

**BRIEFING NOTE:
REFORMING THE UN GENDER EQUALITY ARCHITECTURE**

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**Prepared by Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) and Women's
Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)**

In February 2006, the UN Secretary General convened a **High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence** charged with exploring how the UN system could be strengthened in terms of coherence and coordination, both at headquarters and in the field, in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment.¹ Gender was included as a “cross-cutting” theme. The Panel is due to make its recommendations to the SG and the GA later this fall. Women's groups around the world view the current UN reform process as an extraordinary opportunity to further advance the gender equality and women's rights agenda and have been organizing for some time to ensure that this process results in better organizational structures to facilitate positive change for women.

There are a variety of options being discussed for reforming the gender architecture at the UN. Women's groups have focused on the approach that we believe has the greatest potential to bring about coherence and positive systemic change: the **creation of a well-resourced, women-specific independent entity**. This would be a body with **normative, operational and oversight capacity, a universal country presence and led by an Under-Secretary General**. This approach was presented to the Coherence Panel at the July 2nd Civil Society Consultation in Geneva and later submitted in a paper prepared by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) and the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) entitled “Gender Equality Architecture and UN Reforms,” and has been endorsed by over 115 local, regional and global women's organizations and networks.²

The recommended framework for a strong independent women-specific entity is an attempt to provide coherence and systemic change in order to deliver more consistent positive outcomes for women's equality. As such, it must be mandated to work across the whole UN system, as this would allow it to provide a more **explicit and synergistic relationship between normative and operational work**. At the same time, its **system-wide responsibility** would ensure the strengthened commitment of existing agencies towards gender equality and gender mainstreaming. This entity would **both carry out and be a catalyst for women's rights programming and monitor gender mainstreaming** throughout the UN system. Based on the experience to date, it is clear that gender mainstreaming only works when it co-exists *alongside* a strong women's entity that can demonstrate this leadership, advocate at the highest levels and hold the system accountable. Such an entity would not “ghettoize” women's issues - just as ILO or UNICEF do not ghettoize labor or children - but would instead provide clear leadership, strong capacity and system-wide coherence.

As such, this entity would have three critical components:

¹ For more information, including names of Panel Members, see <http://www.un.org/events/panel/html/page1.html>

² To read the paper in full, click on:
<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/unadvocacy/Gender%20Equality%20Architecture%20and%20UN%20Reforms%20July%202006.pdf#search=%22gender%20equality%20and%20architecture%20site%3Awww.cwgl.rutgers.edu%22>

- **Policy Development and Advocacy** on substantive issues of gender equality and women's rights, with a comprehensive mandate dedicated to the full range of women's concerns derived from CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and other relevant policies. It must be able to advocate for the necessary changes at both policy and institutional levels.
- **Field Presence** to conduct and shape UN operational activities to ensure that gender equality and women's rights programming are carried out effectively. It should provide high quality substantive expertise on the gender dimensions of a range of issues as well as implement programs, facilitate innovation, share lessons learned and enable institutional learning. This universal country presence is essential to bridge the gap between commitments to women's human rights norms and the realities of implementation of these norms.
- **Monitoring and Accountability Capacities on Gender Mainstreaming** with the authority necessary to ensure accountability throughout the UN system. This would be in the form of a mechanism that functions at all levels of the UN, and in partnerships with NGOs and women's rights networks at global, regional and country level.

In order to function effectively, this women-specific entity must have several key characteristics:

- **Agency Autonomy.** As an independent lead entity, it needs the authority to take responsibility to tackle issues and commitments effectively. It cannot be subsumed under another agency and must have its own governance structure.
- **High-level leadership.** To affect change and upscale power, authority and resources, it should be led by an Under-Secretary General who will guarantee the organizational stature and a voice for women at the high-level UN decision-making table and other bodies that this requires.
- **Substantial, regularized and predictable resources.** These need to be adequate to implement its mandate which would include a minimum budget of \$300 million, and personnel with high levels of expertise.

For more information and further discussion on these points, see the following links:

- <http://www.wedo.org/files/unreform.html>
- <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/unadvocacy/index.html#Coherence>
- http://www.peacewomen.org/un/women_reform/Panel_index.htm (for background docs).