



GAP III Structured dialogue: Country level implementation plans: *Discussion with EU Delegations*

Online meeting held 9 July 2024
Report

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I. Executive Summary

As part of the EU's structured dialogue for the Gender Action Plan (GAP III), this online dialogue meeting was hosted to allow a discussion about the implementation of the GAP III at country level through the Country-Level Implementation Plans (CLIPs). More than 150 participants attended the meeting, including 95 representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) and associations of local authorities (ALAs), and representatives of 30 EU Delegations. Speakers included representatives from DG INTPA, EU Delegations, local authorities and CSOs. The discussion centred on the many challenges and external threats, including backlash and resistance to gender equality, that hamper the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. It also highlighted the importance of reinforcing efforts and working together, noting that leveraging opportunities and best practices could help harness the potential of GAP III.

In group discussions, participants had the opportunity to further exchange ideas and explore different angles and perspectives on the opportunities, challenges and lessons learned on collaborative work among EUDs, CSOs and LAs in GAP III/CLIP implementation at local level.

Key challenges identified:

- **Backlash and resistance to gender equality and women's rights** was noted as a global issue, with societal and political backlash posing significant hurdles to gender equality initiatives.
- **Shrinking space for CSOs and backlash on women's rights** take different shapes, including removing existing gender equality structures such as Gender Focal Points in municipalities or government agencies.
- EU Delegations face challenges in adequately focusing on GAP III/gender equality due to **the multiple responsibilities of gender focal points**. Gender focal points often have multiple roles, which can limit their ability to focus solely on gender issues. The complexity of organisational structures and procedures can be a significant barrier, and gender focal points often lack the authority to allocate resources or make significant changes independently.
- There is also **insufficient knowledge and skills** by EU staff **to effectively mainstream a gender perspective** into all phases of programming, necessitating increased capacity building and the development of gender-responsive leadership.
- The need for more collaborative **efforts to include diverse organizations in consultations**, particularly those from rural areas, and those facing discrimination, was emphasized to ensure broader inclusivity and thoroughly implement intersectional approach as mandated by GAP III.
- Local organizations often struggle with the **complex requirements to access EU funds**, a challenge recognized by both civil society and EU Delegations.

The main lessons learned:

- **Effective consultations with CSOs:** Combining in-person and online consultations can be effective, although internet connectivity can be an issue. Ensure diverse participation, by reaching out to lesser-known or remote organisations through existing partners, networks, and other donors helps diversify participation. Utilising existing events and platforms to bring new organisations into the fold can be beneficial. And conducting consultations in local languages ensures better engagement and understanding.
- **Creating safe spaces:** Holding separate sessions for local CSOs, international NGOs, and donors encourages more open and honest communication. Ensuring safe environments for discussions helps participants speak more freely.
- **Integration into existing processes:** One significant lesson is the importance of integrating gender considerations into existing municipal processes rather than creating parallel ones. This approach ensures that municipalities, which often lack the capacity to handle multiple projects

simultaneously, can effectively incorporate gender and inclusivity without overburdening their systems.

- **Participatory approach and community involvement:** gender-inclusive urban planning **local ownership** Including women in the participatory processes, especially in urban planning and public space design, has been effective in creating spaces that meet the needs of the entire community. This inclusive approach ensures that the resulting public spaces are safer, more comfortable, and better utilised by everyone.
- **Data-driven policy and action:** The connection between gender-sensitive data collection and concrete actions on the ground has been crucial. Utilizing tools to map safety, green spaces, and climate vulnerabilities from a gender perspective has shown that data-driven policies can lead to more effective and inclusive public spaces. This approach helps in demonstrating the tangible benefits of involving women in the planning and design processes.
- **Critical role of women's funds:** Women's funds are essential in bridging grassroots movements with larger funding bodies, providing crucial financial and organisational support, especially in regions with limited resources. Women's funds excel in offering flexible grants and treating grantees as partners, which is vital for addressing the diverse and immediate needs of grassroots movements, especially during crises. Enhancing the transfer of knowledge and engagement between grassroots women's funds and larger funding bodies, like EU delegations, are essential for maximizing the impact of initiatives like GAP III.
- **EU responsiveness to civil society needs:** The EU programs are closely aligned with the interests and agendas of civil society. For example, when the EU managed to continue funding human rights organisations in Ethiopia in 2009 despite a new law that restricted foreign funding for CSOs.
- **Inclusivity and participation of local organisations:** Efforts have been made to include a diverse range of organisations, especially those from rural areas, in consultations and events. This inclusion helps local organisations connect with various donors, not just the EU, enhancing their opportunities for support and collaboration. Involving multiple stakeholders can amplify the impact of gender-responsive urban development projects.
- **Importance of gender-responsive urban planning through participatory approaches:** Inclusive urban development that considers the needs of women benefits everyone. Engaging women in urban planning and decision-making processes ensures that public spaces and policies are more inclusive and responsive to their needs. Public spaces that cater to women's needs enhance overall accessibility and usability. The presence of women in decision-making roles enhances the focus on gender equality and social inclusion.
- **Role of public space in social change:** Urban development projects that visibly change physical spaces can have a profound transformative impact on society. Public spaces are vital for community interaction, socialisation, and addressing societal issues. Ensuring these spaces are accessible and welcoming to women can foster discussions and solutions for systemic problems. This is particularly relevant in societies where women are socially isolated (e.g., moving to the husband's family after marriage), for whom public spaces provide essential venues for networking and mutual support, helping them to address systemic issues collectively.
- **For EUDs, supportive leadership is crucial, as well as having visibility:** Having supportive leadership at various levels (e.g., head of delegation, head of cooperation) facilitates the implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs. Training on **gender-responsive leadership** helps creating momentum for advancing gender equality and in activating gender mainstreaming mechanisms to thoroughly mainstream EU actions on the ground. Being present in decision-making spaces allows gender focal points to advocate effectively for gender equality. Ensuring that gender focal points are included in key discussions can lead to significant incremental changes.

II. Exchange on CLIP implementation in partnership with civil society and local authorities

a) Introduction

Chiara Adamo, Head of Unit, INTPA G.1 Gender equality, human rights and democratic governance, opened the meeting praising the high number of participants, as an indicator of gender equality and women's empowerment as a key area where institutions, civil society and local authorities are all committed to working together. GAP III is about promoting gender equality and a gender equal world, and the focus today is on engaging with civil society and local authorities, both at the global and local levels, highlighting the crucial role of gender focal points in this effort. These individuals balance multiple responsibilities and serve as key allies in implementing country-level plans. The meeting aims to address both opportunities and challenges at the country level, share good practices for partnerships, and advance the gender equality agenda.

The country-level implementation plans (CLIPs) were introduced to align EU political priorities with local contexts and ensure a coordinated approach with local partners. Approximately 130 CLIPs exist, with more than 50 recently updated. The plans are uploaded on the GAP III space on Capacity4Dev. GAP III has been extended until 2027, providing stability for implementing this action plan and to align it with the multi-annual financial framework.

Gianluca Azzoni, Team leader for policy dialogue and consultation, INTPA G.2 Local Authorities, Civil Society Organisations and Foundations, emphasised the importance of linking central policy dialogue with country-level work, specifically regarding country-level implementation plans (CLIPs). This work is part of broader efforts to engage with non-governmental stakeholders through EU Country Roadmaps for civil society engagement, which provide a framework for regular dialogue and coordinated action to strengthen independent and democratic civil society organisations (CSOs).

All EU partner countries have adopted these roadmaps, similar to CLIPs, often in collaboration with EU member states. Headquarters support EU delegations in these efforts and monitor progress through annual surveys. Recent survey results show a positive trend, with increased participation of gender and youth-focused CSOs, which made up almost one-third of total CSOs attending EU-organised events in 2023. Additionally, there is a notable increase in women's organisations making significant contributions to discussions, and a greater involvement of grassroots and community-based organisations, which comprised about 50% of the consulted CSOs in 2023. This indicates a strong focus on local context and gender initiatives, underscoring the EU's commitment as outlined in GAP III and the Youth Action Plan.

Alexandra Rosen, Senior Policy and Advocacy Adviser for Gender Equality, Concord Europe, outlined the organisation's work on sustainable development and international cooperation, specifically through its gender equality working group. Opportunities to discuss GAP III implementation as part of GAP III structured dialogue has proven to add value in gathering insights to advance gender equality in diverse local contexts and in recognising the efforts and challenging conditions of women's rights organisations, feminist movements, and grassroots organisations. The commitment of EU delegation gender focal points to collaborate with civil society was recognised.

While GAP III has brought significant improvements, challenges remain, including funding cuts to EU aid budgets, integrating intersectional and gender-transformative approaches, and engaging with local civil society in restricted spaces. Looking ahead, stressing the need for gender equality to remain a top political priority in the EU's global engagements and not just a checkbox in projects. The Global Gateway strategy is a new opportunity to apply GAP III principles but also as a challenge. With GAP III ending in 2027, its achievements need to be built upon for the adoption of a more ambitious, feminist foreign policy by the EU.

b) Exchange on CLIP implementation in partnership with CS and LAs: Examples

Aleksandra Tor, Gender Focal Point, EUD Ethiopia, discussed how they consult civil society organisations (CSOs) and the challenges faced by gender focal points. Highlighting the difficulty in engaging with diverse and remote CSOs in large countries such as Ethiopia, often resulting in repetitive consultations with the same groups. To address this, they adopt hybrid consultation methods, utilise existing networks and events, and encourage connections through implementing partners and other donors. They also emphasise the importance of local languages in these consultations and the need for separate, safe spaces for CSOs to provide candid feedback without the presence of donors.

Challenges faced by gender focal points were pointed out, including their need to balance multiple roles, which can detract from their focus on gender issues. Mentioning the complex structure of the EU organisation, which makes the grant application and reporting processes difficult for CSOs. Additionally, decisions and budget allocations are often made above the delegation level, limiting the ability to address specific local needs directly. Despite these challenges, gender focal points are passionate about their work.

Saba Medhin, Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA), discussed the organisation's efforts to ensure gender equality in Ethiopia through advocacy, capacity building, networking, and monitoring government compliance. Since 2007, NEWA has collaborated with the EU delegation on various programs and engaged in discussions on governance and human rights. Overall, they recognise the EU's responsiveness to civil society needs, highlighting efforts to support local organisations and address challenges such as restrictive funding laws. EU's efforts in organizing inclusive events like the 16 Days of Activism were praised as well, which have allowed diverse and rural organisations to connect with donors and participate in meaningful discussions.

Still, challenges and recommendations for improving support for CSOs exist. First, the importance of making grant application processes more accessible to local organisations and providing continuous capacity-building support. Second, separating consultations with local CSOs, international NGOs, and donors can create safer spaces for open dialogue. Finally, EU and other donors should facilitate access to diversified resources and ensure local organisations lead their programs. Addressing these issues can help strengthen civil society's role in promoting governance, gender equality, and human rights, particularly in complex contexts like Ethiopia's federal system.

Eloísa Astudillo Fernández, EUD Nepal, explained that in Nepal significant efforts have been made to implement GAP III, with a focus on integrating gender perspectives into urban development projects. One key initiative involves collaborating with Cities Alliance to create inclusive urban spaces that cater to women's needs as designers, decision-makers, and participants. This approach aims to ensure that public spaces are gender-responsive, which generally benefits the broader community. The 2015 constitution of Nepal has been instrumental in increasing women's representation in local governance by mandating that either the mayor or deputy mayor must be a woman. Despite some setbacks in the second elections due to party coalitions, the initiative has substantially increased women's involvement in local government, enhancing participatory and gender-responsive governance.

The program targets municipalities with strong women's leadership and effective gender equality plans, currently working in six municipalities with the support of USAID. Urban planners, trained in gender equality, are embedded in these municipalities to ensure public spaces meet women's needs. Public spaces are critical for social interaction and societal change, providing women with platforms to discuss systemic issues and build networks. The project aims to empower women leaders and associations, facilitating tangible changes in public spaces, thereby promoting gender equality and improving community cohesion. Challenges faced by gender focal points in program management emphasizes the importance of their involvement in decision-making processes to drive meaningful change.

Giulia Maci, from Cities Alliance, explained that they are a global partnership focused on inclusive and sustainable urban development, with gender equality at its core. In Nepal, their "Cities for Women" programme exemplifies this commitment, addressing three main components: national policy integration; local participatory processes; and knowledge exchange. At the national level, they work on incorporating gender indicators into urban policies, while locally, they integrate gender aspects into existing participatory processes in five to six cities, ensuring that women's needs are addressed in public spaces. The program emphasises climate resilience and aims to demonstrate that involving women in urban planning leads to more inclusive and effective public spaces.

Key elements of the program include integrating gender considerations into existing municipal processes, connecting policy with gender-sensitive data collection, and co-funding mechanisms to ensure municipal ownership. They visualise data on public spaces, safety, and climate vulnerability to make gender-inclusive urban planning more tangible. The initiative involves municipalities co-funding public space projects, fostering local ownership and capacity development. Over three years, the program aims to enable municipalities to independently prioritise and implement gender-responsive public spaces, with the hope of replication in other cities. Additionally, the program promotes knowledge exchange, sharing Nepal's experiences with other regions to foster global learning and collaboration.

In summary, the "Cities for Women" program in Nepal demonstrates that integrating gender considerations into existing municipal processes, using data-driven approaches, fostering local ownership, engaging communities, and promoting knowledge exchange are critical for creating inclusive and sustainable urban environments.

Gohar Shahnazaryan, from Women's Fund Armenia, which is part of the European chapter of Prospera, emphasised the crucial role of women's and feminist funds in connecting grassroots movements with larger funding initiatives like GAP III. Prospera is an international network of 47 women's and feminist funds, predominantly based in the Global South and East, with a mission to support movements led by women, girls, trans, and non-binary individuals. Despite raising significant funds, these organisations face challenges in meeting the overwhelming demand, with only a fraction of applications being supported. Women's funds are key in providing flexible grants and core support, treating grantees as partners, and focusing on GAP III priorities, such as combating gender-based violence, promoting sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), and integrating gender and climate justice.

Additionally, these funds are vital in times of crises, offering quick mobilisation and support for marginalised communities facing multiple discriminations. They also engage in advocacy, promote participatory grant-making, and work closely with EU delegations to introduce the challenges and needs of feminist movements. However, bureaucratic procedures and insufficient connections with gender focal points hinder their efforts. The presentation stressed the importance of funding the ecosystem through GAP III to achieve long-term change, enhance organisational strength, and ensure continuous support for women's organisations. There was a call for improved knowledge transfer and engagement of national grassroots women's funds in the design and implementation of GAP III.

Tito Contreras, Gender Focal Point, EUD Colombia, addressed three areas: experiences with civil society consultations; good practices; and challenges in implementing the GAP III. Highlights included the importance of building strong relationships with civil society, particularly with women's movements, to foster trust and effective engagement. This engagement includes regular interaction with women's organisations and participation in their events, which has improved dialogue and decision-making on gender gap priorities in Colombia. The consultation process was streamlined to avoid multiple meetings, integrating gender aspects into broader civil society discussions and ensuring women's specific views were incorporated.

Influencing public policies at the territorial level, particularly through grassroots organisations and the European Forum for Peace is essential. Efforts were made to ensure women could actively participate in

public policy design and decision-making processes. This involved training public servants to apply gender lenses and supporting community-based organisations in advocating for gender-inclusive policies. The approach combined both preparing public servants and empowering women's organisations to achieve sustainable outcomes. Despite successes, challenges remain, particularly in maintaining political will and achieving high-level institutional support. The creation of the Ministry of Equality in Colombia is seen as both an opportunity and a challenge in this context.

Recurring challenges include ensuring gender analysis and integration of gender indicators in policy actions. There is a need for gender-transformative actions rather than mere gender mainstreaming. It would be necessary to integrate the Global Gateway narrative into gender gap efforts, especially as new sectors like infrastructure and energy become crucial. While the focus has been strong on women, peace, and security, there is a recognised gap in technical expertise on gender and environment issues, emphasizing the need for further development in understanding and integrating climate change and renewable energy considerations into gender gap discussions.

III. Continuous exchange in smaller groups

After the presentations, participants were divided in five groups to allow for a more in-depth exchange around the question: How can EUDs and CSOs and LAs work together in GAP III/CLIP implementation at local level?

The following is a summary of the discussions in all groups, also reflected in the Miro board in the Annex.

Opportunities:

Efforts to promote gender equality encompass a diverse range of strategies across different regions and sectors. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for example, there is a focused initiative on strengthening partnerships with civil society organisations. These collaborations aim to amplify grassroots voices and enhance community-driven solutions to gender inequality.

Simultaneously, initiatives are underway to secure European Union funds specifically directed through a gender lens, prioritizing support for women-led startups. This financial support not only bolsters economic opportunities but also fosters a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

In the realm of advocacy and community engagement, there is a strategic collaboration with faith-based organisations, leveraging their influence to advance gender justice agendas. This partnership extends to engaging male relatives as allies in promoting gender equality, recognizing their pivotal role in shifting societal norms and behaviours.

Furthermore, efforts are directed at fostering generational change by involving younger demographics to challenge and reshape existing gender stereotypes. Initiatives include educational campaigns and youth-focused programs designed to cultivate a more equitable outlook from an early age.

Engaging civil society remains fundamental, with a proactive approach through clear communication channels. This ensures effective dialogue and collaboration, utilising platforms such as the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence to forge new partnerships and amplify advocacy efforts.

In North Macedonia, strategic utilisation of the enlargement instrument is pivotal in advancing gender equality goals. This includes leveraging resources and frameworks to support local authorities in implementing Gender Action Plan III, thereby institutionalising gender mainstreaming practices.

Moreover, partnership opportunities are actively pursued across various sectors to promote comprehensive gender equality agendas. This includes capacity-building platforms focused on gender issues and integrating gender perspectives into broader international development projects through initiatives like the Global Gateway program.

Challenges:

Navigating the landscape of gender equality initiatives presents several complex challenges across different regions. In many contexts, religious or faith-based organisations often prove difficult to engage effectively on issues of gender equality, creating barriers to fostering inclusive dialogue and collaboration. This challenge is compounded by political dynamics in places like Turkey, where gender mainstreaming efforts face significant resistance and hurdles due to political instability and shifting priorities.

Meanwhile, countries such as Malaysia experience strong pushback against gender equality, highlighting entrenched societal norms and systemic barriers that hinder progress. These challenges are further exacerbated by limited engagement of civil society organisations (CSOs) outside major cities, which restricts the reach and impact of gender equality initiatives, particularly in rural and marginalised communities.

In Mexico, despite increasing awareness, overwhelming workloads frequently impede meaningful dialogue on crucial issues such as sexual and reproductive rights. This issue is exacerbated by coordination challenges between LA and CSOs, impacting the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at addressing gender disparities and promoting women's rights.

Moreover, funding remains a persistent obstacle across regions, with difficulties in accessing funds for gender-specific projects and feminist organisations facing competition for leadership and co-financing requirements. This uneven playing field in accessing project funding further hampers the scaling up of successful initiatives beyond local levels and integrating gender transformative principles into broader human development agendas, such as the Global Gateway initiative.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires comprehensive strategies that prioritise inclusive engagement, address political and societal resistance, enhance coordination among stakeholders, and secure sustainable funding mechanisms. By navigating these complexities with strategic alliances and concerted efforts, progress towards gender equality can be advanced, ensuring no one is left behind in the pursuit of equal rights and opportunities worldwide.

Lessons Learned:

The lessons learned emphasise the critical role of inclusive consultations and partnerships in effectively implementing initiatives. This involves engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including diverse civil society organisations, to ensure that perspectives are integrated from the outset. Proactive engagement is stressed over reactive approaches, highlighting the need for continuous dialogue and responsiveness to community needs and dynamics.

Transparency in promoting CLIPs is crucial, underscoring the importance of clear and accessible planning frameworks that involve both formal consultation mechanisms and informal contacts. Advocating for dedicated financing instruments for women is identified as essential to address gender disparities effectively.

Engagement with faith-based organisations is highlighted as a strategy to tackle challenges such as polarisation and fundamentalism, promoting dialogue and understanding. Learning from successful practices like the 16 Days of Activism fosters the sharing of effective initiatives, while recognising the transformative potential of local authorities in driving gender equality projects.

Finally, the importance of advocacy projects is underscored for influencing policy at all levels, ensuring that gender equality goals are integrated into broader policy frameworks effectively. These lessons collectively emphasise the necessity of inclusive, proactive, and transparent approaches to achieve sustainable gender equality outcomes.

IV. Closing

In the closing remarks, **Lina Andéer**, Focal point for GAP III Structured Dialogue, INTPA G.1 Gender equality, human rights and democratic governance, emphasised the positive outcomes of the dialogue, highlighting the fruitful discussions that brought forward significant issues. Expressing satisfaction with the engagement among delegations, civil society organisations (CSOs), and local authorities, which was a primary goal of the session.

Participants were thanked for their contributions and looked forward to translating the discussions into actionable priorities to effect positive change together. INTPA is committed to following up the insights, continuing the dialogue, and encouraging ongoing feedback and collaboration.

V. Annex: Miro board from group discussions

How can EUDs, CSOs, and LAs work together in GAP III/CLIP implementation through regular, structured dialogue at the local level? Challenges, opportunities and lessons learned

Challenges



Opportunities



Lessons learned

