

ANNUAL REPORT 2006

Rohini De Silva, Special Adviser on Gender and Diversity discusses efforts in 2006 to achieve gender-balance in the UNICEF workplace

Q: What is UNICEF's policy on the issue of having a gender-balanced workplace and what were the measures taken in 2006 to achieve this?

UNICEF's policy on gender equality is very much based on the UN system-wide policy, which is based on [General Assembly resolutions](#) 50/164 of 22 December 1995 and 59/164 of 20 December 2004, that we should have 50/50 – gender balance at all levels, and all categories of staff. Additionally, as you know, UNICEF is the leading organization for children, which goes hand-in-hand with gender equality and women's empowerment. Thus it is important if we are to be a credible partner for children's rights that we should embody in the organization what we advocate with our partners.

If you look back at UNICEF's history, there's always been a commitment to gender equality and parity. We actually right now are number 3 in the UN System in terms of reaching the gender parity goals; we're currently at 47 per cent. In 1985, UNICEF set itself a goal to have one third women, and to reach it by 1990, which they did. They went on to say that we should have parity by 2000, a goal which was not met, although advances were made to about 42 per cent [women] at that time. In 2004, the Executive Board encouraged us to continue efforts to reach parity particularly at the senior levels. In 2005 we commissioned a study on gender parity in senior management in UNICEF, where inconsistencies were noted. The report was published in May of 2006. The current [Executive Director](#) took immediate steps to implement the recommendations of the study. She set up practice to have committees gender-balanced: she took the first steps to ensure that the Organizational Review Steering Committee and its Reference Group was gender-balanced. She then appointed me as a Special Adviser to advise and monitor the progress towards gender balance and to take steps to ensure attainment of the goals.

Q: How has the issue of gender-balance impacted on UNICEF's recruitment criteria?

Firstly we have to set ourselves a goal toward which we want to work. If we are looking at reaching gender balance in, let's say, the next five to six years, given that we are at 47 per cent now, we set a goal of two women for every three vacancies- this was based on looking at the retirements and the foreseen [staff] rotations in the organization. Obviously this working goal has to be adjusted to the regions, and to the divisions specific situations and vacancies. We found that when you looked at a two for three basis, we will get to gender parity in the next five to six years. We designed a 'corporate scorecard' [which] shows for each division and region where they are now and what the gaps are, and how they can actually achieve gender-balance. This is a tool against which they monitor their progress. In terms of the selection criteria, competence and merit are the primary criteria, ensuring that there are equal opportunities for all.

When we say equal opportunities for all, we also need to ensure that wherever necessary, we take specific measures to ensure those equal opportunities. Let me explain. When we go into a recruitment process, for example, we are saying that we must ensure that at the job description stage, the competencies are gender-neutral, that the advertisements encourage gender-balance, that the whole short-listing process is gender-equitable, and that the interviews are gender-sensitive. That we go out and search for female candidates to ensure that the short-lists are, in fact, gender-balanced. Through that process and the screening, managers have opportunity to ensure that women are given equal opportunity to compete. Managers and selection bodies have been very vigilant to ensure that equality is being reviewed at every stage, and that there's a level playing field where people can compete equally.

The Executive Director took a very positive lead at the Senior Staff Review in 2006 where she paid very careful attention to appointment of women at the senior level, and really that has given us quite a leap. At D-2 [the Director levels in the UN are D-2 and D-1] we moved from 19 to 35 [per cent women], and in D-1 we moved from 33 to 38 [per cent]. It's been proven overlooking the work over the last six months that if you have the will, give equal opportunity from the very beginning, and you find competent men and women, then the chips falls where they are for merit, and people are able to compete more equally.

Q: What recent actions have UNICEF taken to promote a culture of gender-sensitivity and fairness within the organization?

That's a pet topic of mine. As you know, the study found that while we were doing fairly well on gender parity in terms of numbers, that one of the things that came out of the study was that staff felt that the work culture was not gender friendly. Looking at what came out of the report we said let's tackle the situation, let's be open and find out what is concerning staff. And so we have organized a programme of dialogue – three workshops. We held the first one in Bangkok in March, we will be holding the next in MENA [the Middle East and North Africa region] and then in New York. It is a process by which staff get together – it was the senior managers [involved] – and review what came out of the report, particularly in terms of trust, workload, stereotyping. We addressed those three aspects. And then managers actually committed to action to see how they would improve the aspects discussed.

We also had a skills-building module. Managers were asked to be self-aware, and be able to identify with cultures and views of others and through that process have a better awareness of how actions and behaviours impact others. I think this is quite a bold step forward because as you know it's a very sensitive topic. The fact that people are talking openly about it and want to address it shows the commitment of UNICEF to tackle this issue.

Q: How do the Organizational Review and the issue of gender and diversity interact?

The Organizational Review reviewed the gender parity study as part of its diagnostics, and took the findings of that report into their final report. So, in a sense, we're all under

the umbrella of the Organizational Review and all the different parts – the strategic review, the review on supply partnerships – all these reports were studied and gender taken into account in the recommendations. I am really happy to say that they have confirmed gender equity as a core organizational imperative. The feedback from work on gender parity, particularly the programmes of dialogue on the work culture, has been fed back to the organizational review, and coming out of the review you will see recommendations on the need for improvement in management, in leadership in the organization – senior managements in particular, and also the need for talent development.

Q: What are the benefits of gender equality and how was that reflected in UNICEF's work in 2006?

In the workplace, gender equality enhances undoubtedly the productivity of the organization. That is by the full and equal participation of both men and women staff the organization benefits, because we get the competence of both men and women, which are noted to be similar, but also have some positive differences. We get to value the differences that men and women bring to the organization, to spark off creativity, new ideas, new values which is as a result of the diversity, and what we end up with is a much more inclusive and diverse organization, which has been proven to be much more productive than a homogeneous organization.

How we partner with the UN System is very important with all the [UN Reform](#) that are going on. And I think that here UNICEF can actually play some sort of a leadership role together with UNFPA and other agencies who have done well. I don't know whether you've seen the recent report of SG [United Nations Secretary-General] before he left of the gender situation in the UN System. It's pretty bad. It's just 37 per cent overall, and there has been no growth and in fact some sliding back in senior positions. When we talk about 'One UN', we must ensure that there are sufficient women in the whole system, otherwise we can't encourage mobility, secondments and diversity. I think that we can work together in partnership to see how we can enhance equality for the UN System.