. The EU went on to make it clear that financing in favour of gender equality and the empowerment of women affects both developed and developing countries, and in addition noted that in paragraph 21 of the “agreed conclusions”, the commitments undertaken were bound to national priorities, leaving the need or pertinence of putting them into place in the hands of individual governments.

Conclusions and recommendations

In general, the outcome of the 52nd session of the CSW left both male and female participants from civil society with a bittersweet taste in their mouths, because no specific commitment was made to increase resources allocated to financing gender equality and the empowerment of women and children.

Consequently, feminist and other movements in civil society will continue to review aid efficiency from a gender perspective, relaying the main indicators and signs to governments with the aim of guaranteeing equality and empowerment of women and children, based around the following:⁸

- Guarantee the coherence of social, economic, trade and international cooperation policies in order that the eradication of poverty, human development, environmental sustainability and gender equality are priority goals.
- Analyse the impact of gender in macroeconomic policies and monitor the degree of implementation of the Monterrey Consensus from a gender perspective.
- Analyse gender mainstreaming in public finances, in budgetary priorities and assignation, and gender-responsive budgets.
- Guarantee gender equality in all official development aid mechanisms.
- Ensure an adequate, sufficient and steady line of finance aimed at the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as of women’s organisations which work to that end.
- Guarantee the full participation of civil society and the feminist movement in all arenas and decision-making processes and recognise their priority role as key agents in sustainable development and gender equality.

⁷ <http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/EU%20Statement%20on%20the%20AGREED%20CONCLUSIONS.pdf?id=589>

⁸ For a more detailed examination see: “Posicionamiento de WIDE para la 52 sesión de la CSW” http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/CSW%202008_WIDE%20Position%20Paper.pdf?id=579b

FRIDE's Comments provide a brief and concise analysis of current topics in international affairs in the fields of peace and security, democratisation, human rights, and humanitarian action and development. Further information about FRIDE, as well as its publications can be found at www.fride.org

The views expressed by the authors of the documents published on this website do not necessarily reflect the opinion of FRIDE.
If you have any comments on the articles or any other suggestions, please email us at comments@fride.org

Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior
C/ Goya, 5-7 pasaje 2ª - 28001 Madrid - Telf: 91 244 47 40 - Fax: 91 244 47 41 - E-mail : fride@fride.org
www.fride.org