



Angelina Heerens/Foto:L.Acedo

"It's time for men to realize that they form part of gender issues..."

Angelina Heerens works at the EuropeAid Co-operation office in the European Commission. She has extensive experience in women projects in the rural world and in gender equality issues. She was born in Indonesia, speaks six languages and has worked in Spain for two years. She assures that gender equality is a matter of global concern.

Q. What are your duties in EuropeAid?

A. EuropeAid is like a family, it is quite a complex network, because we have many Directorates Generals and one of them is the DG of Development. We are part of the RELEX family which means, External Relations and it helps third countries. In this context, we are working for countries which need poverty to be eradicated, that is our main objective. I am working in a thematic unit where we try to integrate gender issues with all the activities.

Q. Have you worked with gender projects before?

A. Yes, during the period I worked for the DG of Agriculture. At the beginning I was in charge of projects concerning women in the rural world in all Member States but then it was all reorganised and divided into geographical units and I joined the Spanish one. So it was then when I started to become involved in gender projects. I was in charge of the structural funds projects for five autonomous regions in Spain. I was responsible for Andalusia, Madrid, Castilla la Mancha, Asturias and Cantabria. I worked for four years in order to create the multiannual program 2000-2006. Nowadays each Member State knows the obstacles to achieve gender equality better than anyone else and that is why I try to attend meetings like this one in Thessaloniki where networking is promoted because it allows

me to follow gender issues in a special way.

Q. Which is the most important thing concerning work methodology in a project like this one in order to be most effective?

A. Networking is the most important thing. I have been very pleased to see that in this meeting more than in any other, there was a clear teamworking spirit. This is very important and that is why from the European Commission we always insist on that. Here in Thessaloniki, we have been able to see that there is not only national networking but also across frontiers and that structural funds are helping very much to carry out this process. I have checked that the situation is getting better and thanks to projects like this one you are working on to overcome gender stereotypes in the labour and entrepreneurship field, the situation is making progress step by step.

Q. Due to the recent incorporation of the new Member States, they have to make a great effort to reach the level of the old Member States. Does the European Union offer any help concerning gender equality to implement this harmonization?

Gender issues are still new. We have been promoting and financing projects for some years now. Furthermore, we have just launched a training program. This program is accessible for all European officers and

delegations, whether governmental or not, and NGO's and it is designed to explain the guidelines to integrate gender equality actions in every aspect of labour and family life. We have also improved and extended our webpage adding some practical information.

Q. Are these projects special challenges being a woman working in the European Union?

A. I have been working for many years in these projects and I am very aware of gender equality issues. I am very glad to find that there are people like this in Thessaloniki or like my partners in Guatemala who are very much involved to carry out their projects. What we must achieve is men getting involved with these issues and working together with women for the same objective. The gender concept is still based on traditional stereotypes. Men have always had the privilege not having to realize that they are form part of gender issues. Women, as the main victims of prejudices, who have made gender issues visible and now I think it is time for men to get together, promote themselves and work for young people and even children to become part of gender issues.

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