

POLICY BRIEF | 2010

GENDER MAINSTREAMING



ON TRACK WITH GENDER – TAKING STOCK PHASE



Almost 15 years ago, governments committed themselves to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). This was to be realised through gender mainstreaming. Fifteen years later, the results of gender mainstreaming seem to be disappointing. However, a comprehensive and systematic study on the possible causes of and solutions for this limited success was lacking. This “Taking Stock” exercise aims to shed light on the current gender mainstreaming policies and practices and provides recommendations for future interventions in this field.

In the next phase of the On Track with Gender Trajectory, dialogue with non-gender experts in Dutch organisations will take place. This Policy Brief is intended to support that dialogue by presenting the main outcomes of the Taking Stock exercise and translate them into practical recommendations to enhance gender mainstreaming in development organisations and processes.

The On Track with Gender Trajectory is an initiative of CIDIN, Hivos, Oxfam Novib and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Trajectory started in July 2008 and is supported by the Development Policy Review Network as one of the three-year processes aiming at intersectional cooperation and policy review. On Track with Gender covers two stages. The first stage was devoted to ‘Taking Stock’: a review of what has been done so far with regard to gender equality and gender mainstreaming at the Ministry, Dutch NGOs and universities. It sought to establish what policies and strategies are being pursued and what can be learnt. This Policy Brief is based on analyses of papers and discussions during the Taking Stock meetings. For more details about this trajectory and future activities, see www.ontrackwithgender.nl.

In the Taking Stock phase, five papers have been written:

1. **Nathalie Holvoet and Liesbeth Inberg** Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action through a gender lens: an international perspective and the case of the Dutch Development Cooperation.
2. **Conny Roggeband** No instant success... Assessing gender mainstreaming evaluations.
3. **Anouka van Eerdewijk** Energies and (dis)connections: The practice of gender mainstreaming in Dutch development cooperation.
4. **Linda Mans** “You shouldn't be too radical”: Mapping gender and development studies in Dutch academia.
5. **Tine Davids, Francien van Driel, Franny Parren** Gender mainstreaming: driving on square wheels. Theoretical review and reflections.

1. Maintain dual approach

One of the most important elements of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 was the need to pursue a dual approach to achieving gender equality and empowerment of women. This implies, on the one hand, that specific measures must target women's empowerment and gender equality – the stand-alone track – and, on the other hand, that gender equality needs to be integrated as the cross-cutting issue into all policies, programmes and budgetary decisions – the gender mainstreaming track. This second track was comparatively new at the time of the Beijing Declaration and received far more attention in the years that followed.

Over the past 15 years the emphasis on the new track of gender mainstreaming led to ‘evaporation’ and ‘away-streaming’ of the objectives of achieving gender equality and of empowerment of women. The neglect of the stand-alone track was instrumental to the weakening of mobilising structures such as gender-sensitive social movements and women's rights organisations. These mobilising structures are, however, indispensable to keeping gender equality, women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming high on the agenda. The result of this backlash was that little progress was achieved with regard to reducing gender inequalities. Another consequence of the neglect of the stand-alone strategy was the depoliticising of gender mainstreaming: gender efficiency arguments were emphasised, and the connection with social change got lost (see below in this Policy Brief).

A number of critical evaluation studies of governmental and NGO donor agencies and a successful lobby comprised of the few remaining mobilising forces have led to renewed commitment and underlined the indispensable role of the stand-alone strategy. Examples are the launch of the MDG3 fund by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other support to women's rights organisations by other donor countries and INGOs.

Recommendations:

- Maintain the dual approach and include a stand-alone track.
- Ensure sufficient budget and resources, knowledge and expertise, staff and programmes for the stand-alone strategy at **all different levels in the policy chain**. This means (1) supporting women's rights organisations, gender expertise centres, gender and/or women's departments, and (2) creating or maintaining these departments and gender focal points and the like in the internal organisation of development agencies and ministries.
- The role and place of gender units and gender experts within the organisation needs consideration: clarity is needed on the mandate and it is important to be able to report directly to the top executive. Ensure that organisational bureaucracy does not frustrate this open channel of communication between the gender unit and senior management.

2. Involve and consult thematic women's organisations and feminist specialists

Mobilising structures are not only needed in a general sense. Women's rights organisations and women's departments that operate in a specific policy area (e.g. democratisation, value chains, HIV/AIDS), and gender centres that have expertise on specific topics (that is, thematic gender expertise), play a crucial role in mainstreaming practices. For some thematic fields or policy areas it might be more difficult to find such organisations and/or experts, but not impossible. If this is the case, commissioning studies to develop and expand knowledge and expertise is an important step forward. Persons and organisations from different countries and regions can learn from each other.

Women's organisations, feminist activists, and specialised gender experts and researchers are active in **all thematic fields and disciplines** in the Global North and the Global South. The gender equality agenda is not something Western and donor-driven; women's and gender studies are firmly rooted in the Global South, and a great number of Southern women's organisations and feminist activists and academics exist across all fields. Such organisations in both the Global South and Global North should be part of the network of thematic experts and programme officers rather than confined to their respective gender units or internal gender experts. Tapping into specialised women's organisations and gender expertise centres will enhance the general knowledge base of non-gender experts.

Recommendations:

- Provide funding and resources from thematic programmes for thematic women's organisations and thematic gender expertise centres.

- Commission studies to develop and expand thematic gender knowledge and expertise.
- Include general and thematic women's rights organisations and expertise centres in the civil society consultation processes in all policy areas.
- Include both thematic and general women's rights organisations and expertise centres in the network of non-gender experts.

3. Define and translate gender mainstreaming

Some organisations use other words for gender mainstreaming, like institutionalising gender or integrating gender. The reason for this rephrasing is often to avoid the association with 'away-streaming'. Most development cooperation institutions base the definition of gender mainstreaming (or other wordings) on the definition established by UN ECOSOC and the Council of Europe (see text box). Both definitions are useful but insufficient to apply gender mainstreaming in practice: translation into the processes of organisation is needed.

DEFINITIONS

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (UN ECOSOC 1997)

Gender mainstreaming is the reorganization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making. (Council of Europe 1998)

Many development organisations have formulated gender objectives as part of the objectives and missions in their organisational policy statements. This commitment by organisation leaders is a precondition for success and an important step forward. Moreover, the importance and necessity of addressing gender is often agreed upon throughout all levels of an organisation. In addition, it is generally acknowledged within an organisation that gender mainstreaming is the responsibility of all staff. Practice, however, reveals that gender is **not integrated into all policy areas** and that gender is **not integrally addressed at all policy levels**. Moreover, non-gender staff lacks sufficient time or human and financial resources to implement gender mainstreaming.

The weakest link in gender mainstreaming practices lies at the level of thematic, sectoral or departmental programmes, where strategic analysis and the prioritisation of gender is often weak. At the same time individual staff members at implementation level are confronted with a (political) gender agenda, which has to be integrated into their daily work. The weak gender priorities at programme level frustrate the general acceptance of gender equality objectives because they do not enable and support the implementation of gender mainstream instruments. Another problem at the implementation level is the emphasis on quantitative aspects in gender mainstreaming instruments. Neither gender nor non-gender staff is satisfied with limiting gender issues to counting women.

An important step forward is to improve the link between gender equality priorities and other development goals by rethinking that link at the in-between policy level of thematic, sectoral and departmental programmes. By doing so new connections between the different objectives and bodies of knowledge and experience can be made and negotiated. In that way general gender objectives can be translated into strategic gender issues in the thematic domains, and qualitative elements of women's equality can be addressed more fruitfully. In this rethinking process the role of outside connectors could be pivotal, as they can bring in the required thematic gender expertise that neither the thematic staff possesses nor the gender staff can offer on all policy areas.

Recommendations:

- Translate the definition of gender mainstreaming into the strategic, analytical and administrative processes of the own organisation.
- Strengthen gender analysis at the programme level and formulate (thematic) qualitative gender priorities.
- Rethink the link between gender equality priorities and other development issues at the level of thematic, sectoral and departmental programmes and translate it into strategic gender issues. Involve outside connectors in this process.
- Formulate and implement gender specific activities and projects and support gender specific thematic partner-organisations in all departments and programmes (see above under 2).

4. Use targets, but combine flexibility with accountability

The use of input and outreach targets and gender scans fits the broader trend in development cooperation towards more emphasis on accountability and results-based orientation. Setting concrete targets and monitoring is integral to this orientation, thus there is no reason to resist doing so with respect to gender mainstreaming. However, input and/or

outreach targets have led to mixed results: they contribute to signalling gender concerns in all activities, but they can disguise the necessity of formulating qualitative (thematic) gender priorities. Monitoring instruments and checklists are valuable to the implementation of gender mainstreaming, but when reduced to numbers and figures, they can miss the point. Mere quantitative definitions in combination with monitoring on a yearly basis can lead to some non-gender staff feeling that they are being subjected to the 'gender police'.

DEFINITIONS

Input targets establish the percentage of the organisation's budget to be spent on gender, in the stand-alone track and/or the mainstreaming track.

Outreach targets usually define what percentage of the beneficiaries should be women.

Gender scans are tools used to compile a gender assessment, usually of partner organizations, and can be used as one of the overall organizational assessment instruments.

Energies would be better spent on combining quantitative and qualitative aspects of empowering women and gender equality (see under 3). In addition, flexibility should be emphasised when setting and monitoring targets. It is not only important to define and monitor targets, but also introduce 'motivate and explain why (not)' procedures. This implies, for instance, demanding explanations for why targets are not being met, and also provides motivation and induces reflection on how success can be achieved. What has been undertaken? Why has it worked, or why not? In this way, monitoring and evaluation can amount to more than a mere counting, and, more important, concentrate attention on desired gender results (in terms of gender output, outreach, outcome and impact).

Gender assessment tools and targets are necessary for keeping gender visible and for looking at partner organisations in a systematic way. Combining this with a gender follow up in the case of a partner's rather weak assessment is necessary to improve gender performance (for instance, via connecting to women's organisations, gender awareness training and/or hiring external gender expertise). Moreover, the tools and targets need not only apply to the organisation, but also to the programmes. In the latter case, the bottom-line assessment is whether the programme can influence the position of women negatively – a situation that should be avoided in all cases. This minimum requirement can be expected of all partners.

Recommendations:

- Develop monitoring instruments and checklists that address quantitative and qualitative (input and/or outreach) targets.
- Introduce 'motivate and explain why (not)' procedures.

- Accept that counting is not the only way of accounting for gender equality goals.
- Turn attention towards and monitor gender outputs, outcomes, outreach and impacts, rather than inputs alone.

5. Human rights discourse AND gender efficiency arguments

The rationale for gender mainstreaming is often justified by 'business case' arguments of effectiveness and efficiency. Empirical evidence supports such claims. These 'business case arguments' help to convince hardliners of the benefits of gender mainstreaming. However, the emphasis on the track of gender mainstreaming (at the expense of the stand-alone track; see section 1) combined with the apolitical and technical approach to implementation is responsible for the disappointingly slow progress on reducing gender inequality. Too much emphasis on effectiveness and efficiency leads to the dilution of the main goal of gender mainstreaming, namely promoting gender equality, which is basically a human rights issue.

Gender mainstreaming implies that it is not enough to add gender equality goals to other development objectives. Both gender equality and development essentially imply transformation and social change. The demand for effectiveness and efficiency has taken shape in the Paris Declaration (PD) and the Accra Agenda for Action. The changing structure of aid offers opportunities and poses potential threats. International donors who have signed CEDAW, the Beijing Platform of Action and the Millennium Declaration have declared gender equality promotion as essential. The Paris principles of accountability and results-orientation hence offer opportunities to achieve equality and empowerment objectives. Results-orientation should not be misconceived as 'management by results'; rather, it means 'management for results', in this case for gender equality impacts.

The changing relations and roles in the new aid structure call for a rethinking of key entry points to ensure that the gender equality agenda is addressed and translated into action. With more emphasis on ownership, harmonisation and alignment, the substantial integration of gender in the formulation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and in the cooperation between donors becomes increasingly important. Parallel processes of ownership and harmonisation are taking place in the NGO sector, for instance, in the programmatic, rather than project-oriented, approach. Involving women's organisations and gender expertise in multi-stakeholder processes and interorganisational programmes will be essential.

Recommendations:

- Successful implementation requires a dual track of business case arguments and social justice arguments.
- Understand result orientation as 'management for results' rather than 'management by results'. This is even more important during the evaluation phase, to ensure that gender mainstreaming passes beyond 'counting bodies' and measuring economic efficiency.
- Identify key entry points for introducing and safeguarding the gender equality agenda in the new aid structure, and new relations and ways of working in the international NGO sector.

6. Gender mainstreaming is not a value free exercise

Gender mainstreaming cannot be applied in a neutral way. It cannot be implemented as a 'to do list' or as an 'add-women-and-stir' strategy, first of all because gender mainstreaming implies a change in existing policy processes and outcomes in order to correct the observed gender bias. Gender inequalities are not a coincidental by-product but caused by unequal power relations and unequal access to power. Second, gender is more than women. The power mechanisms that play a role in the perpetuation of gender inequalities are linked to other inequalities (such as ethnicity, class, age), and in particular to hetero-normativity.

Institutions such as development agencies, ministries and partner organisations do not operate in isolation from broader contexts and political processes. Institutions are not neutral entities, but themselves inherently gendered: they involve and reproduce gender inequalities and bias, and entail power relations. Consequently, without gender mainstreaming the work of staff in those organisations may (re-)produce gender inequalities, as the workings of gender are not necessarily recognised by staff responsible for gender mainstreaming. External actors, including women's organisations and feminist activists, are well positioned to observe and question taken-for-granted gender-biased practices. Gender mainstreaming is meant to combat gender inequality, but this cannot be done without the participation of those suffering from it.

Recommendations:

- Use definitions and practices of gender mainstreaming that refer to the need to give voice to feminist movements and to those suffering from gender inequality.
- Translate gender mainstreaming into an approach that allows a wide range of inside and outside actors to question assumptions and objectives underlying proposed or existing policies and projects, rather than following an instrumental approach that emphasises monitoring instruments and checklists.

7. Assess and develop staff competences on gender

The necessity of addressing gender inequality is generally agreed upon throughout most development organisations, but the competences to actually achieve this goal need enhancement. However, because theoretical understandings have complicated feminist theorising, gender training is sometimes seen by practitioners 'in the field' as too abstract and too complicated. Given the general acceptance of gender equality objectives and policies, the need to be trained in the 'why' of gender is not as urgent as the need to be trained in the 'how'. This calls for gender trainings that are tailor-made and theme-specific – that is, targeted at particular policy areas.

It has become clear that gender studies have a rather isolated position in development studies in most universities. A degree in development studies does not necessarily mean that one is familiar with the concept of gender. Therefore, it seems imperative to ensure that new staff understand and accept basic notions and concepts with regard to gender inequality and gender mainstreaming. If necessary, the 'why' needs to be addressed in introduction programmes.

Gender mainstreaming can also be translated into the incentives organisations use in their staff-appraisal policies. Successful gender mainstreaming can and should be rewarded. In addition, open communication and cooperation are important for gender mainstreaming. In Dutch state bureaucracy, cooperation to jointly assess (potential) gender effects of policies and programmes has proven to create more awareness of the value of gender expertise and to overcome internal resistance.

Gender mainstreaming should address both the administrative and analytical aspects of the work of practitioners and policy makers. New knowledge management approaches, in which practice-based and tacit knowledge play a prominent role, could support the analytical 'what is in people's head' aspects, which are often core to what staff do in their work. This could be combined with creating teams of gender experts and non-gender experts and programme creators on specific topics. A 'triangle exercise of empowerment' involving internal and external experts, women's organisations and (wo)men in decision making might create a new stimulus for gender

mainstreaming as well. The Taking Stock exercise proved the additional value of stakeholders sharing experiences and exchanging strategies.

Recommendations:

- Invest in gender training that is tailor-made, theme-specific and focused on the 'how'.
- Integrate gender into staff introduction programmes.
- Integrate gender performance into staff appraisal policies.
- Form internal teams of gender and non-gender staff and encourage dialogue between gender and non-gender staff and external experts and women's organisations.
- Build new knowledge management approaches to support gender mainstreaming by addressing and tapping into tacit and practice-based knowledge.

In conclusion

This brief reflects critically on experiences with and insights into gender mainstreaming. The Taking Stock exercise makes it possible to build on available experience and knowledge in order to rethink and transform the current understanding and practice of gender mainstreaming. Dialogue and exchange between practitioners, policy makers, academics and activists are indispensable to improve the level of gender analysis and the formulation and implementation of gender (mainstreaming) policies. We will continue to shed light on gender mainstreaming and provide recommendations for future policies and practices. Join our efforts by contacting us.

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