

ILO uses participatory gender audits to promote individual and organizational learning on ways to mainstream gender in order to help achieve equality between women and men. A gender audit, which is conducted during a two-week period by a team of four trained facilitators, encourages dialogue and reflection among members of the organization, department or office that has volunteered to undertake this highly participatory exercise. Audits use a self-assessment approach and take into account both objective data – gathered through a review of the unit’s internal and public documents – as well as perceptions including those of staff, management and clients. Workshops and interviews are held with members of the unit, and constituents are also consulted.

At the end of the audit, a report is submitted to management and staff in order to share good practices identified in promoting equality between women and men, as well as challenges and recommendations. The report addresses, among other areas that are key to effectively mainstreaming gender, the following:

- Mainstreaming gender as a cross-cutting concern within the unit’s objectives, programme and budget
- Existing gender expertise and competence
- Information and knowledge management on gender issues
- Systems and instruments in use for accountability, evaluating and monitoring on gender equality
- Choice of partner organizations
- Advocacy products and public image
- Staffing and human resources concerning balance between women and men, as well as gender-friendly policies
- Organizational culture and its effects on gender equality

Follow-up to the report and implementation of its recommendations are the responsibility of the audited unit.

Update

In 2001 ILO began using participatory gender audits as an internal assessment tool, which was the first such exercise of its kind in the UN system. Between 2003 and 2005, the audits were extended from ILO offices and work units to constituents: governments, and employers’ and workers’ organizations. By 2007 gender audits had gained momentum in their usefulness for promoting gender-responsiveness among constituents as their capacity was built in using them as a tool for policy formulation and programming within Decent Work Country Programmes. In 2008, the Inter Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANGWE) found gender audits to be a useful self assessment tool and encouraged the ILO to link it further with the UN system-wide gender mainstreaming policy and strategy. ILO also began conducting gender audits for some UN “delivering as one” pilot countries at their request, and it is considering how to adapt the methodology to the needs of “delivering as one” contexts. UN Country Teams are increasingly requesting gender audits, as are individual UN agencies at country level.

As of 2009, gender audit facilitators had been trained in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and Europe. The Turin-based ILO International Training Centre regularly conducts courses for gender audit facilitators. The manual for facilitators, which exists in English, French and Spanish, has also been translated into Russian, Arabic, Portuguese, Bahasa and Cambodian-Khmer.

Results and Good Practices

Sri Lanka was the first country in 2005 to undertake gender audits of ILO constituents. Based on recommendations of the audit reports, related follow-up has included establishment of a Gender Bureau within the Ministry of Labour and Employment, a Code of Ethics on Gender Equality and Sexual Harassment set in motion by the Employers' Federation of Ceylon, and a strengthened Women's Division in the trade union federation Nidhas Sevaka Sanghamaya.

Yemen was the first country in which findings of gender audits were used as a baseline for related indicators within its Decent Work Country Programme. The recommendations of gender audits – of both the Labour Office in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, and of the Department of Government Services in the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation – have been used to help shape a national policy on gender equality in Yemen.

Kyrgyzstan was the first country to carry out gender audits with support of a donor country – under the ILO/Netherlands Partnership Agreement – and with high-level political institutions such as the Parliament and President's Administration. After a gender audit in 2007 of the latter's Department of Economic and Social Policy, the department's role in formulating gender policy was strengthened by a Presidential decree. An analysis of the national institutional mechanism on gender equality and recommendations for improvement has been developed, and a national database on gender equality has been launched for developing action plans and funding proposals.

The Philippines was the first country to establish a national network of gender audit facilitators in 2009. The network will help coordinate initiatives to undertake further audits in the country. It will also liaise with the United Nations Gender Mainstreaming Committee in the Philippines, as well as with ILO and other gender specialists in the region.

In Zimbabwe, the first country where ten UN agencies were audited in 2005-2006, concerted efforts have seen been made to engender programmes. For example, UNICEF's activities to help empower communities have resulted in positive effects for both women and men, and girls and boys. There has also been improvement in the practical "how to" of mainstreaming gender, including the creation by UNDP of a fulltime gender specialist position.

Malawi was the first country in which recommendations of gender audits of several UN agencies have been incorporated into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2009. Findings of the audits – conducted by facilitators who were trained by ILO with support from the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development – have also led to revision of gender guidelines in the framework.

Tanzania was the first country in which a gender audit was conducted on joint UN “delivering as one” programmes. ILO trained audit facilitators – with support from the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development – from both constituent organizations as well as from the UN country team. Three audits were conducted for ILO constituents and one for the joint programmes. Report recommendations from the latter audit have been used to revise the gender-related dimensions in some joint programmes and to strengthen corresponding activities.

Gender audits of ILO headquarters-based work units and field offices have also yielded good practices and results including:

- Strengthened gender dimensions in Decent Work Country Programmes
- Improved efforts in mainstreaming gender in technical cooperation projects
- Work environments that allow more balance of staff’s professional and private life
- Project documents and proposals reviewed with a gender perspective
- Publication of user-friendly tools on gender and child labour
- Gender focal point teams set up to monitor implementation of audit report recommendations
- Country-specific vision on gender equality developed along with corresponding mainstreaming strategies