

## Understanding the need for UN Women: Notes for New Zealand civil society

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FLEUR ROBERTS

### Abstract

The United Nations (UN) has long been seen as one of the world's most influential organisations in the movement for gender equality. The UN is unique in its ability to produce binding inter-governmental normative frameworks which have led to legislative and policy reform at the national level, including in New Zealand. The UN has also played an important role through its research, advocacy and programmes. However, during the 2000s many gender equality advocates became increasingly concerned with the gap between policy and practice and the significant weaknesses within the UN system. In particular, the UN has been criticised for providing inadequate resourcing, capacity support and senior-level espousal for its gender architecture. In New Zealand, UNIFEM's weak presence and low capacity to provide technical support to the government and visible advocacy exemplifies the UN's past inability to support gender equality at the national level. It is hoped that the recent establishment of UN Women in January 2011 will alleviate many of the issues related to the UN's gender architecture and signal a new era for the UN's work on gender equality. This paper explores the core reasons for the imperative reform of the UN's gender architecture. The paper then analyses whether UN Women has the necessary scope and funding to address the UN's past failings and deliver tangible results. A strong UN agency with country-level capacity in New Zealand would fill a gap within New Zealand civil society for a leading specialist organisation for gender equality that not only supports governmental and civil society efforts in New Zealand, but also contributes to equality within the wider Pacific community. Therefore the paper then outlines steps for action for New Zealand civil society organisations to ensure that UN Women lives up to its potential.

### Keywords

United Nations, women, gender, equality, architecture reform, New Zealand civil society.

### Introduction

While the United Nations (UN) has long been regarded as a key partner in the movement for gender equality and women's rights, the UN has failed to provide adequate funding and capacity support for its gender work – thus contributing to the ongoing pervasiveness of gender inequality throughout the world. For many years the UN's limitations have caused some gender equality advocates to question the value of engaging with the organisation (Kettel, 2007, p.881). Therefore when former Secretary-General Kofi Annan initiated a structural reform process in 2005, gender equality advocates demanded that the UN's gender architecture needed to be included on the reform agenda if the UN was to be considered a credible partner for gender equality. After a protracted negotiation process, in July 2010 the UN General Assembly took the historic step of approving the formation of UN Women, thus replacing the UN's four gender bodies: the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW).

The creation of UN Women delivered significant improvements with regard to funding and capacity and it is now the UN's leading agency for gender equality and women's empowerment. But does the creation of UN Women mark a turning point for the UN's tangible support

for gender equality or represent yet more rhetoric? This paper will investigate the UN's contribution to the realisation of gender equality and identify the possible reasons why the UN has previously failed to live up to expectations. The paper will then assess the extent to which UN Women is likely to ameliorate the UN's past issues. While New Zealand ranks well on the UN Gender Inequality Index, a stronger UN agency is also relevant for New Zealand women and men (United Nations Development Programme, 2010). For example, only 33% of ministerial positions are held by women, only 9% of directorships for the top 100 companies on New Zealand's Stock Market are held by women, the gender pay gap persists at around twelve percent and violence against women remains a prevalent problem (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2010; Online Women in Politics, 2009). A strong UN agency with a presence in New Zealand would provide needed technical and advocacy support for the strengthening and implementation of national frameworks and action plans, and would contrast sharply to UNIFEM's previous presence in New Zealand. Despite the commitment of its staff, UNIFEM New Zealand always lacked the resourcing and capacity to have a significant presence within the New Zealand political and civil society context. But with the establishment of UN Women, will the UN finally live up to its potential and what can New Zealand civil society do to support the transition?

### **The United Nations' contribution to gender equality**

Gender equality advocates have long engaged with the UN system because it is considered to have an important role to play in the promotion and protection of women's rights and gender equality. The UN has contributed to the movement for gender equality in three key ways: 1) Through the establishment of normative frameworks and government commitments to women's rights; 2) By providing space for civil society organisations to collaborate and strategise on progressing gender equality; 3) By making important contributions through its programmes, advocacy, and research on the status of women and girls.

#### **Normative frameworks**

Since its inception the UN has played a particularly important role as a global forum for the progression of gender equality, and over recent decades it has been crucial in facilitating the establishment of influential normative standards for women's rights. These initiatives include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000), to name just a few.

CEDAW is the most extensive legally binding framework for women's rights. It serves to give visibility to specific forms of inequity experienced by women and gives legitimacy to women's claims against discrimination. States that have ratified or acceded to the convention are bound to implement CEDAW's provisions; moreover, they are required to submit regular reports outlining the steps they have undertaken to comply with the convention. The Optional Protocol adopted in 2000 further strengthened the convention as it gives women in signatory countries a channel through which to appeal grievances if their claims were not adequately addressed at the national level. Guerrina and Zalewski (2007, p.5) have rightly described CEDAW as 'a significant landmark in the development of a coherent strategy for the promotion and protection of women's human rights'. Although a convention such as CEDAW does not result in a wave of change, it is a valuable tool because it enables women to make supported claims about the way they should be respected and puts legal obligations on signatory governments (Guerrina & Zalewski, 2007, p.5; Lloyd, 2007, p.101). But CEDAW should not be seen as merely a legal framework. Rather, perhaps more importantly, it has provided a foundation for grassroots and global advocacy.

The UN conferences on women (1975, 1980, 1985, 1995) and conferences such as the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights (1993) and the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (1994) led to the formulation of declarations and output documents that greatly progressed global articulations on gender equality and women's rights. Although the conferences' action plans are not legally binding under international law, they assign a moral obligation to the governments that signed onto them (Wichterich, 2005). In particular, the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (1995) was an important milestone as it saw 189 governments sign an unprecedented agenda for gender equality in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. These documents consolidated past commitments on women's rights and gender equality, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); CEDAW (1979); the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985); the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993); and the Cairo Programme of Action (1994). The Beijing Platform for Action also set out 12 Critical Areas of Concern, the expanse of which meant that many gender equality advocates rightly see the document as the most comprehensive and authoritative consensus on women's rights and gender equality produced at a UN conference (Zeitlin, 2007, p.8; Zeitlin, Frankson & Valenti, 2005, p.6)<sup>1</sup>. Further, unlike many conference documents, the Platform for Action is a living document as the 12 Critical Areas of Concern shape the work of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, as well as countless civil society organisations.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security marked further progress for gender equality as it delivered a more nuanced understanding of gender, women, and conflict in a space, the Security Council, which had previously failed to move beyond typical narratives of women as mere victims. In contrast, Resolution 1325 produced a more complete representation of women's varying roles in conflict and peace. The resolution identifies women as active participants in combat, conflict prevention, and peace processes; acknowledges the urgent need to mainstream gender in UN peace-keeping operations; and emphasises the need to improve women's access to leadership positions and decision-making forums related to conflict and peace-building. By producing a more realistic narrative of women's multiple roles and experiences, it acted as a springboard for initiatives at the national, regional and international levels that are responsive to women's varying roles and promote their involvement in conflict prevention and resolution. Furthermore, like the normative frameworks mentioned above, Resolution 1325 implores Member States and the UN system to support and facilitate the realisation of gender equality.<sup>2</sup>

The three examples above illustrate that the UN has been a leading force – with the support of civil society – on the progressive articulation and recognition of women's rights and gender equality. Such standards have given validity and support to the issue of gender equality and, because the UN is the world's only democratic multilateral agency, the normative frameworks established in this space have a level of international legitimacy that cannot be achieved in other spaces. The normative standards achieved through the UN most certainly surpass the laws of most states and by signing onto these standards Member States are, in theory at least, accountable to those standards (Choike, 2007; Women's Environment & Development Organisation (WEDO), 2007). Not surprisingly then, gender equality advocates have long viewed the UN as a crucial partner in the promotion of women's rights and gender equality (Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) & WEDO, 2006, p.1-2).

### **Space for civil society to collaborate and strategise**

In addition to facilitating the establishment of normative standards, the UN created important spaces through which a diverse range of gender equality advocates have been able to network,

collaborate, strategise, organise, and lobby governments. Some scholars believe that the UN has been influential in helping the global gender equality movement take root and mature into a formidable force (Antrobus 2004; Eager, 2004; Jain 2005). For example, the early UN conferences on women took place at a time when feminists had yet to build transnational networks or to pragmatically work together as a group. Rather, there were significant tensions between feminists of the Global North and Global South.<sup>3</sup> These UN conferences, which frequently provided NGO forums, provided space for feminists from around the world to share ideas and experiences. These dialogues were a necessary step for later collaboration, and they enabled new networks to be forged – many of which remain strong to this day (Antrobus, 2004, p.37; Eager, 2004, p.108-109; Jaquette, 1995, p.48-49). The annual Commission on the Status of Women meetings and the UN's gender-specific bodies have continued to facilitate this interaction and provided an authoritative space through which to lobby governments. This is another reason why many believe that the UN has been fundamentally important to the global movement for gender equality (Jain, 2005, p.160; Phadnis, 2002, p.8).

### **Research, advocacy, and programmes**

Through its research, advocacy, and programmes the UN has provided both support and leadership for the gender equality movement. Though severely under-funded (discussed later), the UN's gender equality entities made significant contributions through their regional and global research on key issues including violence against women, HIV and AIDS, peace and security, the Millennium Development Goals, economic empowerment, aid effectiveness, democracy, and climate change. They also produced useful databases such as WomanStats, publications on the status of women, advocacy and training materials, and web portals on key gender topics. Furthermore, as well as initiating formal global advocacy campaigns such as the 'Say No - UNiTE to End Violence against Women' campaign, the UN's various gender equality entities have been crucial partners for civil society organisations in lobbying Member States and UN officials. Moreover, although its operational capacity was severely limited, UNIFEM delivered targeted programmes at the regional and national level by working in partnership with other UN agencies, governments, and civil society. Lastly, through its monitoring mechanisms the UN helps to hold Member States accountable for their actions and raise concerns over violations of commitments. This accountability is achieved through mechanisms such as the CEDAW Committee and the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women.

In sum, the UN has produced outcome documents that have set new standards for women's rights and gender equality, facilitated dialogue and networking, and developed worthwhile research, advocacy, and programmes. These contributions have been instrumental in elevating the issue of gender equality on international, regional, and national agendas.

### **Relevance for New Zealand**

New Zealand was one of the first signatories of the UN 1945 charter and since then, the New Zealand Government and New Zealand civil society have long engaged with the UN in support of forming and upholding international standards that support the rights of people in New Zealand and beyond. As a Member State, New Zealand has taken an active role in supporting the progression of gender equality through the UN by participating in the UN conferences for women, sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, and major UN forums such as the General Assembly. At the same time, New Zealand national policy has been influenced by the normative frameworks established for gender equality. For example, in 1985 New Zealand ratified CEDAW and since then the government has established specialised taskforces and legislative frameworks, such as the Prostitution Reform Act (2003), the Employment Relations

Amendment Act (2007, 2008) and the Human Rights (Women in Armed Forces) Amendment Bill (2007) to ensure that CEDAW's principles have been incorporated into the New Zealand legal system, ultimately ensuring the rights of both men and women (New Zealand Government, 2009). The process of mandatory regular reporting on progress to the CEDAW Committee has helped to ensure that the New Zealand Government has maintained momentum for developing legislative and policy frameworks and establishing taskforces to support gender equality, thus addressing ongoing areas of concern such as the persistent pay gap of twelve percent and violence against women (New Zealand Government, 2009). Therefore, while New Zealand has consistently ranked well on the UN Gender Inequality Index, engagement with the UN has provided an impetus for New Zealand governments to address the very serious issues related to gender inequality that persist in the country (United Nations Development Programme, 2010).

### **Weaknesses within the United Nations' gender architecture**

Despite the work achieved over the past 35 years, there is consensus amongst gender equality advocates that more needs to be done by the UN if tangible change is to be achieved. The formulation of influential frameworks and official commitments often failed to translate into tangible action within the UN system and its Member States (Kettel, 2007, p.873). Not surprisingly, by the 2000s many advocates became dismayed and frustrated at the lack of progress, and some began to question the value of engaging with the UN to advance gender equality (Cornwall & Molyneux, 2006, p.1189; Griffen, 2004, p.162-165; Mayer, 1995, p.189; Zeitlin, 2007, p.8). In an open letter to the Secretary-General, women's rights organisations at the 50th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women expressed concern that 'the lack of implementation sets a disheartening precedent which retards the work and reputation of the United Nations and impedes the urgently-needed progress of gender equality worldwide' (Gender Monitoring Group of the World Summit, 2006).

It was obvious that despite the constant rhetoric proclaiming unwavering support for women's rights and gender equality, the support mechanisms at the UN were significantly inadequate (Kettel, 2007, p.872-873). Particular areas of concern included resourcing; stature of the UN's gender entities; the absence of senior-level support; lack of operational capacity for gender equality work; and the fractured structure of the gender architecture. Before looking into the issues that led to the formation of UN Women, it is important to briefly introduce the UN's preceding gender architecture.

### **The UN gender architecture**

Prior to the formation of UN Women there were four staffed UN bodies primarily mandated to work on women's rights and gender equality:

UNIFEM was arguably the most significant gender entity at the UN. It was an associated fund of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and commanded an annual budget of US\$215 million (Curtis, Rigg & Kotok, 2009, p.4). The organisation was mandated to support national and regional initiatives that benefitted women, act as a catalyst to ensure women participated at all levels of mainstream development, and play an influential role within the UN system. Yet, as will be discussed, UNIFEM was severely impeded in its ability to deliver on this vast mandate.

INSTRAW was situated within the UN Research Institutes, with a mandate to assist the advancement of women through research, training, and the distribution of important information. The organisation had an annual budget of approximately US\$4.12 million, but as it was de-

pendent on voluntary contributions, it did not have a regular UN budget on which to rely. This funding structure proved highly problematic for INSTRAW because it struggled to persuade donors that research could adequately affect policies on the ground. This dilemma resulted in constant funding problems, cuts in staff, and an absence of necessary resources (Jain, 2005, p.131).

DAW was situated within the UN Secretariat under the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It was responsible for formulating international normative standards and policies; supporting and monitoring the implementation of international agreements and policy documents at the global and local levels; providing support to states in their implementation of CEDAW; and supporting gender mainstreaming within the UN and its Member States. In fulfilment of its mandate, DAW played a main support role for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the CEDAW Committee, providing them with technical support. Kettel (2007:876) asserted that 'as the unit that provide[d] Secretariat support for the CSW, the CEDAW and the Optional Protocol, the DAW [was] the lynchpin for all gender equality work with national governments, and for gender mainstreaming efforts within the larger UN system'. This was a significant responsibility for the entity considering its limited 'division' status and restrictive annual budget of US\$1.15 million (Curtis, Rigg & Kotok, 2009, p.4).

OSAGI was also situated within the UN Secretariat under the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the organisation had an annual budget of US\$418,000 (Curtis, Rigg & Kotok, 2009, p.4). As with DAW, OSAGI was required to support the mainstreaming of a gender perspective within the UN and amongst Member States, but only had two full-time staff to fulfil this task (Kettel, 2007, p.876). The office was also mandated to advise and represent the Secretary-General on gender issues; lobby for the inclusion of gender in high-level policies of the UN; provide gender support to various UN bodies; and support the effective implementation of the UN Millennium Declaration, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Beijing Plus Five outcome document (Women Watch, 2007). These challenges represented an overwhelming mandate for the office considering its small budget and staffing levels.

At face value it appeared the UN possessed the structures and entities to effectively address gender equality and women's rights issues. However, these structures consistently lacked resources, stature, commitment from senior management, operational capacity and coherence. As a consequence the capacity for supporting gender equality became increasingly diffuse, and the work these bodies achieved was the result of constant struggles. Indeed, CWGL and WEDO (2006, p.3) go as far as to say that 'these structures are designed to fail or falter'. Although this assertion may be a slight exaggeration, the UN gender architecture and the mainstreaming of gender throughout the UN system were not given the support they needed to succeed.

### **Lack of resources**

Prior to the formation of UN Women, all aspects of the UN's gender infrastructure and mainstreaming work were considerably under-funded (CWGL & WEDO, 2006, p.3). Member State representatives and senior UN officials often stated that gender equality and women's empowerment were a priority, yet time and again words failed to translate into sufficient funding, which suggests that supporting gender equality was not a priority concern. This assertion is supported when one looks at the disparity between the funding for the gender-specific bodies and that of other UN bodies. For example the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) - which is tasked with supporting child rights and development, as UNIFEM was for women - has an annual budget of more than US\$3 billion. In comparison, the entire gender machinery received approximately US\$221 million in 2008, not even one percent of the UN's total US\$27

billion budget (Bunch, 2009, p.10).<sup>4</sup> UNIFEM received the bulk of the funding with an approximate income of US\$215.4 million (Curtis, Rigg & Kotok, 2009, p.4).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the funding fell well short of that needed to meet the demands of its work such as the delivery of strong regional and country-level programming and technical expert support for other UN entities. Yet, although it was one of the smallest of the UN funded programmes, the organisation was expected to deliver results comparable to its better-funded counterparts (Jain, 2005, p.129). Despite its low-level funding, UNIFEM worked hard to have a strong influence within and outside the UN and Jain (2005, p.129) claims that it ‘punches way above its weight’. The other gender entities faced similar challenges and in recent years INSTRAW, as mentioned above, struggled to survive due to under-funding.<sup>6</sup> If UN Women is to escape the difficulties experienced by its forerunners, it must have adequate funding to meet its mandate.

However, funding difficulties have not been isolated to the four key gender bodies; other components of the UN gender equality architecture have faced similar budgetary struggles. For example, the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) – a network of Gender Focal Points that operates throughout the UN to promote gender equality and support the coordination of gender mainstreaming – has consistently raised concerns about the impact that under-funding had on its ability to achieve its mandate:

The lack of resources for the Network’s activities, including for its task forces, remains the major impediment for its work. For many joint activities there is no follow up or continuity because of paucity of financial resources. While external joint fundraising is undertaken, financial support from HLCM [High-Level Committee on Management] and CEB [Chief Executives Board] is vital to demonstrate commitment and ownership (United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women & Gender Equality, 2008, p.5).

Frustration with the lack of funding has consistently been noted in IANWGE’s annual meetings.<sup>7</sup> IANWGE’s members are expected to monitor and support the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the General Assembly’s recommendations on gender throughout the UN system. This is a critical role, one that has been set up to fail because the network does not have the necessary resources to be effective.

Gender mainstreaming provides another example of the UN’s failure to allocate sufficient funding to support the implementation of its gender policies. Despite the ubiquitous language on gender mainstreaming throughout the UN, it would appear that the UN has fallen well short to fund this strategy. Torild Skard’s (2009) review of eight different UN agencies, programmes and funds clearly illustrated that support and implementation has been significantly inconsistent; and even in cases where there has been support from senior management, mainstreaming has failed to be adequately funded to ensure effective implementation. Research conducted by IANWGE showed that, where funding has been made available, gender mainstreaming work usually relies on extra-budgetary funds (United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women & Gender Equality, 2009, p.6). In most cases however it is almost impossible to accurately identify how much money has actually been allocated to gender mainstreaming within the UN. For example, Nafis Sadik et al’s (2006) review of the UNDP’s implementation of its gender mainstreaming policies revealed that ‘much of the information about UNDP resource allocation to gender is missing, incomplete or inconsistent. There is no accurate and reliable way to estimate the exact expenditures on programmes, which pay attention to gender mainstreaming’. The overall result has been significant inconsistencies in implementation and a lack of support for training and production of materials, establishment of systems and tools, monitoring and evaluation, and employment of experts.

### **Lack of stature**

All of the UN gender entities suffered from a lack of stature and limited access to decision-making forums. For example, whereas UNDP, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS are headed by Under-Secretary-Generals, which enables access to high-level forums, none of the heads of the four gender entities held the position of Under-Secretary-General. OSAGI was the only entity to have had access to senior-level forums and that was only a recent development. In 2007, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon added the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Rachel Mayanja, to his Senior Management Group (the key advisory body to the Secretary-General). Prior to this the Special Adviser was excluded from the Senior Management Group, despite being the Secretary-General's key advisor on gender issues. Similarly, UNIFEM's Executive Director was excluded from senior decision making forums. This situation arose because UNIFEM, considered the core women's organisation at the UN, did not even have agency status. Rather, it was a subsidiary body of UNDP and UNIFEM's Executive Director only had D-2 status, which is the level below that of Assistant Secretary-General. At the headquarters level this lack of status meant that UNIFEM's Executive Director was excluded from crucial decision-making spaces such as the Secretary-General's Senior Management Group and the Executive Committee on Peace and Security – despite the fact that UNIFEM was expected to influence these forums (Sadik, Bissio, Jolly, Mbikusita-Lewanika & Snyder, 2004, p.13). At the country level, UNIFEM's involvement in decision-making forums was at the discretion of UNDP's Country Director.

Given the gender-specific bodies' limited access to decision-making forums, they were severely restricted in their ability to advance gender equality through 'mainstream' policy and planning; directly influence and critique policies and decisions; or hold UN agencies and senior staff to account for their work on gender equality. As a result, CWGL and WEDO (2006, p.3) claim that the gender bodies and their staff were used to 'defend the status quo rather than change it'.

### **Lack of commitment from senior management**

The above issues were exacerbated by an apparent lack of commitment from senior management as well as the absence of adequate systems to ensure the UN leadership's accountability to gender policies (Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), 2006, p.2). Results can be seen in the UN's inability to uphold the most basic principles of gender mainstreaming, such as gender balance. Under Kofi Annan, the Office of the Secretary-General (the highest office of the UN) had 27 members, only six of whom were women. Under Ban Ki-moon 40 percent more women were appointed to senior posts (Ki-moon, 2010). Yet, at the level of Assistant Secretary-General and above, the ratio of males to females remains significantly unbalanced at 93 to 27 (Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues & Advancement of Women, 2009, p.1). The most common excuse for this inequality is that Member States fail to nominate female candidates for these roles (Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues & Advancement of Women, 2007, p.21). The same excuse can not be used when looking at the rest of the UN system. Although the UN has made countless commitments to improving gender balance, particularly at senior levels, female staff members continue to be concentrated at lower levels and are under-represented above the D-1 level.<sup>8</sup> At the current rate of progress towards a more gender balanced UN, the 50:50 target will not be achieved until the year 2114 for the P-5 level or 2130 for the D-1 level (Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues & Advancement of Women, 2007, p.21).



The lack of commitment from senior management can also be seen when looking at other aspects of mainstreaming gender within the UN. For example, the policy and practical support for gender mainstreaming within some of the UN's most significant organisations has been considerably inadequate. Nafis Sadik et al's (2006, p.4) review of UNDP found that 'UNDP's gender mainstreaming policies do not have clear objectives, targets and timeframes, [and] it was not possible to assess the effects and impact of gender mainstreaming on projects and programmes at the country level'. By not putting adequate systems in place, UNDP's leadership has failed to show commitment and sent the message that gender equality is a 'nice to have' rather than an imperative priority. It is a similar story throughout the rest of the UN – when it comes to gender equality there have not been consistent efforts to set solid targets and concrete requirements. Instead, the implementation of gender mainstreaming has been reliant on a few champions and junior level staff. In fact, the responsibility of gender mainstreaming has been delegated primarily to junior, over-stretched, and inexperienced staff – many of whom have no background or training in promoting gender equality. Of the UN's 1300 Gender Focal Points, 1000 have been at a junior level, and they have lacked adequate budgets for the task (CWGL & WEDO, 2006, p.3). In practice this has meant that, without the support of senior management at all levels, these focal points have been restricted in their ability to contribute to and influence policy making; institute gender mainstreaming strategies, methods and tools; organise staff training; and undertake monitoring and reporting - all of which are expected of them in the job description.<sup>9</sup>

Donovan (2006, p.14) rightly believes that the lack of senior management support has resulted in an 'institutional culture that treats gender and women's rights as 'soft' issues, requiring no particular expertise'. This response has meant that rather than being a transformative strategy, at best gender mainstreaming has been implemented as a technocratic tool, and at worst completely sidelined. As a result, gender mainstreaming has not delivered its expected outputs, and this initiative is now widely seen as a failure (AsiaWOMENet, 2006; AWID, 2006, p.2; CWGL & WEDO, 2006, p.2; Donovan, 2006, p.14). If UN Women is to reverse this trend, it will need senior-level support across the organisation and significant capacity to support better training and more concrete gender mainstreaming frameworks.

### **Lack of operational capacity**

UNIFEM was the only entity amongst the four key gender bodies with operational capacity, but not surprisingly, considering its limited budget, any operational capacity was modest to say the least. UNIFEM had 15 sub-regional offices, ten country programme offices, and 46 project offices (however these only remained open when funds were available) (Sadik et al, 2004, p.11). The organisation had approximately 230 staff, 150 of which worked in field offices; UNICEF in comparison possesses a presence in 191 countries and operates with 7200 staff (Curtis, Rigg & Kotok, 2009, p.4-5). As UNIFEM had little to no presence at the country level, inter-agency Gender Theme Groups were relied upon to support gender programming at the country level, even though they only exist in a handful of countries. Gender Theme Groups meet regularly, though not on a compulsory basis, and are encouraged to support gender mainstreaming, identify key issues within the country, and propose possible actions (Keays et al, 2005). The UN's resource guide for Gender Theme Groups states that such groups are at their best when they ensure that UN organisations within the respective country coordinate their efforts on gender equality, ensure normative commitments on gender equality are integrated into the mainstream frameworks such as Common Country Assessments, UN Development Assistance Frameworks, and Poverty Reduction Strategies, and support the collection and utilisation of sex-disaggregated data (Keays et al, 2005, p.3). Although such an impact would be a good

beginning in improving the UN's gender equality work at the country level, it is only the start, and it pales in comparison to what is needed. Unfortunately, the UN has too often fallen short in even meeting this starting point.

The Gender Theme Groups have usually been made up of junior level staff members who have gender as an add-on to their job descriptions, rarely have relevant expertise or training, and do not have access to decision-making meetings at the country level (Donovan, 2006, p.13). They have most certainly not had the capacity or funding to deliver the kind of strong programming that is required at the country level. Furthermore, the Resident Coordinator has no mandated responsibility to ensure that the Gender Theme Group has access to decision making meetings and s/he is not officially required to meet with them (United Nations Development Group, 2008). Indeed, it is at the discretion of the Resident Coordinator whether a Gender Theme Group is even needed within the UN Country Team (Keays et al, 2005, p.39). Given the pervasiveness of gender inequality in every country, and the UN's supposed commitment to gender mainstreaming, surely the power to dismiss the validity of such a group should not be concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. Given the challenges these groups have faced, coupled with their lack of capacity, it has been almost impossible for them to make a significant contribution to addressing gender inequality. Any success they have achieved is a tribute to the individuals involved, not a result of institutional support.

Considering UNIFEM's restricted field presence and the inability of Gender Theme Groups to adequately address gender inequality at the country-level, there has been limited capacity within all of the UN's country programmes to: develop concrete, targeted programmes which address gender inequality and deliver on frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action; provide expert technical support to civil society organisations and governments; and support gender mainstreaming throughout the activities of the UN country team. In sum, the UN's capacity to deliver effective programming for gender equality at the country-level has been woefully inadequate (though UNIFEM and the Gender Theme Groups should be commended for their work and achievements), resulting in a failure to serve the needs of countries and communities. Gender equality advocates hope and demand that UN Women fill this vast void. However, to achieve tangible results the organisation will need significant funding and capacity support.

### **Fractured gender architecture**

In addition to the problems discussed above, the recently replaced gender architecture was severely fragmented and incoherent. This situation manifested because specific gender bodies were established over time, in reaction to identified need, rather than as part of a cohesive, long-term strategy (Jain, 2005, p.132). This resulted in a lack of clear classifications for the various gender bodies' roles and responsibilities towards the UN's gender frameworks and forums, thus resulting in a duplication of mandates in some cases and a questionable absence in others (Sadik et al, 2004, p.17). For example, although organisations such as UNFPA and UNICEF have clear responsibilities for the normative frameworks relevant to their areas of work, UNIFEM had no officially mandated responsibilities with regard to critical frameworks such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, or Security Council Resolution 1325 (Donovan, 2006, p.10, 13; Sadik et al, 2004, p.17). Yet UNIFEM was considered to be the UN's front-running body for women, and it was the only gender entity with operational capacity. In contrast to this bizarre absence of mandate, OSAGI and DAW's mandates in some ways appeared duplicated. For example, they had similar responsibilities towards gender mainstreaming. The two entities' scope of work was so similar that Donovan (2006, p.34-35) claimed that 'the roles of OSAGI and of DAW are not easy to decipher; it appears that the two offices often

work in parallel' with little coordination. This lack of coordination could also be seen between INSTRAW and UNIFEM. Even though they were established as 'two halves of a dual strategy' to progress the status of women, a General Assembly review of INSTRAW revealed that despite the inter-connectedness of their work, there had been a consistent lack of collaboration and connection between the work of UNIFEM and INSTRAW (Jain, 2005, p.94; United Nations General Assembly, 2002).<sup>10,11</sup> These problems inevitably had significant impacts on the functionality of the UN's gender equality work.

### **The overall impact**

When reviewing the issues above, the following statement from Donovan (2006, p.14) seems apt: 'Faced with a job that requires a fork lift, women have been handed a fork'. Without adequate resources, stature, senior-level support, operational capacity and coherence, it was extremely difficult for the gender-specific bodies to fulfil their comprehensive mandates. This could be seen evidently in New Zealand in the case of UNIFEM New Zealand. UNIFEM had a very limited presence within New Zealand as it was only staffed by voluntary members, not by full-time paid staff (UNIFEM, 2010). As a result, UNIFEM was forced to maintain a narrow focus on a few advocacy and fundraising campaigns such as the White Ribbon campaign and annual celebration of International Women's Day. UNIFEM's limited capacity meant that the organisation could not act as a strong advocate and provide technical support to the government and civil society organisations to substantively address enduring inequality issues in New Zealand such as violence against women and pay inequality - issues which fit well within UNIFEM's mandate. This example illustrates that while New Zealand, like other countries, has been expected to fulfil its commitments to normative frameworks, the UN has not been able to provide any significant support through its own gender bodies – not even through the most significant entity, UNIFEM. As a result of the issues discussed above, by the mid-2000s many gender equality advocates agreed that the UN required a 'major up-scaling of the power, authority, and resources dedicated to women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment' (AWID, 2006, p. 3).

### **The creation of UN Women: Tangible change or more rhetoric?**

After years of hard-fought lobbying, gender equality advocates were buoyed in July 2010 when the General Assembly agreed to establish UN Women in Resolution A/64/L.56, with the intent that the new entity should be operational by January 2011. And fortunately, the creation of UN Women delivers on a number of the key issues for which gender equality advocates had been lobbying. The problem of fragmentation has been greatly addressed because Resolution A/64/L.56 formalised the creation of a composite entity which would possess both a normative and operational role. UN Women encompasses the mandates of the four disbanded UN gender entities, is mandated to provide unprecedented country and regional-level programming and fulfils responsibilities towards gender mainstreaming and coordination at the UN – all under one roof. Moreover, the entity has official responsibilities towards the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and other key commitments.

The problem of stature has also been addressed as UN Women is headed by an Under-Secretary-General (Michelle Bachelet) who will be included in the Secretary-General's Chief Executives Board for Coordination and other key senior-level forums such as the Policy Committee and Senior Management Group. While there were some concerns that the Secretary-General's recruitment process for the Under-Secretary-General to head the agency was not being conducted in a fair and transparent manner (AIDS-Free World, 2010), the appointment of

Michelle Bachelet was widely applauded due to her strong ability to perform in the role. Her appointment was the first signal that UN Women would have the potential to live up to expectations.

However, in some areas the extent to which UN Women will have the capacity to ameliorate past issues will only be seen as the agency matures. The ability of UN Women to foster high-level support and its ability to put pressure on senior staff and prominent organisations to deliver gender mainstreaming results and meet objectives will take time to come to fruition, and will be dependent on the lobbying strength of staff within UN Women. Equally, while UN Women is mandated to deliver country and regional-level programming, the organisation's ability to deliver strong support is yet to be seen. Some are concerned that the organisation's scope is not large enough. It is imperative that UN Women has the capacity, authority, and independence to deliver effective, self-led programming. However, Resolution A/64/L.56 instructs that UN Women's responses at the country level will be at the request of Member States (see paragraphs 51(b, c) and 68). Although it is important that the entity should be responsive to governments, it is equally important that it should have the mandate to identify and initiate programmes that do not necessarily meet the demands of governments. Given some governments' antagonism towards certain gender equality issues, this point is of paramount importance.

However, the main concern about UN Women's ability to address past failings relates to funding. As expected, the entity will be funded from both regular (normative role) and voluntary (operational role) funding. A budget of US\$500 million has been recognised by Member States as the minimum investment needed for the organisation. This figure was derived from the Secretary-General's 'Comprehensive Proposal for the Composite Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women' (henceforth Comprehensive Proposal), in which he outlined how the funds would be divided (United Nations General Assembly, 2010). The Gender Equality Architecture Reform campaign and other advocates, such as Stephen Lewis - former Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, have consistently emphasised that the new entity requires a minimum start-up budget of US\$1 billion, with substantial increases in the future. This monetary goal is a reasonable target compared to UNICEF's budget of US\$3 billion. The Secretary-General's Comprehensive Proposal envisioned that the new entity should be funded as follows:

#### Secretary-General's proposed funding for UN Women

	Existing	Proposed
<b>Total budget</b>	US\$224.7m <sup>12</sup>	US\$500m
Basic staff/programme capacity		US\$125m
Country-specific 'gap' funding		US\$375m
<b>Headquarters staff</b>	205	206
<b>Field staff</b>	196	760

The proposed funding target is more than twice the combined funding level of the four disbanded gender bodies. However, the ambition for UN Women is that it should be more than a simple amalgamation of the old architecture. UN Women will have far greater normative, operational, and monitoring responsibilities. A major concern with the US\$500 million funding target is that the UN does not have a realistic idea of the funds needed to 'fill gaps' at the country level because it has never conducted a full scale investigation, and this inadequacy is revealed in the lack of evidence provided in the Secretary-General's Comprehensive Proposal on how these figures were derived. Unquestionably though the US\$500 million funding level

falls well short of what is needed. In paragraph 44 of his Comprehensive Proposal, the Secretary-General reflected that applications to UNIFEM's Trust Fund to End Violence against Women received requests totalling more than US\$900 million in 2009 alone. The World Bank recently estimated that US\$83.2 billion would be required to meet Millennium Development Goal Three on promoting gender equality and empowering women (Grown, Bahadur, Handbury & Elson, 2006, p.22). This estimate presents a question mark as to why the funding estimate for the new entity is so low.

Although funding needs to be achievable, the bar should be set high because without adequate funding UN Women will suffer the same fate as its predecessors. For example, Resolution A/64/L.56 notes that UN Women will work within the UN Country Team system and will be responsible for leading and coordinating the UN's gender equality work at the country level (see paragraph 56). However, in his Comprehensive Proposal, the Secretary-General proposed that the entity's smaller country offices would consist of only one national professional officer, with support staff and a budget as low as US\$500,000 (United Nations General Assembly, 2010, p.24). This staffing and fiscal reality effectively means UN Women will be starting on the back foot and does not represent a great improvement on UNIFEM's old predicament; if UN Women is to be a considerable component of the UN Country Team, it needs to have the size and capacity to fulfil its leadership and coordinating mandate. Equally, it must have adequate resources at the headquarters-level to support the strengthening of gender mainstreaming and the work of entities such as IANWGE.

### **Conclusion: The role of New Zealand civil society**

The creation of UN Women could have a significant impact on resolving the institutional issues that have affected the effectiveness of the UN's gender equality work in the past. For New Zealand, a strong UN agency with country-level presence would hopefully have the technical capacity to work closely with the government in its efforts to address enduring problems such as violence against women, more closely monitor the government's progress against CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, be a focal-point agency for gender equality advocacy to lead lobbying of the government and key stakeholders, and be able to undertake visible and mobilising public advocacy to create greater awareness and action amongst the public on key gender equality issues, both in New Zealand and the Pacific. Ultimately, a stronger agency with country-level capacity would fill a gap within New Zealand civil society for a robust specialist organisation for gender equality that not only leads efforts in New Zealand's but also contributes to equality within the wider Pacific community.

However, while the new organisation holds promise in what it might deliver, there are valid concerns that it might not live up to its full potential if key factors such as funding and country-level capacity are not delivered upon. Throughout the reform process between 2006 and 2010, New Zealand civil society played a key part in campaigning for the formation of the new gender equality entity and must continue to play its part to ensure that UN Women lives up to its potential. In 2011, New Zealand civil society organisations should link in to the Gender Equality Architecture Reform campaign network in New Zealand and the global network at <http://www.gearcampaign.org/>; lobby the New Zealand Government to push for increased funding for UN Women; work with local and regional UN offices to give input on the gender equality challenges and programming directions in the Pacific region; and advocate for UN Women to operate with transparency and collaborate with civil society organisations to meet its objectives within its first year of operation and beyond. With the support of civil society, UN Women has the potential to finally deliver significant results for women's rights and gen-

der equality. However, if the UN can truly be considered ‘the only global institution with the legitimacy to create change for women’s rights on a massive scale’, as WEDO (2007) suggest, then now is the time for the UN to truly deliver – time has run out for excuses.

*FLEUR ROBERTS is a development practitioner who has worked for NGOs in New Zealand and abroad, and is currently based in Bamyan Province, Afghanistan. She previously worked as a Gender and Development Trainer – in this role she co-developed and facilitated introductory training workshops on critical approaches to gender for development practitioners. In 2008 Fleur completed her MA in Development Studies from the University of Auckland. Her MA thesis provided a critical analysis of the institutional challenges facing women’s rights in global forums.*

## Notes

- 1 The 12 Critical Areas of Concern are: Women and Poverty, Education and Training of Women, Women and Health, Violence against Women, Women and Armed Conflict, Women and the Economy, Women in Power and Decision Making, Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, Human Rights of Women, Women and the Media, Women and the Environment, and the Girl Child.
- 2 Although Security Council Resolution 1325 was a watershed for narratives on women and conflict, it has also been criticised for its limitations. For example it is not legally binding, it lacks monitoring and accountability frameworks, and it does not challenge militaristic structures that perpetuate gender inequality (Otto, 2009).
- 3 Jaquette (1995, p.48-49) explains that this is because feminists of the Global North, who were focused on the ‘Women in Development’ agenda, were wary of the South’s focus on structural inequality and challenging of economic and neo-colonial hegemony, ‘which they saw as diversionary’. Conversely, feminists of the Global South rejected the dominance of the Global North feminists and their conception of what constitutes a ‘women’s issue’.
- 4 Estimates on the 2008 budget of the four gender entities vary: Curtis, Rigg & Kotok (2009, p.4) claim that the total budget was US\$221 million, whereas the Secretary General claims the budget was US\$224.7 million in his report, *Comprehensive Proposal for the Composite Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women* (United Nations General Assembly, 2010).
- 5 UNIFEM’s income of US\$215.4 million in 2008 represented a significant increase in funds compared to previous years (the organisation received US\$129.8 million in 2007 and US\$63.3 million in 2006), which is largely attributable to a US\$64.8 million grant provided by Spain (Curtis, Rigg & Kotok, 2009, p.6).
- 6 INSTRAW’s financial woes were an ongoing problem recorded in the following UN documents: A/61/897; A/60/366; A/59/433.
- 7 See IANWGE annual meeting reports available online at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/annualmeet.htm>.
- 8 Policy support for gender balance within the UN can be seen through the numerous resolutions on the issue which have been adopted by the General Assembly: A/RES/41/206; A/RES/45/239; A/RES/50/164; A/RES/51/67; A/RES/52/96; A/RES/58/144; A/RES/59/164; A/RES/61/145; A/RES/61/244.
- 9 The full job description of a Gender Focal Point can be accessed through the OSAGI website: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gmfpdrafttors.htm>.
- 10 At the recommendation of the Mexico City conference in 1976, the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women (later known as UNIFEM) and INSTRAW were established. These entities were mandated with specific responsibilities relating to women, but were expected to collaborate as part of a dual strategy.
- 11 There were several reasons for INSTRAW and UNIFEM’s lack of collaboration, including: the geographic distance between the organizations; the entities saw their roles as distinctly separate; inadequate mechanisms in place to ensure regular collaboration; both organisations had limited resources and were already overstretched; and the UN’s funding structure meant the entities competed for funds, stifling cooperation (Jain, 2005, p.131; Sadik et al, 2004, p.17; United Nations General Assembly, 2002).
- 12 See note 4
- 13 The Secretary-General’s report proposes that in the initial phase there should be up to 12 small offices, 41 medium offices, 27 large offices, and six regional offices (United Nations General Assembly, 2010, p.24).

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