Gender equality and women empowerment in development cooperation

2007/2182(INI) - 13/03/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 347 votes to 136 with 44 abstentions, a resolution on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation in response to the Commission Communication on the subject. The own-initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Feleknas **UCA** (GUE/NGL, DE) on behalf of the Development Committee.

While welcoming, in theory, the Commission's strategy, MEPs deplore the fact that, since 1995, when the Council first declared consideration of the gender perspective in development cooperation to be a principle underpinning the development policy of the Community, not enough has been done in practice.

Members also regret the fact that most Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) Country Strategy Papers refer to gender as a cross-cutting area. They call for gender-specific targets and activities to be included in future strategies. Parliament regrets that only 5% of the DCI funds for the thematic programme 'Investing in People' (2007-2013) are allocated to gender equality and that regional and country strategy papers do not give an overview of budget allocation to gender equality since gender is only mentioned as a cross-cutting issue and thus no financial details are provided. The Commission and Member States are called upon to take action in development cooperation with concrete and measurable effects on gender relations (amending laws, institutions and existing patriarchal patterns, increasing budgetary resources and improving social and economic conditions for women).

On a general note, MEPs call on the Commission to undertake a gender analysis at every stage of policy design, implementation and evaluation so as to ensure that all forms of gender-based discrimination are eliminated and so as to protect and promote women's human rights. In particular, the Commission is urged, when drawing up development cooperation policies, to support measures to strengthen the legal status of women, further promoting equal access to decent work as well as fundamental human and social rights, and paying particular attention to the increasing number of migrant women and their increasing vulnerability, so that women do not become the new exploited class of society. Parliament also calls on the Commission to evaluate the potential effect of Economic Partnership Agreements from the gender perspective.

Parliament welcomes programmes addressing female victims of violence but criticises strongly the fact that measures to combat violence against women are not part of the Commission's strategy. Members condemn any legal, cultural or religious practices that discriminate against women, exclude them from political and public life and segregate them in their daily lives, as well as those that condone genital mutation, rape, domestic violence, forced marriage, honour killings, any obligation against the woman's own will to observe specific dress codes, harassment for not conforming to gender-related norms or rules, trafficking and forced labour. The Commission and Member States are urged to combat these practices in development cooperation policies. Parliament deplores in the strongest possible terms the virtual chattel status of women trapped under Sharia law, and regards this oppression as representing the diametric opposite of every principle which Parliament holds to be of paramount importance.

Recalling that in sub-Saharan Africa, 57 per cent of adults with HIV are women, Parliament invites the Commission and the Member States to develop specific, time-bound and measurable commitments backed by the allocation of adequate resources to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for all women and girls by 2010. MEPs also call on the Commission to strengthen its political leadership role in health policies, addressing currently neglected women's sexual and

reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues. They emphasises the importance of putting women at the centre of water supply, sanitation and hygiene and emphasises, therefore, the importance of increasing access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and water for productive uses;

In order to promote the development of local communities, the Commission is called upon to develop policies that encourage women to form self help groups and set up on their own and, in collaboration with international organisations (such as Finance PlaNet), to expand the microfinance network so that more women can take out loans in order to improve their economic status.

Parliament points out that the ability of women to influence the development of their own lives is contingent on their education. It stresses the need to further promote access to education and vocational training at all levels for girls and to support education policies that are equitable and of a high standard, by providing teachers with training in gender issues and supporting reform of the curriculum to include gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and women's empowerment issues.

Lastly, Members emphasise the importance of encouraging donor coordination for gender mainstreaming and, improving dialogue and communication to achieve a common understanding of gender concepts and appropriate methodology.