



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Federal Public Service

**Foreign Affairs,
Foreign Trade and
Development Cooperation**

A difficult path towards equality

Gender and Development in Belgian Cooperation

Synthesis



Indonésie - AFP/BelgaImage



Introduction

Over the past few decades, a relatively strong normative framework in the field of gender equality has been set up on an international, European and Belgian level. This framework is based on a series of key resolutions and legislation. A wide range of measures, procedures, instruments, etc. has also been developed in parallel with a view to its implementation. Thanks to this, gender equality has become part of the development policy of almost all development stakeholders. Despite this, studies carried out into the effects of the integration of gender reveal that, to date, the results of these efforts are relatively disappointing. Furthermore, attempts made to translate this practice into concrete actions have encountered increasing resistance in recent years. Hence, there is a major divide between the policy and its actual implementation. Development cooperation in general has great difficulty in contribu-

ting sustainably to improving gender relations.

Belgium is no exception to this rule. Thus, this evaluation concludes that, **to date, Belgian development cooperation, in general, has not succeeded in making a substantial contribution to gender equality.** The few results obtained appear, in most cases, to be a consequence of temporary or accidental situations resulting from the initiative taken by motivated individuals. Only a small number of organisations involved in Belgian cooperation manage, in a structural and constant manner, to integrate gender in a way which ensures that a significant contribution is made to strengthening gender equality. However, overall, the scale and intensity of the efforts made and the subsequent results are not in line with the extent of the problems encountered in the South in the field of gender, which mainly affect women.

This thematic and strategic evaluation has been carried out by South Research, the IOB (University of Antwerp) and an independent consultant. The purpose of the evaluation is to examine the integration of the gender dimension in Belgian development cooperation, with a view to improving gender equality and improving the position of women. The strategy paper 'Equal rights and opportunities between women and men' (2002) provided the main reference for this evaluation. The objectives of the evaluation are as follows: **(1) to account for the results, (2) to draw lessons from the past in order to improve things in the future, and (3) to formulate well motivated recommendations.** The resulting recommendations should enable the better integration of the gender dimension into policies and strategies, thereby ensuring that international developments are taken into account. The evaluation covers the period from 2002 to 2011. In practice, 2012 and 2013 have also been taken into consideration.

Some concepts used

Women in Development (WID)

The Women in Development (WID) approach highlights the contribution made by women to development and focuses mainly on effectiveness and poverty reduction. It aims to integrate women into the development process and explains inequality between men and women, above all, as being a result of poverty; consequently, this approach aims to reduce poverty through a better integration of women into the economic process and a better access to production resources. However, above all, this approach aims to integrate women into already established strategies and objectives, without paying too much attention to their perceptions and priorities. As a result, WID projects focus mainly on the practical needs which allow women to fulfil their traditional roles more easily. The WID approach concentrates exclusively on women and ignores the importance of underlying gender

relations for explaining inequality between men and women.

Gender and Development (GAD)

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach highlights the importance of 'gender' as a sociocultural construct which determines the needs, rights, duties and opportunities of men and women. It is this social construct which is perceived as the main cause of inequality between men and women. Therefore, the GAD approach starts from the idea that interventions in all thematic fields and at all levels (global, macro, meso and micro) are influenced by existing structural characteristics (such as gender) of societies. Therefore, interventions are not implemented in a social void and their degree of effectiveness and efficiency is determined, among other things, by the underlying structures and institutions which influence human



relations. Conversely, it is considered that all interventions potentially have an influence on gender (and other) relations. If these reciprocal influences are not taken into account, there is a great risk that the interventions will increase inequalities between men and women.

Women's empowerment

This process aims, among other things, to ensure the empowerment of women. This is a process of acquisition of "powers" on a personal and collective level. It refers to the capacity to act independently, to make choices and decisions about one's life and one's society. It is a process which combines several elements, namely, inner power (self-image, self-confidence), economic power, in-

tellectual power (knowledge and the capacity to be critical), and social and political power.

Gender mainstreaming

'Gender Mainstreaming' is a strategy which aims to systematically integrate gender when drawing up development policies, at all stages in their implementation and during their evaluation, with a view to achieving gender equality. The notion of 'mainstreaming' was first used at the end of the 1980s when it became apparent that efforts made until then tended to be superficial and dealt more with the symptoms than with the actual causes of the problems. It was therefore necessary to set up a strategy which dealt with the structural and systemic aspects of gender

inequality. In other terms, gender should be part of the *mainstream* of interventions in the field of development; therefore, it should be placed at the centre and not dealt with as an accessory theme. Only then may gender equality be achieved.

Integrating gender equality involves taking account of the specific implications for women and men of all types of action, particularly in the fields of legislation, political choices or programming, regardless of the domain or level. It is a strategy which aims to identify the needs and experiences of women and men in order to fully integrate these into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of directions and choices in all areas of politics, the economy, and social relationships, for the equal benefit of men and women, in such a way as to not perpetuate inequality.

The twin-track approach: gender mainstreaming and specific actions

From the existing reciprocal relationship of influence between 'gender'

and 'development' appeared the need to integrate the dimension of gender into the different phases (diagnosis, planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) of the development cycle and all types of interventions at every level. In the OECD/DAC (1999) directives, it is specified that a gender mainstreaming strategy comprises two components:

- the integration of aspects related to gender into the analysis and formulation of each policy, programme and project (also called integrationist approach, which aims to integrate gender into existing development paradigms, in particular by integrating gender questions into a large range of sectors, without necessarily aiming to influence the development agenda);
- initiatives designed to allow women and men to formulate and express their convictions, and participate in the decision-making process related to all development questions (called agenda-setting approach, which aims to modify the development agenda).

The evaluation uses the term 'gender mainstreaming' in reference to both components. Therefore, the evaluators follow the OECD/DAC's definition, which is the reference in development cooperation but which does not necessarily correspond to the one which is followed by Belgian public authorities. Aside from '**gender mainstreaming**' (with its two distinct parts), a second track is essential for achieving greater equality between men and women: so-called specific (or positive) actions focused specifically on changes in structures and gender relations. This type of action is crucial in contexts that are governed by deeply rooted gender norms. These specific actions may target men as much as women, or institutions. The combination of 'gender mainstreaming' (with its two distinct components) and specific actions is often referred to as the **twin-track approach to gender equality**. These two tracks complement one another and both aim to contribute to the empowerment of women.



Methodological approach

The evaluation encompasses almost all of the Belgian cooperation: only a few specific aid modalities have not been taken into account.

Initially, the evaluators consulted the ODA database. This database was created by the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGD). It compiles data about the entire Belgian development cooperation. At the level of the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the program officers are in charge of encoding and updating the database. The interventions are encoded using, among other things, a gender policy marker. In order to be able to determine the progress made in terms of

integrating the gender dimension in its activities, the DGD decided to use the international gender notification system, known as the Gender Policy Marker, which comprises a notification system based on three values:

Value 2

This concerns an intervention which has gender equality as its main objective.

Value 1

This concerns an intervention which contributes to gender equality (significant objective) but which does not have gender equality as its main objective.

Value 0

This concerns an intervention not focused on the objective of gender equality.

Using this database, the evaluators established **a descriptive inventory** by country, sector and cooperation channel for 17,575 interventions eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA), financed by the Belgian Federal State (with the exception of State-to-State loans) between 2002 and 2012. This inventory revealed that 36% of interventions have not been marked. Among the marked interventions: 9.5% have a G-2 value (5.3% of total expenditure), 37.3% have a G-1 value (47.7% of expenditure) and 53.2% have a G-0 value (47.0% of expenditure).

On the basis of this inventory, **50 representative interventions were selected** for more detailed analysis. Among the 50 interventions - situated in five countries: Benin,

Bolivia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Morocco and Vietnam - 35 were the object of field visits. The 15 others - situated in the Palestinian Territories, Niger, Rwanda and Peru, and dealing with other forms of support (for example, worldwide thematic programmes) - were analysed by means of an in-depth documentary study completed with a few interviews. For the 35 interventions, the entire intervention cycle was analysed, taking account also of the wider context (policy dialogue with the partner country, policy dialogue between indirect development actors and the DGD and between indirect actors and their partners in the South, etc.).

The evaluation, as is the case with many exercises of this kind, was faced with several challenges and methodological limits resulting in a need to find the right balance between the required evaluation rigor and the resources available.

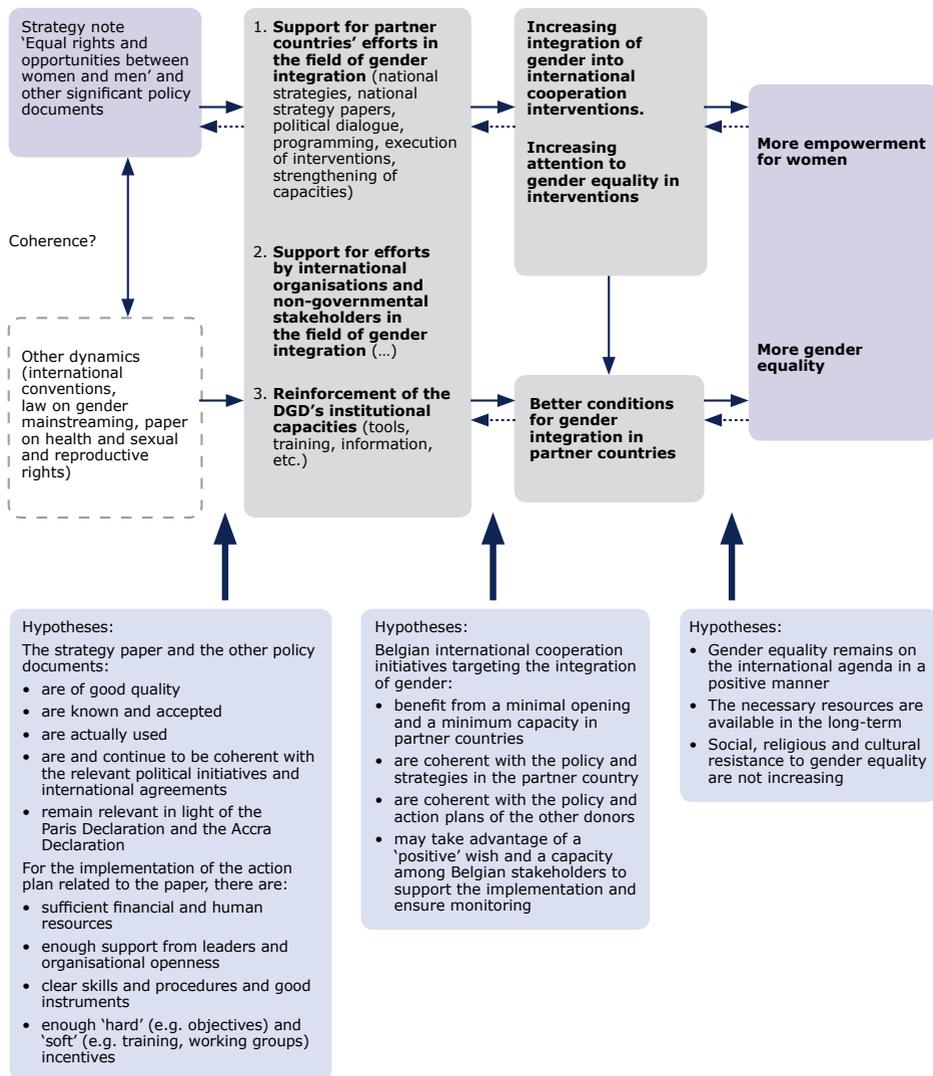


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Theory of change

Starting from the 2002 strategy paper 'Equal rights and opportunities between women and men', the evaluators drew up a 'Theory of Change' which has served as a basis for the development of an evaluation framework :

Figure 1 Schematic representation of the Theory of Change in the field of 'gender and development'.



Evaluation framework

The evaluation framework comprised eight evaluation questions. These questions were completed by judgement criteria and indicators. The evaluators also drew up a series of explanatory questions that helped to detect the underlying factors behind certain findings. Indeed, many of these 'explanatory questions' could be linked with the hypotheses presented in the theory of change diagram.

Evaluation question 1:

To what extent has the strategy note been relevant, in particular in view of developments in the international context?

Evaluation question 2:

To what extent has Belgian cooperation integrated gender in a coherent manner?

Evaluation question 3:

To what extent and with what results has the Directorate General for Development Cooperation integrated gender at all levels of cooperation, thereby applying the action plan of the strategy paper "Equal rights and opportunities between women and men"?

Evaluation question 4:

To what extent has Belgian assistance to centralised and decentralised public institutions, grassroots civil society organisations, professional organisations, and the private sector contributed to women's empowerment (including to achieving MDG 3) and to the reduction and prevention of violence against women?

Evaluation question 5:

To what extent did Belgian cooperation show enough commitment to implement the strategy paper "Equal rights and opportunities between women and men" and the Gender and Development (GAD) strategy in general, and did it use its resources efficiently?

Evaluation question 6:

To what extent are the effects of the results of Belgian cooperation in the GAD field sustainable?

Evaluation question 7:

To what extent has the National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 proved to be effective?

Evaluation question 8:

What are the unexpected long-term results of interventions of Belgian ODA focusing on gender equality (Gender Policy Marker values 1 and 2)?

Conclusions

The analysis reveals that **many, often commendable, initiatives actually produced hardly any results in terms of improving gender equality.** Despite the existence of an adequate legal and policy framework, the absence of a strong social support basis - here and in the South - represents a serious obstacle to efforts pursuing gender equality. Many initiatives met with explicit and implicit resistance within development organisations, which reflect the society to which they belong. This observation applies at all levels and all echelons of Belgian development cooperation. In order to fight this resistance effectively, a series of initial conditions must be fulfilled (sufficient knowledge and acceptance of the strategy paper, sufficient resources, sufficient incentives, clear support from the management), which is only sporadically the case in Belgian cooperation. Regardless of their intrinsic qualities and their relevance, the many instruments, procedures, tools, etc. which have been developed may only lead to sustainable results if they can be deployed in an environment which wishes to make gender equality a policy priority.

Another obstacle concerns **the difficulty of understanding the concept of 'gender mainstreaming'.** Often, the Gender and Development (GAD) strategies developed by the Belgian cooperation are actually reduced to empty shells resulting in an "evaporation" or "dilution" of ideas. They have no or little effect on gender

inequalities in the South. One striking example of this "dilution of ideas" is considering gender as a cross-cutting theme. When considering gender in this manner, it is automatically isolated and dissociated from its final goal, gender equality and equity. In such cases, one easily forgets that '*gender mainstreaming*' is neither a simple theme nor a sector, but a holistic approach designed to make profound and lasting changes in gender relations.

When considered as a whole, Belgian cooperation, to date, has not contributed sufficiently to gender equality, this does not mean that there has not been any progress in the field. **The results of projects in sectors such as education, health and economic development appear, in some cases, to have effects on gender equality,** although there is no question of '*gender mainstreaming*'. Projects in these fields, which are considered effective in technical terms, often contribute to meeting some of women's and girls' practical needs. Economic projects appear to be best suited to inducing changes in gender relations. Thanks to these activities, women who succeed in increasing their production and/or their revenue often escape the context in which they found themselves beforehand - voluntarily or not. Their economic success triggers a situation in which various elements interact: greater self-confidence and self-image, stronger position in the household and the community, greater power of initiative. These factors often lead



Equateur, Diaconia ©Sophie Charlier

to the development of talents that so far had remained unexploited. But, the fact that insufficient attention is paid to gender in this type of projects often creates additional challenges, such as an increase in women's workload.

However, many projects do not take advantage of the opportunity offered to them **to more in general link the satisfaction of practical needs to a strategic agenda devoted to changing gender relations.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations

The evaluation has formulated eight general recommendations that mainly concern the overall framework in which initiatives in the field of gender and 'gender mainstreaming' should be deployed. To a large extent, they apply to all the stakeholders concerned and will largely determine the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of more operational recommendations.

The recommendations, which may serve as a guideline for updating and adapting the strategy paper, concern:

1 *the need for a clear political and institutional commitment which is both pragmatic and ambitious.*

In this respect, Belgium will opt for well-delineated but feasible actions on an institutional level, potentially drawing inspiration from other small donor countries (such as Sweden) deemed, on an international level, to be the flag bearers in the field of the promotion of gender equality. This political and institutional commitment must be shared by all, at all levels within the organisations concerned, in such a way that each individual perceives gender equality as an intrinsic part of his attributions for which he assumes full responsibility. A modification of the law on development cooperation (implying that gender is no longer dealt with as a cross-cutting theme) could represent a strong and important political signal;

2 *the correction of existing misconceptions concerning 'gender mainstreaming'.*

In this regard, it is important that efforts in the field of 'mainstreaming' are clearly connected to the final goal of gender equality and 'empowerment' and are monitored and evaluated on that basis. In other terms, gender and 'gender mainstreaming' cannot be dissociated from the final goal, namely gender equality, and must, therefore, be an integral part of the backbone of Belgian cooperation;

3 *the confirmation of the two-track approach already present in the strategy paper;*

namely specific actions focused as much on women as on men, combined with 'gender mainstreaming' as defined in recommendation 2). This approach must be an essential guideline for the development of concrete strategies, and must focus on finding complementarity and synergies while working out both tracks;



4 *the need to set clear priorities (at the level of the Belgian cooperation as a whole and/or by country) in the wider field of gender and 'gender mainstreaming'.*

This should help to guarantee greater depth and quality and give concrete content to responsibility (see recommendation 1);

5 *the need to understand the integration of gender as a two-track process of change.*

The first track deals with internal 'gender mainstreaming' at organisational level – which, if well implemented, may change the nature of the organisation. The second concerns the integration of gender into development policy, programmes and projects. This choice in favour of

a dual process of change has major implications in terms of staff training, management commitment and the way the commitment to gender is valued within the organisation;

6 *the need to pay greater attention, in a way that is structurally embedded into the organisation, to the prevention and fight against gender-based violence.*

In most partner countries, especially those with a low Human Development Index (HDI), gender-based violence is a major problem, although it largely remains unnoticed. This attention must be translated both into specialist projects and "traditional" cooperation, which often offers great potential in this field, as several case studies have shown;

7 *greater attention for initiatives which integrate men into interventions designed to promote greater gender equality.*

Men have actually to be integrated in all efforts towards gender equality. These interventions must, among others, pay special attention to the fight against gender stereotypes that affect the behaviour of men and women, and perpetuate attitude and

behaviour - mainly of men - which are, among other things, at the origin of existing inequalities between the sexes;

8 *a more explicit choice in favour of the use and support of local expertise in the field of gender* which is often relatively unknown but largely available in most partner countries.

Specific recommendations

The previous recommendations are completed by a few more operational recommendations concerning the following points:

9 *the integration of gender in the policy dialogue with partner countries and with the indirect partners of Belgian cooperation.*

It is important to gradually implement this integration, along with the implementation of the more general recommendations and the integration of gender into all aspects of the development chain.

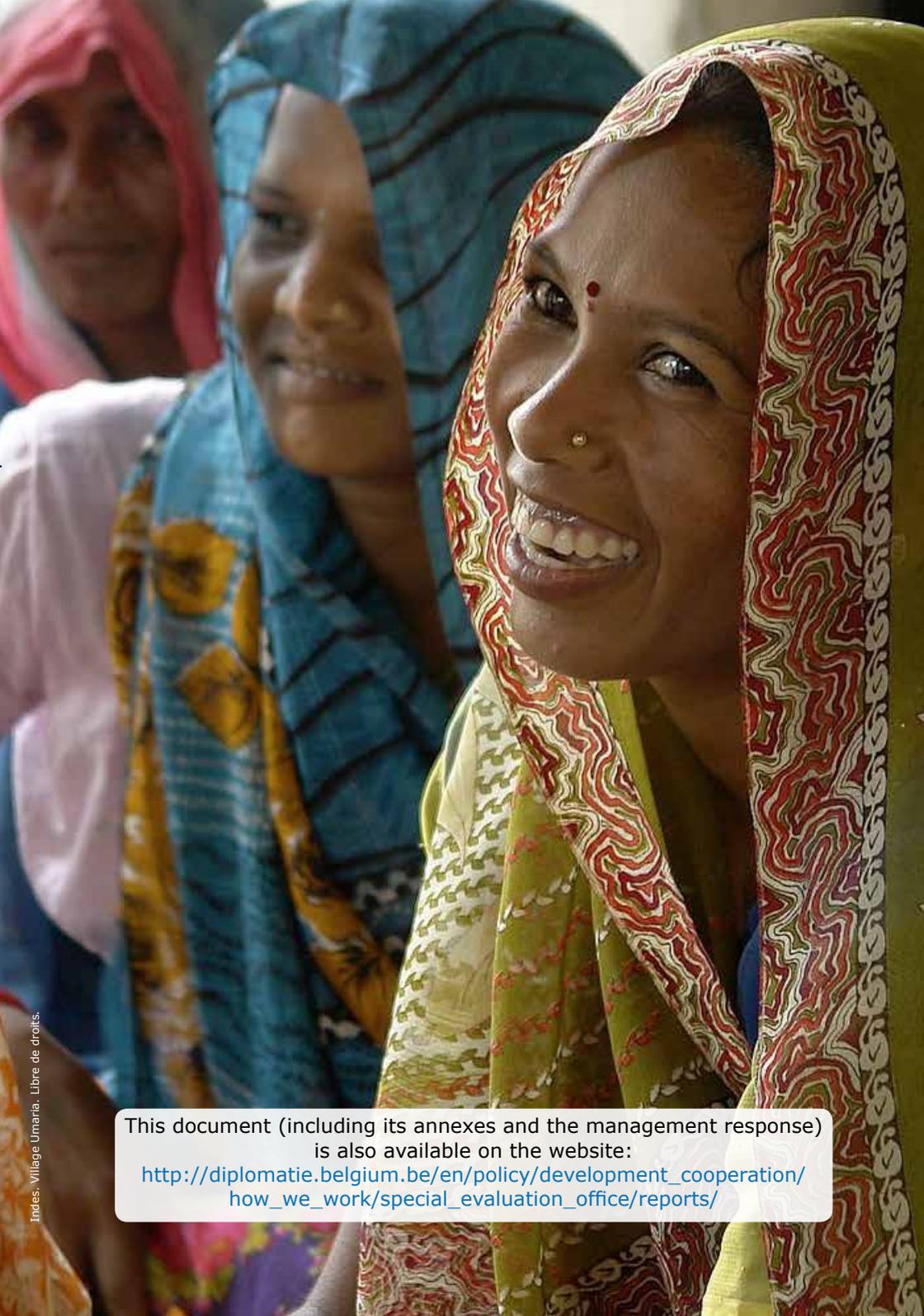
10 *adequate use of the 'gender policy marker' so that it provides correct information for both internal and external use.*

In this respect, one important initial step involves requesting the stakeholders concerned to select a gender marker for their interventions and to justify their choice;

11 *comprehensive integration of gender into the intervention cycle*, with a need for the DGD to accord greater weight to gender in its ex-ante evaluation of interventions (bilateral, multilateral, indirect);

12 *the adequate integration of gender into an effective approach focused on reaching development results.*

Therefore, such gender specific objectives should not be limited to integrating women into activities and guaranteeing their access to the benefits of interventions; ultimately, they aim to achieve qualitative changes (in particular in the attitude and behaviour of men and women, but also in terms of acquiring power on a personal and social level).



This document (including its annexes and the management response) is also available on the website:
http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/development_cooperation/how_we_work/special_evaluation_office/reports/



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