Module 4: Working Together for Results on Gender Equality

Case Study – Inter-Agency Empowerment Programme for Adolescent Girls in El Salvador (PIEMA)

This case study illustrates how different UN agencies working together for gender equality results in real changes for women and girls at the country level. Consider the global level guidance that is introduced in this module and reflect on the links between the global and country level work on advancing gender.

The focus of this case study is on the inter-agency collaboration aspect of PIEMA, the first inter-agency programme jointly implemented in El Salvador. Entitled the “Inter-Agency Program for Adolescent Girls” (PIEMA), the project addressed the needs, interests and demands of adolescents in general, taking into account cultural, social, political and economic factors to empower them and strengthen their role in the promotion of their rights and human development. Five agencies were involved (FAO, PAHO/WHO, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF) and facilitated coordination between government agencies and civil society organizations, at national and local levels.

The creation of the UN Inter-agency Gender Group (GIGNU) led to development of a joint proposal. The proposal development involved extensive stakeholder consultation and also required that common interests and comparative advantages of each agency with regard to adolescent girls were identified. In-depth gender and situational analyses were done to inform planning and the responsibilities for each agency were clearly defined based on their respective expertise and mandate.

Gender Focal Points who participated in the GIGNU and initiated PIEMA acted as consultative group and technical reference points. Their role also included facilitating inter-agency work through analysis, coordination and follow-up to projects and providing input at all levels. The GIGNU involvement gradually decreased over time. However, in spite of this and the turnover among agency Facilitators, the team managed to achieve coherence and work jointly, enabling inter-agency work to be carried out effectively with high levels of collaboration and commitment.

An aspect that remained valid throughout the programme was its conceptual framework. It enabled a harmonization of concepts and views on gender, empowerment and even adolescence, on which each agency had its own approach. Retaining the initial framework despite all the changes (with newcomers often trying to introduce modifications) was beneficial.

A stocktaking exercise was carried out between June to August 2006, to document the experience and lessons learned and assess their replicability, given the project’s innovativeness in terms of target population, geographic focus, and procedures and methodology. This exercise assessed to what extent joint or inter-agency implementation, as an innovative work modality for the UN system, contributed to generating synergies and complementary initiatives, which in turn fostered the empowerment of participating adolescent girls and altered the outlook of a number of stakeholders on the issue.

The stocktaking exercise revealed that when all the entities decided to work together toward a common objective, with United Nations agencies managing joint planning, coordination and implementation centrally, it not only facilitated inter-agency work, but also generated more value-added with a much higher impact for beneficiaries. Similarly, a multi-faceted issue such as the empowerment of adolescent girls as agents of change and development can be the catalyst for inter-agency work, as it requires a comprehensive approach and revolves around gender equity, which is relevant for all agencies.

Several valuable lessons learned and recommendations are outlined in the full stocktaking report. The report provides recommendations on the effectiveness of the financial management modality that was selected and the importance of a coordinating entity with strong leadership and management capacity.

Despite some difficulties, the commitment and tenacity of those involved in the programme yielded substantial results that mean PIEMA can be seen as good practice.