Gender Mainstreaming in Theory and Practice

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Abstract

This article utilizes the findings of a recently completed, eight-country research project to visit some key issues in the theory and practice of gender mainstreaming. The research results indicate that gender mainstreaming is a diverse entity when looked at from a cross-national perspective but rather hollow when considered within the national setting. To the extent that there is a "common core" to gender mainstreaming in action across countries, it lies in the tendency to apply the approach in a technocratic way and to be non-systemic in compass. The argument is advanced that this is at least in part attributable to particularities in the development of main-streaming. The article suggests that gender mainstreaming is under-developed as a concept and identifies a need to elaborate further on some fundaments. In particular, the conceptualization of main-streaming needs to be rethought with special attention devoted to the understanding of the problematic of gender inequality that underlies it and the articulation of the relationship between gender mainstreaming and societal change.

Gender mainstreaming is one of those essentially technical concepts that has managed to achieve a relatively wide currency in a short time. It is a term that has no ready popular resonance and yet is now used quite comfortably in policy circles. One can speculate as to the reasons why gender mainstreaming seems to have captured the imagination of policy-makers. As the research reported here shows, it is seen as the most "modern" approach to gender equality. Another, not unrelated, factor is its wide promotion by international

organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), Council of Europe, and European Union (EU). For all that, it is a term that appears to travel well; yet, the character and robustness of gender mainstreaming are not beyond question. The theoretical literature has focused especially on gender mainstreaming as a political strategy. The particularity of the literature is striking in other ways as well. For example, the division is unclear between work that seeks to advance mainstreaming theoretically and that which focuses on its articulation as a policy approach. Indeed, the development of gender mainstreaming as a theoretical concept and its promotion as a model of policy-making have proceeded simultaneously, with some of the most significant conceptual elaboration of gender mainstreaming having been carried out under the auspices of policy organizations (especially the Council of Europe). Although this is not in itself necessarily problematic, it has served to influence which aspects of gender mainstreaming have been foregrounded for analysis and development. As it stands now, I consider it fair to say that gender mainstreaming is better developed as (policy) approach than concept.

A dialogue between research and theory is therefore timely. This piece seeks to engage in such a dialogue by utilizing some of the principal findings from a recent cross-national research project to address key issues in understanding gender mainstreaming. The critique to be developed is not one based solely on praxis. To an extent an exercise confronting theory with practice, the aim is to employ the findings to reflect on critical aspects of policy-making and to inquire further into the theoretical underpinnings of gender mainstreaming. In this endeavor two issues are seen to be critical: the problematic of gender mainstreaming (in the sense of the relationship between gender mainstreaming and gender inequality) and the relationship between gender mainstreaming and social change.

The empirical fundament of the piece comes from a recently concluded EU-funded study. Known by the acronym EQUAPOL, the research centered on case studies of how gender is being integrated into policy in the following eight countries: Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.[1] Running from 2002 to 2004, the project was oriented to cross-national comparison of how gender mainstreaming is conceived of by policy-makers and other stakeholders, the vision underlying gender mainstreaming as practiced for policy purposes, and the measures that are being taken to put gender mainstreaming in place in different national settings. In sum, the aim was to assess the progress and impact of gender mainstreaming in a range of national settings. The eight countries were selected for comparison mainly on criteria relating to their history of addressing gender

relations and their tradition of public policy-making. The original hypotheses of the study sought to establish whether and how the history and tradition of policy-making affected the approach taken to gender and the readiness to adopt gender mainstreaming (as the "latest" approach). In addition to a country's general approach, the study focused on progress in implementing gender mainstreaming in fields of social policy (especially income and education policies). The empirical data of the project mainly consisted of information obtained through interviews with policy-makers and key stakeholders. This piece concentrates selectively on the results. Rather than detailing institutions and practices in each national setting, it is overview and broad-brush in nature. Its main intent is to consider the extent to which key findings, especially those relating to cross-national variation, speak to how adequate gender mainstreaming is for the task at hand and how well it has been thought through and conceptualized.[2]

Main Trends in Relation to Gender Mainstreaming

The distinctiveness of the gender mainstreaming approach is that it seeks to institutionalize equality by embedding gender-sensitive practices and norms in the structures, processes, and environment of public policy. All the countries examined in the study have made a formal commitment to implement a gender mainstreaming approach to gender equality. However, to say this is to say relatively little because there is much cross-national variation.

Looking across the eight countries, a number of broad trends are to be observed.

One quite robust pattern is that countries are spreading responsibility for gender across units or departments. This can be read as a move toward gender mainstreaming and away from the former centralization of responsibility for gender and the practice of treating gender as a specialist field of policy (as implied by both equal treatment and positive action approaches). The shift is being effected in different ways or through different means. In some countries—Ireland and the United Kingdom—"decentralization" is being led by the revision of equal treatment legislation to involve all public bodies in antidiscrimination policy. The roots of gender inequality are in this view seen to lie in proscribable gender-based discriminatory practices. In these two countries antidiscrimination legislation does not exhaust the approach to gender—it is flanked by efforts to introduce gender mainstreaming (albeit on a selective basis) alongside an expansion of positive action measures. In other countries the preferred method of spreading responsibility is through the "transversal"

action plan on gender equality (Belgium, France, Greece, Lithuania, and Spain). Though it takes different forms and varies in how widely it extends and in its coherence as a plan or strategy (as against a collection of measures), the underlying strategy is for different ministries to be assigned or assume objectives and/or targets in relation to gender equality as part of an overall plan. In a third scenario the systematic use of gender analysis tools in the design and implementation of all policies is the signature piece of contemporary gender policy (Sweden). What this means in practice is that all public, private, and voluntary organizations (for example, ministries, public authorities, private firms, voluntary associations, and so on) become active participants in the attainment of gender equality in society and that they use dedicated means and methods for that purpose.

Another, and related, empirical trend is for national administrations to treat gender mainstreaming in an "à la carte" fashion. One of the most notable features of gender mainstreaming as it is developed in the literature is that it is grounded on the one hand in an analysis or vision of how gender inequality is perpetuated and on the other in a range of activities and/or tools to attack inequality. The latter include the production of gender disaggregated statistics, the use of gender impact assessment methods, and gender budgeting. This duality is not generally found in practice. Instead, what might be called a "funneling effect" occurs whereby agencies adopt some of the components of gender mainstreaming, especially tools or techniques, often in the absence of an overall framework. As it is practiced within and across national settings, then, the implementation of gender mainstreaming places an overarching, if not excessive, focus on policy-makers acquiring skills and implementing a set of methods and procedures. One could read this as a tendency toward "technocratization" of gender mainstreaming. This is certainly how it has been represented in the literature (Beveridge and Nott 2002; Yeandle, Booth, and Bennett 1998). To the extent that there is technocratization, gender mainstreaming resembles more a mode of delivery than a policy agenda or program in its own right. When selectivity reigns, the research reveals gender analysis of policies to be the most favored technique or policy practice. It, in turn, is understood in a technical way, mainly as gender impact assessment of policies or of budgets (that is, the scrutiny of policies for their gender friendliness). Sweden is the exception in that it has in place an entire "package" in the sense of an acceptance of the analysis of gender equality, as well as the integration of the full spectrum of relevant procedures for gender mainstreaming across levels of administration. The tendency towards selectivity has been noted by other research also (Council of Europe 2000).

A third trend concerns the increasingly complex mix of equality approaches to be found within and across countries. Rather than gender mainstreaming supplanting other approaches to gender equality, the evidence for each country is of a mix of approaches.[3] Complexity is increased by the fact that the three models—equal opportunities, positive action, and mainstreaming—are not separable in practice but are intertwined with and build on one another. One implication is that one cannot (and should not) study gender mainstreaming in isolation because it is in all countries predated by and grounded in an existing history and set of gender equality measures. Context matters. In addition, one can speak of a process of evolution in gender equality policy in Europe. This process involves not just the introduction of gender mainstreaming but ongoing significant changes in the equal treatment and positive action approaches. For example, in some countries positive action measures, which originally targeted women's employment and human capital endowments, are now being applied to what one might call the private sphere (such as domestic violence in Spain) and more widely in policy spheres beyond their traditional "home" in employment and education. Apart from this, the focus of positive action has broadened to include measures specifically targeted at men (for example, boys' educational development programs in Ireland) or at both women and men (gender stereotyping interventions in France, Greece, and Spain). Equal treatment legislation has also undergone important development. In many countries such legislation has been reformed to broaden both the concept of discrimination and the sphere of application (for example, public services and facilities, aside from education and the workplace). In effect, the three approaches should be seen as evolving simultaneously.

It should be noted that these findings challenge those parts of the literature that have tended to represent the three approaches rather schematically, in terms, for instance, of three generations. Rees (1998), for example, portrays the emergence and development of each of the approaches as confined to the specific circumstances and periods of time during which they became dominant in the countries of Europe and in EU policy. Her description of the approaches, then, draws on the main features characterizing each at a particular period of time. In effect, Rees "freezes" each approach and in so doing precludes the possibility that each may develop and change over time. For example, her characterization of equal treatment draws on the hallmark features of legal measures for gender equality introduced in the 1970s. These were rooted in the idea that women should not be discriminated against vis-à-vis men. Positive action, regarded as the main approach during the 1980s, is depicted as based on the recognition

that women and men are "different" in key respects and that such differences, as well as the failure to deal with them, have acted to disadvantage women. Gender mainstreaming, for its part, is represented as an approach that turns attention away from individuals and their rights (equal treatment) or deficiencies and disadvantages (positive action) toward those systems, processes, and norms that generate such inequalities. The findings of the study outlined here suggest that we should cast a cold eye on chronological periodization—approaches to gender equality are living entities, enduring over time and also subject to change and capable of showing dynamism. It is also worth underlining that the contemporary policy mix in relation to gender is more complex than that which prevailed in the past—no country has only one approach in operation. Rather, different approaches sit alongside each other, and approaches are being hybridized. Hence, the distinctions among different approaches are less clear-cut than one might assume. All of this speaks strongly against seeing approaches as fixed and distinct.

The discussion thus far implies a strong sense of similarity across countries. To leave it at this would be to seriously mislead the reader; in fact, while countries might be heading in a roughly similar direction, their departure point and the substance of their activities and objectives in the service of "gender mainstreaming" vary hugely.

The Problematic of Gender Mainstreaming

Policy-makers in all eight countries make the rhetorical claim that they are applying a gender mainstreaming approach. This cannot be taken at face value because they mean something quite different by this. Taking countries as a whole, at least three varieties of a gender mainstreaming approach can be identified. The first, with Sweden as the locus classicus, can be styled an "integrated approach." Gender mainstreaming is employed in a global fashion, whereby responsibility for gender equality is extended to most, if not all, actors involved in public policy and is embedded across institutions in society. The second variant, found in Belgium and Ireland, can be depicted as "mainstreaming in the form of limited transversality." In these contexts of "mainstreaming light," transversality indicates little more than the involvement of different government departments or ministries in the implementation of a plan or program around gender equality. What gender mainstreaming means in these contexts is a spreading out of responsibility for gender-related objectives to more line ministries. However, mainstreaming is at an early stage of development and typically does not span the entire policy spectrum or hierarchy. In a third scenario, true especially of France and the United

Kingdom and to a lesser extent Greece and Spain, gender mainstreaming is a highly fragmented endeavor, confined either to a small number of policy domains or to a specific program within a domain and disconnected from general governmental policy on gender. Mainstreaming in these countries is a tender shoot. Whether the activities that are going on merit the label is debatable. To the extent that mainstreaming implies breadth and depth, it probably should not be deemed to be in operation in these countries.

Although the cross-national characterization presented above is new, in some ways the point about variability has been anticipated by the literature. Over time, and especially as an empirical base of work has begun to build up (Behning and Serrano Pascual 2001; Mackay and Bilton 2003; Rubery and Fagan 2000; Yeandle, Booth, and Bennett 1998), scholars have come to recognize that gender mainstreaming is a variable entity. One can espy two kinds of responses to diversity in the literature. The first is to suggest that the lack of widespread agreement on how gender mainstreaming is practiced and understood is not problematic, given that its meaning is contingent and constructed in context. Walby (2005a), for example, indicates that the contrasts are theoretical rather than substantive and that all approaches are capable of producing working definitions. A second tendency is to broaden the definition. Booth and Bennett (2002) tend in this direction, in that they view gender mainstreaming as incorporating the three approaches (what they name equal treatment, women's perspective, gender perspective). Squires (in this volume) is even more inclusive. She suggests that mainstreaming should cease to be understood as a distinctive strategy that moves beyond the previous strategies of equality of opportunity and positive action and instead be viewed as a broad strategy that entails the incorporation of the other two strategies as and when appropriate. It seems to me that, apart from the conceptual stretching that is involved here, this representation of mainstreaming is too contingent and runs the risk of depicting mainstreaming as little more than a capacity to incorporate the two approaches as the occasion calls. Although I would not call for a uniform approach, in my view the lack of clarity in the concept/approach at the present time is causal. It provides fertile ground for political expediency, for example—because mainstreaming is so elastic, it is easy to make a claim to be doing mainstreaming. In addition, one could attribute the tendency toward technocratization to lack of clarity in definition and conceptualization.

In this context it seems appropriate to recall some of the origins in the literature of gender mainstreaming. Theoretically, gender mainstreaming draws from feminist analyses of gender inequality, aiming to revise and further develop key feminist concepts and approaches.

So grounded, gender mainstreaming claims to offer a superior under-standing of the ways in which deeply embedded norms and assump-tions about gender relations pervade all aspects of social and political behavior, sustaining far-reaching gender inequalities in society (Mazey 2000, 336). Gender mainstreaming is especially grounded in a strategy of change, seeking to address gender inequality by focusing effort on organizational culture, processes, and structures, especially those associated with policy-making. The relationship between gen-der mainstreaming and feminist theory is underlined in definitions of gender mainstreaming provided by those official bodies that have been foremost in actively promoting the implementation of the approach. Thus, the Council of Europe, the UN, and the EU make reference (either explicitly or implicitly) in their definitions to the goal of gender mainstreaming as not just being about gender equality but also being capable of achieving it. The research results on empir-ical practice highlight a number of obstacles to the progress of gender mainstreaming.

One of the most significant results is that in seven out of the eight countries studied, gender mainstreaming does not depart from an analysis of gender inequality as a structural problem. Sweden is the exception. The single most widespread motivation for introducing gender mainstreaming is a general wish or compulsion to update and/or improve gender equality policy. To explain: in a context where gender mainstreaming is seen, and promoted by the EU espe-cially, as the best (practice) approach, the primary incentive for countries to engage with gender mainstreaming is to "modernize" their gender equality approach and architecture in that direction. Hence, the introduction of gender mainstreaming, rather than emerg-ing out of or being embedded in a philosophy about gender inequal-ity as a structural phenomenon, tends to stem from policy-making exigencies or current styles or fashions. One could say that main-streaming has won the "style battle." Countries see it as in their interests to update. Often, there is an instrumental reason for this: it is quite common, for example, for the introduction of gender main-streaming to be aimed at satisfying (usually EU) constraints tied to the allocation of funding. Another motivation for gender main-streaming, albeit less common, is for it to be aimed at more effective achievement of policy objectives that are quite distant from gender equality (for example, improvements in productivity). For these rea-sons, gender mainstreaming tends not to be grounded in a discourse about gender and equality—the debate about the acceptability of gender inequality in society is one that took place much earlier in most countries and has not been updated or revisited in a fundamental way in the service of introducing gender mainstreaming. As a result,

while one can find women and men present in the policy focus, gendered social roles and relations tend not to be recognized as part of the societal fabric of inequality.

There are two underlying points here. The first is that gender mainstreaming has become part of the accepted wisdom about what modern gender equality architecture should look like—it has become a symbol of modernity. Second, there is the fact that the "symbolic" use of gender mainstreaming has an effect on the objectives adopted. In particular, it serves to shift the orientation of and impetus for policy change away from gender inequality as a policy problem and toward the modernity of policies. These are not mutually exclusive, but current practice means, then, that gender mainstreaming can be divorced from overall gender equality objectives, an essential element of gender mainstreaming as it is conceived theoretically.

A second obstacle highlighted by the research is the possibility that gender mainstreaming may not necessarily be gender-focused at all. Let me explain. Many of the initiatives implemented under the rubric of gender mainstreaming draw philosophically from a positive action approach (which takes women as its focus). The Belgian *Strategic Plan for Equality Affairs*, an initiative aimed at building a basis for the consolidation of gender mainstreaming as the main approach to gender equality, is a telling example. Drawing on the principles and methods of transversal positive action plans, the Belgian *Strategic Plan* consists of the implementation, on a cross-sectoral basis, of specific measures mostly targeted at women.[4] Another example, along with the Belgian plan, is the integration of a woman's, rather than a gender, perspective as part of mainstreaming policy in various regions of Spain. Take the initiative to integrate a woman's perspective in environmental policy in Andalusia for example: this is done through a women-specific program (Women and the Environment [GEODA]), which is not informed by a gender analysis. Given that the tradition of gender equality policy in these two countries has largely favored a positive action approach, these examples suggest one hypothesis about the trajectory of gender equality policy: in countries with a positive action tradition, some gender mainstreaming principles and techniques can be accommodated in a tradition of equality policy that has different principles, methods, and institutions. Once again, malleability (or perhaps more benignly framed "inclusiveness") as a characteristic of gender mainstreaming comes to mind.

In sum, the reported research results question both the presence and uniqueness of the two main elements that have been used to characterize gender mainstreaming in comparison with the other gender approaches: (1) that the goal of gender mainstreaming is to

tackle structures of inequality (rather than discrimination or women's disadvantage), and (2) that, contrary to the other two approaches, it incorporates a gender perspective. Policy, it seems, is carving out new possibilities. In this context, scholarship cannot shy away from the matter of what is distinctive and particular about gender mainstreaming.

Gender Mainstreaming and Change

As well as questions of constitution or problematic, the extent to which gender mainstreaming is transformative is a critical issue. A signature appeal of gender mainstreaming is that it promises to bring about change and transform the status quo. The context of gender mainstreaming is developmental, in that, at the risk of slight exaggeration, it represents an accumulation of learning over some three decades about gender inequality and the best policy to address it. In the words of Verloo (2001, 3–4), "By reorganising policy processes so that regular policy makers will be obliged and capable to [*sic*] incorporate a perspective of gender equality in their policies, this strategy aims at a fundamental transformation, eliminating gender biases, and redirecting policies so that they can contribute towards the goal of gender equality."

Let us consider the evidence. For the purpose of identifying potential changes, it is helpful to register that there are at least five different levels or dimensions at which gender mainstreaming may take effect. One is at the level of discourse or rhetoric. In this regard, the EQUAPOL research provides evidence of a clear shift in discourse from a focus on women to one focusing on women and men (with the family often as backdrop, alongside the labor market). However, the extent of the shift is questionable—I am reluctant to characterize the discourse as being one of gender because in most cases an analysis of power relations is lacking. Second, there has been institutional or structural change in that dedicated gender mainstreaming units have been set up in a number of countries. These are often seen as technical support units and are usually staffed by people who are skilled in gender mainstreaming. Their task is to provide training for policy-makers on the techniques and tools of gender mainstreaming. Third, there has been innovation in the tools used to make policy—as outlined above, gender focused policy analysis, evaluation, and monitoring mechanisms have been introduced. Fourth, and as a result of the last two types of change, new data has been made available (sometimes this means old data with new disaggregations), and new research has been undertaken. Finally, the research identified some innovation in the way that policy is made. The range of official

actors in the policy process has broadened, especially through the inclusion of those in line ministries or departments or agencies heretofore not associated with gender. Furthermore, there has been a visible increase in social dialogue through the institutionalization of consultation practices, the creation or consolidation of advisory bodies representing women's groups (for example, women's national councils), and an increase in government investment with a view to equipping women's representatives with the necessary skills to participate in policy-making.

Care needs to be taken in attributing significance to these developments, however. There are two main reasons why they might be characterized as innovation rather than change. The first is that progress has been generally limited, as well as uneven, within and across countries. Only three of the eight countries in the study—Belgium, Ireland, and Sweden—show evidence that the introduction of mainstreaming has been associated with change. There is evidence for these countries of some change in the understanding of the inequality problematic, as well as the establishment of new policy practices, techniques, or institutions (associated with the specific aim of integrating a gender perspective into policy-making across different domains). However, two caveats have to be registered about the broader picture as regards change. First, in no country other than Sweden has there been change across the spectrum, that is, in the discourses, structures, processes, and agency of policy within and across domains. Second, there is significant variation among countries in terms of the degree of change. In a number of cases, especially France and the United Kingdom (at central government level), and to a lesser extent Greece and Spain (the latter also at central government level), gender mainstreaming efforts, while present, are highly fragmented, being confined either to a particular domain or to a specific program within a policy domain, and generally disconnected from general governmental policy on gender.

The second reason to be careful is the lack of depth or embeddedness. There are a number of grounds to be skeptical about gender mainstreaming in this respect. The most profound centers on the meaning of transversalism. As reported, one of the most widespread interpretations of mainstreaming is of transversalism. However, not only is there a selective utilization of different components of gender mainstreaming, but also the transversalism that exists, while it might extend widely, is not embedded. This is the antithesis of the holistic change that is at the core of gender mainstreaming as conceptualized in academic work. Jahan (1995) offers some conceptual assistance here, in differentiating between policy that is agenda-setting and that which is integrative. The former implies a far-reaching set of changes

(in policy paradigm), whereas the latter sees gender introduced without a significant change in the status quo. The EQUAPOL research indicates that what is taking place is a form of integration that is characterized by some breadth but little depth. In other words, horizontalization does not translate into embeddedness across policy domains, institutions, and policies. In contrast, an agenda-setting approach, according to Jahan (1995), requires change on many fronts: decision-making structures and processes, articulation of objectives, prioritization of strategies, the positioning of gender issues amid competing emerging concerns, and the building a mass of base support among both women and men. With little evidence of these characteristics, the degree of institutionalization of gender mainstreaming must be adjudged to be low. Better understood as horizontalization, transversalism, as it is practiced, does not integrate gender into the core of policy but tends to add it on as an additional objective or consideration that then has to fight for its place among the policy priorities.

Embeddedness, of course, can also occur and be expressed in another way. Drawing on the insights of constructivist analysis, Verloo (2003), among others (such as Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2000), has focused on the framing of policy, querying the extent to which gender mainstreaming leads to frame extension and frame bridging. Here the purpose and focus are to detect shifts of meaning and intention (in terms, for example, of the analysis of the "problem" of gender) and how these are reflected or not in the dominant frame and also in shifts of agency (in terms of the identity of the actors involved). Although the current research finds that the range of actors involved in gender-relevant policy-making or policy implementation has broadened somewhat, there is no evidence that these actors approach the "problem" of gender with an altered mind-set. In any case, in the imagery of Beveridge and Nott (2002), the "expert-bureaucratic" model prevails (in that experts and specialists continue as the main actors), rather than the "participatory-democratic" model (which would involve a range of individuals and civil society organizations). In addition, though policy-makers may more readily speak of gender, equality policies in most countries are still overwhelmingly targeted at women. Hence, there is no evidence to suggest that the (vision of the) polity itself has changed or that there has been a reconfiguration of power relations.

These results are somewhat (but only somewhat) counter to those of Behning and Serrano Pascual (2001), who argue, on the basis of an analysis of the impact of gender mainstreaming on national practices in employment, that most policies represented as gender mainstreaming are a continuation of previous policies. While there are some

grains of truth in this assessment, the current research suggests that gender mainstreaming is not just a new label in that (1) there has been an impetus to integrate gender across a wider range of policies than heretofore, and (2) some new initiatives (structural and policy wise) have been undertaken.

Gender Mainstreaming Reconsidered

The thrust of the research reported throughout this article leads, I believe, to a series of fundamental questions about the nature of gender mainstreaming. A helpful way of cutting through the undergrowth is to inquire whether there is something inherent in the conceptualization of gender mainstreaming that fixes the gaze on procedures and processes (and hence inhibits both embeddedness and the founding of gender mainstreaming measures in a gender inequality problematic). The short answer is "yes." Gender mainstreaming tends to be defined in operational terms. So, according to the Council of Europe (1998, 13), "gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, 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." It centers, then, on policy processes and on reorganizing institutions so that the responsibility for gender is generalized widely across the policy spectrum and hierarchy.

But the problems are more profound than technocratization. A second central question is whether gender mainstreaming has "character flaws." I suggest "yes." One such flaw is that gender mainstreaming has a fuzzy core. This is associated with a failure to acknowledge and deal with tensions, if not contradictions, in the concept. Existing work is helpful in clarifying the nature of the tensions involved. Walby (2005b) points out how gender mainstreaming incorporates two different frames of reference—one emanating from a gender equality stance and the other from a mainstreaming stance—and that each pursues objectives that may be regarded as mutually inconsistent. That is, the promotion of gender equality and the desire to render mainstream policies more effective on their own terms by the inclusion of gender analysis may be inconsistent. While the former can be regarded as a feminist goal, the latter is typically grounded in a strategy to improve governance. Woodward (2001, 14) offers a somewhat different articulation of internal tension or contradiction. She identifies gender mainstreaming as involving a tension between rational and irrational elements. The rational elements inhere in the gender mainstreaming instrumentation that has been developed thus far, while the irrational

elements draw from feminist theory about gender inequality in organizations, which lays emphasis on irrational (that is, subconscious) processes that lead to oppression. For Woodward this duality opens up the question of whether a "rational" approach such as gender mainstreaming can tackle the structural power relations between the sexes. For the theorization of gender mainstreaming, it poses one fundamental question: whether the two sides are mutually irreconcilable or whether there is a way in which they can be reconciled. Some feminists take the former view, rejecting gender mainstreaming as a feminist strategy. The Swedish case, however, might be taken as an example of how the two stances can be reconciled and harnessed to address structural inequalities in society. There, gender mainstreaming, understood as an approach to address structural inequalities, is deeply embedded and widely dispersed as a practice. However, the Swedish case is quite particular, if not unique, since the reconciliation of the two "conflicting" strands is made possible by the presence of other variables of a historical, social, and political cast (not least of which is a wide diffusion in society of egalitarian values). Indeed, an important lesson from the comparative analysis of gender mainstreaming in implementation is that a theorization of gender mainstreaming that is modeled on the Swedish case alone has significant limitations when used to account for gender mainstreaming experiences in countries where one or more of the social, political, and historical conjunctures are absent.

In the absence of working through these tensions or contradictions, the tendency in gender mainstreaming is conservative. This is so in two senses: it becomes centered on techniques and on finding points of overlap between the agendas of gender equality and the mainstream (Walby, 2005b). So rather than contest or struggle, there is incorporation. A key underlying issue is the view of the state that prevails. It is important to note here at the outset that gender mainstreaming does have a critique of the state and a reform agenda for the state. However, rather than treating the state as a site of conflict of interest over gender inequality, the process of introducing gender mainstreaming and of achieving change is represented as quite consensual: once policy-makers are "enlightened" and the range of policy actors broadened, then gender inequality will be combated. To the extent that there is a problematization of the state in gender mainstreaming theory, it is seen to lie mainly in the scarce or inappropriate skills and consciousness of political actors. One misses an analysis of the power interests that are embedded in gender inequality.[5] At the present time, it is difficult to see in gender mainstreaming something resembling the feminist revisioning of the political "in terms of power relations which cut across state, civil society and familial realms" (Squires 1999, 32).

There is a second problem, also, in that gender mainstreaming theory has not devoted sufficient attention to the relationship between state and society. Even if actors produce policy that is enlightened, gender inequality might be alleviated by public policy but will not be eliminated by it. Why? Because as a social phenomenon gender inequality has its roots in society, and policy is not (fully) determinative of society. The theorization of gender mainstreaming, I suggest, has to focus more on problematizing the relationship between gender mainstreaming and society/societal change. While trumpeted as fundamentally transformative, it lacks, as yet anyway, a full articulation of a theory of change. In essence, gender mainstreaming targets public policy reform with different dimensions identified as objects of change: policy-making processes, policy actors, public policy. The "change logic" that underlies gender mainstreaming would seem to run as follows: by reorganizing policy-making structures, broadening the range of actors involved, changing the mind-set of actors and the content and framing of policy, there will come about a change in the nature and process of governance itself. Even if one accepts this logic, it is not clear how change in governance translates into soci(et)al change. What is the relationship between public policy and social structure and organization? These are not trivial points. As regards the embedding of gender inequality in society, gender mainstreaming, as it has been developed to date, speaks neither to agents who are not involved in the public realm nor to agency across different realms of society. Policy and social institutions/agency tend to be elided. Moreover, it is not clear how a value change among policy-makers (which will presumably be generated by greater learning) leads to a change in societal values. The vital gaps in theorizing mainstreaming lead me to suggest that the theory lacks a sociological core.

Overview

This article considered the state of gender mainstreaming, in practice and theory, utilizing the results of a recent cross-national study of gender mainstreaming in Europe. There is evidence of some gender mainstreaming in all of the eight countries studied. In particular, responsibility for gender policy is being widened among ministries, new tools and techniques (especially gender impact assessment) for policy-making are being applied, and the range of actors involved in gender-related policy-making is broadening. Taken at face value, then, it appears that gender mainstreaming is advancing. However, a number of qualifications have to be registered. First, the research underlines gender mainstreaming as a diverse set of practices. In addition, the findings indicate that other approaches to gender equality policy, rather

than being caught in a time warp, are still operational and even at the fore in some nations' gender policy. Equal treatment and positive action are therefore subject to ongoing development in relation to their framing of the gender problematic, their objectives and methods, and the actors and institutions responsible for their implementation. What exists in most countries at the present time is a mix of policies, even if it is frequently represented as gender mainstreaming. Second, gender mainstreaming is something of a porous vessel—it lends itself to a selective utilization of some of its basic principles and techniques. The most widespread tendency is to focus on tools and procedures. Relatedly, there is the fact that gender mainstreaming, when it is introduced, tends not to be rooted in an analysis of or set of programs oriented to gender inequality as a structural problem. Expediency, especially in terms of the wish to update the equality architecture and national approach in the light of current "fashions" in policy-making and the pressure to do so in order to secure EU funding, is the main motor behind most of the gender mainstreaming that has been initiated in the eight countries studied. Finally, the amount of change generated by introducing gender mainstreaming, either in policy programs or in terms of political agency, is limited. Summing up, the introduction of gender mainstreaming practices in most countries spells not a change of approach to gender but a more effective way of delivering an established equality policy that is oriented toward women.

All of this serves to focus the lens on the nature of gender mainstreaming and whether it has been satisfactorily theorized and elaborated. The results serve to unpick some of the fundamentals assumed to date by gender mainstreaming theory. In effect, the cases studied are, apart from Sweden, all "hybrid" cases of gender mainstreaming. As it stands, the theoretical literature is not able to account for the variation that exists. To the extent that it has responded, it has done so by emphasizing the contingent nature of mainstreaming. I suggest that scholars need to go beyond contingent definitions because the malleability of gender mainstreaming as a concept, among other things, facilitates a break between the introduction of gender mainstreaming and addressing gender as structural inequality. In other words, gender mainstreaming is introduced in the name of updating existing policy approaches to women rather than as the author of a transformative vision that recognizes gender as a societally embedded and structural problem. This is a decisive rupture and represents a real challenge for existing theory and practice. The double articulation of gender mainstreaming—as a philosophy or frame of analysis and as a set of techniques of policy praxis—deserves to be highlighted in this context.

As things stand now, it is indisputable that we lack a weighty theory that illuminates and explains the diversity of gender mainstreaming experience across Europe. One of the main flaws of existing theory—and a possible starting point for further work—is that it is insufficiently focused on the relationship between gender mainstreaming and soci(et)al change. There is, then, a need to specify further what the core of the approach is in sociological terms. Gender mainstreaming is rife with tensions, especially those tensions between the goals of integrating gender into the mainstream and of changing the mainstream. One of the most important questions that has to be (re)visited is how gender mainstreaming as theory conceives of and relates to gender inequality as a societal phenomenon. In this regard, this article has suggested that the relationships between state (especially in terms of state actors and public policy) and society and how (and indeed if) they are configured for policy purposes need further elaboration. Scholarship must also go beyond the fuzzy and technocratic nature of gender mainstreaming and work toward elaborating the concept and approach as part of a coherent intellectual and policy endeavor.

NOTES

1. Along with Panteion University in Athens, which acted as the coordinator, the partner institutions were the Law University of Lithuania, Queen's University, Belfast, the Free University of Brussels, and Umea University in Sweden. I am very grateful to the partners for providing the empirical material on which this article is based. Sara Clavero was the researcher on the Queen's University part of the project, and I would like to acknowledge my debt to her for help with many of the ideas developed in this article.

2. The full results and different reports of the project are available on the following Web site: http://www.equapol.gr.

3. However, note that in Lithuania the mix does not include gender mainstreaming.

4. However, it should be noted that the plan represents a step beyond transversal plans insofar as it also incorporates gender mainstreaming principles and techniques, such as the setting up of a gender mainstreaming dedicated unit staffed by experts, the development of gender impact assessment tools and monitoring techniques, and the idea of tackling gender-biased institutional practices as a policy goal.

5. See Kantola and Dahl (2005) for a useful discussion and critique of feminist theorizing of the state.

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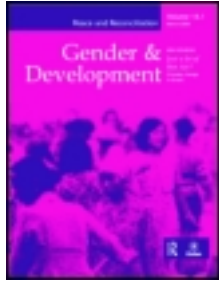
Gender & Development

Is there life after gender mainstreaming?

Aruna Rao & David Kelleher

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Is there life after gender mainstreaming?

Aruna Rao and David Kelleher

In the world of feminist activism, the time is ripe for reflection and review. We need to ask why change is not happening, what works, and what is next. This article points to the fact that while women have made many gains in the last decade, policies that successfully promote women's empowerment and gender equality are not institutionalised in the day-to-day routines of State, nor in international development agencies. We argue for changes which re-delineate who does what, what counts, who gets what, and who decides. We also argue for changes in the institutions that mediate resources, and women's access, voice, and influence. We outline key challenges, as well as ways to envision change a n d strengthen the capacity of State and development organisations to deliver better on women's rights.

In the last decade, efforts to make the development 'mainstream' work for women have resulted in impressive gains as well as staggering failures. In the wake of Beijing Plus Ten,[1] numerous reviews document the strategic partnerships forged between the women's movement and policy reformers in the process of putting equity and women's rights at the heart of development debates (UNRISD 2005; Millennium Project Gender Task Force on Education and Gender Equality 2005). Women have made striking gains in getting elected to local and national governance bodies, and entering public institutions; girls' access to primary education has improved sharply; and women are entering the labour force in increasing numbers.

Under the banner of gender mainstreaming in institutional practice, there are numerous examples of positive outcomes for women's lives, beyond policy measures.

They include bringing women to the discussion table during the Burundi peace process; strengthening or establishing organisations and networks to promote gender equality in mainstream agencies; mainstreaming gender issues into law reform processes in Botswana (including national policy regarding HIV/AIDS); gaining greater visibility for women's work through the census in Nepal, India, and Pakistan; and protecting widows and orphans from dispossession on the death of the male 'owner', by supporting primary-justice mediation processes in Malawi. In Rwanda, where women were systematically raped and murdered during the civil war, women have gained 49 per cent of the seats in parliament and formed local women's councils elected solely by women.

The problem is that these examples are not the norm. Practices that successfully promote women's empowerment and gender

equality are not institutionalised into the day-to-day routines of State and international development agencies.

More important are the myriad, insidious ways in which the mainstream resists women's perspectives and women's rights. Economic orthodoxy promoting unmanaged, export-led growth through competitive market capitalism, free trade, and fiscal austerity — including the drastic reduction of government social spending — has hurt poor women most (Elson 2005). Governance reforms have not forced States to address their accountability failures when it comes to women's access to resources and services. For the most part, institutional reform still means fiscal and administrative reforms rather than making systems work better for the poor, including women.

In South Africa, where Gender at Work[2] has organised numerous consultations over the past three years, the unease generated by the gap between promise and reality is palpable. Feminist activists speak of the fundamental difficulty in shifting the paradigm of patriarchy within which they operate, and the resultant high fall-out and burn-out. They tell us that they have only managed to chip away at how power is exercised — there is no major shift here. They point to the enormous contradictions they see between good gender equity policies and high numbers of women in positions of power, and some of the highest levels of violence against women in the world. In India (where Gender at Work is also active) social justice activists point to the rise in the power of the State and right-wing politics, and an accompanying decrease in commitment to human rights principles.

At the level of formal institutions, whether they are trade unions, NGOs, women's organisations, community-based organisations, State bureaucracies, or corporate structures, not much has changed either. Organisational structures tend to reinforce the power of a few, who, for the most part, are unwilling to give up the privileges of power. Even when power is

shared, decision making remains in the hands of a small number of senior people who, in our experience, are less and less interested in gender equality. Moreover, management discourse dominates institutional life. The strength of traditional management theory, and organisational development thinking and practice, is to focus on efficiency and results. Its weakness, particularly as applied to social-change organisations in many Southern contexts, is that it does not explicitly deal with power dynamics or cultural change. Such theory, therefore, cannot help organisations to develop strategic objectives derived from a nuanced analysis of relational and material hierarchies, or bring about outcomes that change those inequalities.

In the world of feminist activism, it is time to take stock and ask why change is not happening, what works, and what does not work. This rethink is happening at a time of unprecedented militarisation globally which has demoted and marginalised work on women's rights. At the same time we are seeing an equally unprecedented mobilisation of citizens against war, and against the negative effects of globalisation, as well as *for* social justice. Campaigns such as the Global Call for Action Against Poverty (GCAP), led by citizen action groups, are focusing attention on accountability of global institutions, and new terms of trade and development. But by and large, these global movements and their grounding notions of citizenship and accountability are gender-blind.

Moreover, while 'citizens' are mobilising, the infrastructure and resources for supporting women's activism to challenge gender power relations in the home, communities, organisations, markets, and the State are being dismantled. The architecture of organisational structure, process, policy, and funding to support women's empowerment and gender equality is being eroded also at international and national levels. At the same time, new aid modalities such as budgetary supports and Sector Wide

Approaches (SWAPs) may make it more possible to cheat on gender equality goals. Gender concerns are falling through the cracks. Institutional change, capacity building, political partnerships, and women's organising are being marginalised in what is, increasingly, a bean-counting approach to development deliverables.

Gender mainstreaming — wedged between a rock and hard place?

Gender mainstreaming is grounded in feminist theoretical frameworks, and its appeal to 'femocrats' and to gender activists was its promise of transformation. But gender mainstreaming has been caught between a rock and a hard place. At a macro level, it is operating in a policy environment which is increasingly hostile towards justice and equity, and which is further feminising poverty. At a meso level of organisations, gender mainstreaming has become a random collection of diverse strategies and activities, all ostensibly concerned with moving forward a gender equality agenda, but often not working in ways we would have hoped. At this level there is still active resistance to the value of women's rights and gender equality goals. Furthermore, where allies exist, their hands are tied by policy priorities, poor infrastructure, and decreased funding levels. Finally, at a micro level, first-generation development objectives are enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While the MDGs do incorporate measurable indicators for women's empowerment, there are a number of difficulties. First, they narrow the agenda dangerously (by not including violence against women, for example); second, m any governments have not mainstreamed gender equality into the MDGs (other than the one focused on gender equality); finally, focusing on MDGs has pre-empted support for women's organisations and women's organising — the vanguard of the political fight.

The need for political strategising at multiple levels, and deeper, institutional change, highlights the inadequacy of previous strategies. But it is unclear what the new solutions are. Most feminist activists and analysts acknowledge the need for new approaches that address the discrimination brought about by macro-economic policies in employment, wages, and food security. New approaches must also support welfare services that structure opportunities for women, that hold systems accountable, and that allow for learning on the part of women and men. Those approaches are being formulated. They range from calls for a new social contract (Sen 2004), to the creation of innovatively managed market approaches (Elson 2005); and from calls for the transformation of institutions and organisations (Goetz and Hassim 2003; Rao and Kelleher 2002; Millennium Project Gender Task Force on Education and Gender Equality 2005), to a re-energised and re-politicised women's movement. All approaches to bringing about gender equality must have a political component. This is because gender relations exist within a force field of power relations, and power is used to maintain existing privilege. In the remainder of this article we will elaborate on the dimensions of institutional change.

What are we trying to change?

Our understanding of how to work towards gender equality is that we need to change inequitable social systems and institutions. Generally, people now speak of 'institutional change' as the requirement for addressing the root causes of gender inequality. This means changing the rules of the game. These are the stated and unstated rules that determine who gets what, who does what, and who decides (Goetz 1997; North 1990; Rao and Kelleher 2002). These rules can be formal, such as constitutions, laws, policies, and school curricula; or informal, such as cultural arrangements and

norms regarding who is responsible for household chores, who goes to the market, who decides on the education of children, or who is expected to speak at a village council meeting. It also means changing organisations which, in their programmes, policies, structures, and ways of working, discriminate against women or other marginalised groups.

Different organisations have focused on one or other of the four areas listed below. Some organisations, for example, work on legal and policy change, while others focus on changing material conditions. In order to bring about gender equality, change must occur both at the personal level and at the social level. It must occur in formal and informal relations. This gives us the following four clusters which impact on each other:

- women's and men's individual consciousness (knowledge, skills, political consciousness, commitment);

- women's objective condition (rights and resources, access to health services and safety, opportunities for a voice);

- informal norms, such as inequitable ideologies, and cultural and religious practices;

- formal institutions, such as laws and policies.

Figure 1: What are we trying to change?
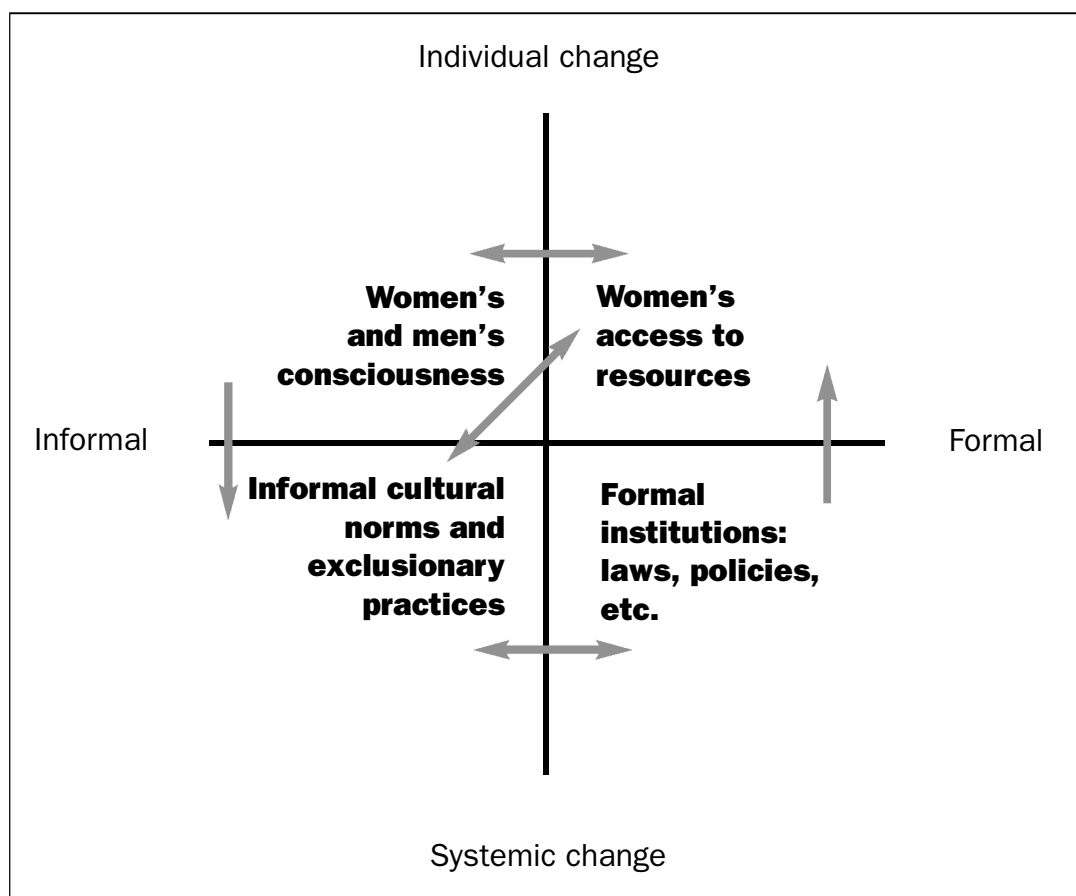
Often we assume that change at one level will lead to change at the others. For example, women who have started and maintained micro businesses often report being more self-confident. However, we also know, for example, that it is possible to have material resources but no influence; and that it is possible to be 'economically empowered' but not free from violence. Sustainable change requires *institutional* change, which involves the clusters of informal norms and formal institutions at the bottom of the diagram. But how does institutional change happen? And most importantly, what is the role of development organisations in that change process? The organisations that support those interventions also exist in the same force field of power. This means that they will require capacities not only to *want* to intervene in a significant way, but also to be *able* to intervene. Typically, it will require an ongoing change process to build and maintain these capacities.

Figure 1 may be helpful in the following ways. First, in an abbreviated way, it shows the whole universe of changes that might be contemplated to enhance gender equality. This can serve as an outline to document how these clusters appear in a particular context. Second, it allows change agents to make strategic choices as to where and how to intervene. Finally, it points to the fact that changes in resources, capacity, and know-ledge are necessary, but not sufficient, for sustainable change. Ultimately, changes of formal and particularly informal institutions are required.[3]

What are some of the key challenges of institutional change?

As we reflect on lessons from experience, and contemplate where we go from here, we see four key challenges.

Challenges of institutional change on the ground

Programme and project evaluations point to the difficulty of moving from individual change and learning to social change. They describe the problem of socio-cultural acceptance of ideas of gender equality, the lack of capacity of implementing partners, and the difficulties of attitudinal and behavioural changes at the individual and institutional levels.

Challenges of clarity

A number of analysts have recently pointed out how a lack of clarity endangers implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies (Hannan 2003; Subrahmanian 2004). However, the most pernicious misunderstanding is the separation of gender mainstreaming from women's empowerment work. In the name of mainstreaming resources are being withdrawn from projects focused on women's empowerment. Although much work needs to be done with both men and women, we cannot reduce commitment to programming that focuses on women, because that is where crucial progress towards gender equality is being made.

Challenges of organisational change

The lack of senior-management support; lack of accountability; lack of knowledge and skills among senior staff on gender issues; marginalised, under-qualified, and under-resourced theme groups and specialists are all problems present in organisations mandated to mainstream gender concerns in development.

Challenges of measurement

At one level, there are ongoing difficulties in obtaining sex-disaggregated data. At another level, there is a lack of tracking mechanisms for the relative contributions that a particular project might make to different goals. For example, in a sanitation project, how much of the project budget can be said to be responding to the needs of

women? Answering this would require a social-impact analysis at the design stage of the project, and a sophisticated tracking mechanism. At a deeper level, however, is the problem of measuring the intangibles that are at the root of social change of any sort. This is the change in consciousness of women and men, the change in community norms, or the change in attitudes. Incremental changes must be perceived and understood as valued results, knowing that gender equality is a long-term goal.

Beyond mainstreaming to institutional transformation

If there is to be life after mainstreaming, our experience teaches us that it will require transformation at the institutional level. We must come to ideas like empowerment, citizenship, and rights with new eyes and a more overtly political analysis.

Transformation of gender relations requires access to, and control over, material and symbolic resources. It also requires changes in deep-seated values and relationships that are held in place by power and privilege. Transformation is, fundamentally, a political and personal process. Sen (1999) says that institutions limit or enhance poor people's right to freedom, freedom of choice, and action. Without a critical understanding of how institutions need to change to allow different social groups to secure their entitlements and access opportunities for socio-economic mobility, development goals cannot be achieved. From the perspective of poor people, institutions are in crisis and a strategy of change must: '(i) start with the poor people's realities; (ii) invest in organisational capacity of the poor; (iii) change social norms; and (iv) support development entrepreneurs' (Narayan 1999, 223).

Feminist thinking about empowerment directly engages with resources, power, ideology, and institutions (Batliwala 1996).

This implies a symbiotic relationship between power and ideology, which gains expression and perpetuation through structures of all kinds — judicial, economic, social, and political. Empowerment in this framework therefore means a transformation in power relations. Specifically, it means control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, intangible); control over ideology (beliefs, values, attitudes); and changes in the institutions and structures that support unequal power relations.

Notions of citizenship, like institutions, are inextricably bound up with relations of power. 'Like power relations, citizenship rights are not fixed, but are objects of struggle to be defended, reinterpreted and extended' (Meer 2004, 32). The negotiation is around societal positions that discriminate against women, and gender roles (including the public/private divide that acts to contain women and their agency primarily within the private sphere, while opening men's agency to the public sphere). It is also around unequal power formed on the basis of class, caste, ethnicity, and other key markers of identity. Not only that: the negotiation is also a challenge to ideas that frame how we see the world and how we act.

Similarly, claiming rights is a political process, played out as struggles between the interests, power, and knowledge of differently positioned actors. A rights-based approach to development argues that all people are entitled to universal human rights, and development should be oriented to meeting those rights. A rights perspective politicises needs (Ferguson 1999). While a needs-based approach identifies the resource requirements of particular groups, a rights-based approach provides the means of strengthening people's claims to those resources. The challenge of the rights-based approach is 'in maintaining equal emphasis on the need to build both citizens' capabilities to articulate rights *and* the capabilities of political-economic institutions to respond and be held to account' (Jones

and Gaventa 2002, 26). For individuals and groups, demanding accountability requires a sense that they have a right to do so (claiming that political space), and mechanisms through which their demands can be made and responded to. On the other side, accountability (according to the UNDP *Human Development Report 2000*) is judged by whether appropriate policies have been implemented and progress achieved.
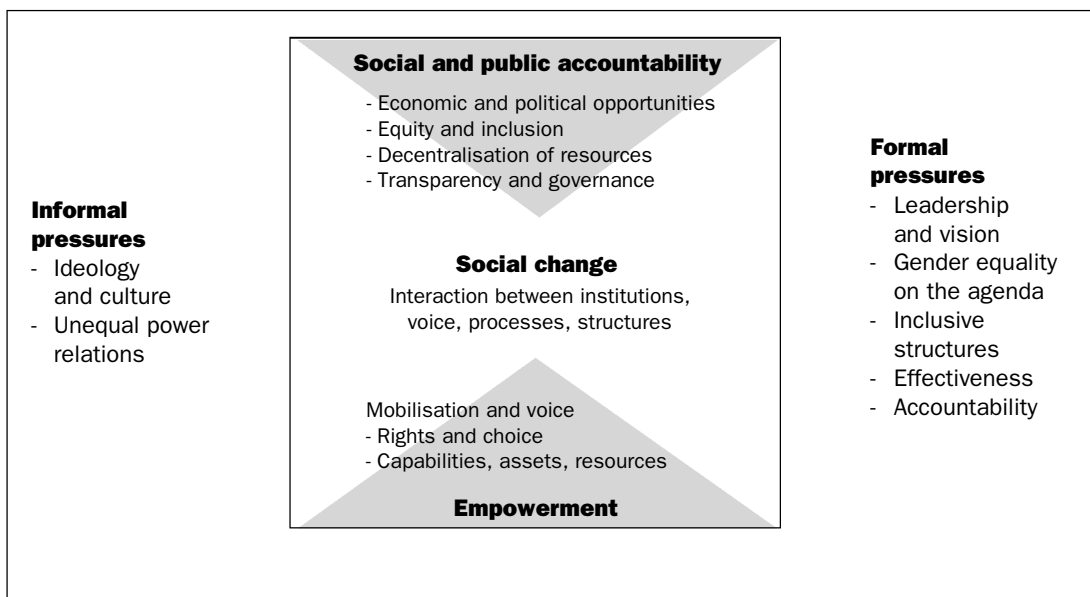
Transformation: the role of development agencies

We think that transformative goals exist uneasily within large development organisations, as they are likely to be overcome by technical considerations more amenable to administrative practice. The key questions are: given the uneasy relationship between transformation and large organisations,

how can we strengthen the capacity of State and development bureaucracies to deliver on their operational mandates? And how can we shift organisational practice to focus better on equity and exclusion?

In order to strengthen the project of transformation, we need to disaggregate the range of strategies and activities that are dumped in the gender mainstreaming bag (such as policy reform, advocacy, capacity building, analytical frameworks, programme development, monitoring systems) and analyse their gains and their failures (Subrahmanian 2004). This should also help us to think strategically about what these institutions are well placed to do. At the same time, measurement systems need to be developed that can capture the full range of gender equality outcomes, both tangible and intangible.

Figure 2: Dynamics between top–down and bottom–up forces of change

Social and public accountability
- Economic and political opportunities
- Equity and inclusion
- Decentralisation of resources
- Transparency and governance

Informal pressures
- Ideology and culture
- Unequal power relations

Social change
Interaction between institutions, voice, processes, structures

Formal pressures
- Leadership and vision
- Gender equality on the agenda
- Inclusive structures
- Effectiveness
- Accountability

Mobilisation and voice
- Rights and choice
- Capabilities, assets, resources
Empowerment

Our change strategies should envision *institutional* change. This does not mean reducing programmes such as those focused on education or women's entrepreneurship. It means seeing these not as ends in themselves, but as means to equality. Institutional change requires political activity to translate education or improved health care into equality. One important idea is that of working on both demand and supply sides of the institutional change equation. By the supply side, we mean shifting opportunity structures towards equality for women; changing incentives and capacity in global, State, and community agencies to respond to women. This includes delivering on services and on rights. On the demand side, we mean strengthening women's awareness of their own agency, voice, and mobilisation; their influence over institutions; and their ability to hold them to account.

Organisational deep structure

Organisational change needs to go far beyond policy adoption and large-scale processing of staff through gender training workshops. It is clear that, like any other complex skill, the evolution of knowledge and values (particularly for men) is a long process, requiring practice. Gender theme groups and specialists need to be better resourced, but more importantly, they need to be part of decision making. Even when senior managers agree that gender is important, gender equality still has to displace other important values in decision making. Only by ensuring a strong voice for gender equality advocates in decision making will gender concerns be represented in the day-to-day discussion of competing needs and values that are at the heart of development work. Numerous analysts have emphasised the importance of strong leadership and accountability structures, including performance appraisal and better

monitoring. While we would agree that these are needed, 30 years of research and practice in the private sector shows that these 'command and control' strategies are not enough for significant organisational change.

In our work, we have described the 'deep structure' of organisations. Like the unconscious mind of individuals, this is largely unexamined, but constrains some behaviour and makes other behaviour more likely (Rao *et al.* 1999). The deep structure is the collection of taken-for-granted values, and ways of thinking and working, that underlie decision making and action. (See Figure 3.) Power hides the fact that organisations are gendered at very deep levels. More specifically, women are prevented from challenging institutions by four inter-related factors:

- **political access**: there are neither systems nor actors who can put women's perspectives and interests on the agenda;

- **accountability systems**: organisational resources are steered towards quantitative targets that are often only distantly related to institutional change for gender equality;

- **cultural systems**: the work/family divide perpetuated by most organisations prevents women from being full participants in those organisations, as women continue to bear the responsibility for the care of children and old people;

- **cognitive structures**: work itself is seen mostly within existing, gender-biased norms and understandings.

It should not come as a surprise to learn that the deep structure of most organisations is profoundly gender biased, and acts as a brake on work for gender equality. For example, one aspect of the deep structure is the separation between work and family. As Joan Acker pointed out, a key assumption in large organisations is that work is completely separate from the rest of life, and

Figure 3: The iceberg of organisational structure
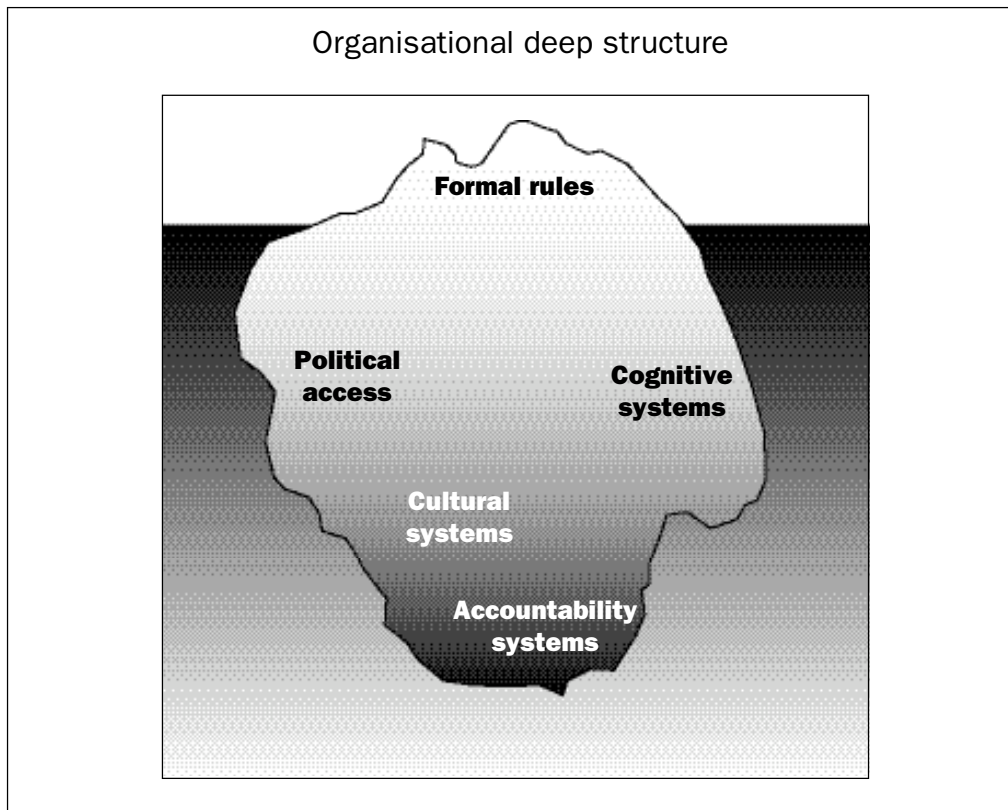
the organisation has first claim on the worker. From this follows the idea of the 'ideal worker', dedicated to the organisation, unhampered by familial demands, and…*male* (Acker 1990). Another aspect of the deep structure is the image of heroic individualism. As organisations were originally peopled by men, they are, not surprisingly, designed and maintained in ways that express men's identity. Heroic individualism can lead to a focus on winning, and noticeable achievement. This contrasts with the largely process-oriented, and sometimes long-term, business of understanding gender relations in a particular context, and acting for equality. In addition, given stereotypical gender roles, heroes tend to be men, further contributing to the idea of men as the ideal workers and women as 'other'.

Generating power to change organisations

We believe that there is a web of five spheres in which power can be generated to move an organisation towards transformation.[4] These five spheres are:

- politics;
- organisational politics;
- institutional culture;
- organisational process;
- programmatic interventions.

The political sphere

This is based on the assumption that because they live within gendered societies, few organisations will devote the time, energy, and resources to effective gender equality work unless pressured to do so. But is there a women's constituency that is exerting sufficient pressure for gender equality to be noticed by the organisation as an issue requiring attention? In some cases donors or boards of directors have been the source of some pressure, but local, political pressure has more potential for holding organisations accountable. The key skills required are organisation and advocacy. The pressure generated by this sphere may have many results, but they are dependent on work in the other spheres.

Organisational politics

This refers to the day-to-day bargaining that goes on between bureaucratic leaders as they struggle to make their particular views a reality. This sphere is about access of gender advocates to power, their bargaining ability, and skill in the use of power. Power is built from position, coalitions, clarity of analysis and purpose, and assets such as access to senior levels, and the ability to provide valued goods (information, technical expertise, material resources). The strong voice of an outside constituency is a tremendous asset, but far from all that is needed for a bureaucratic player. The outcome of bureaucratic 'victories' may be stronger policy, or increased resources, or even the evolution of an alternative organisational culture.

Institutional culture

Institutional culture is that collection of values, history, and ways of doing things that form the unstated rules of the game in an organisation. Most importantly, culture defines what is valued as being truly important in the organisation (often at odds with official mission statements). This sphere is important because of its capacity to make things happen as well as to block

them. Another way to describe culture is as organisational ideology: 'Ideology is a complex structure of beliefs, values, attitudes, and ways of perceiving and analyzing social reality — virtually, ways of thinking and perceiving' (Batliwala 1996, 2).

Culture then, can be a powerful ally in making work on gender equality a valued part of the organisation's work: the normal, the reasonable, 'just good development' (Rao *et al.* 1999). Similarly, culture can exclude — making the organisation difficult for women — and force a focus on 'harder', more 'real', outcomes (such as infrastructure projects). Cultures are generally changed by the influence of leaders, and by the understanding of others that the new directions are valuable.

Organisational process

This is the vehicle that turns the intangibles of bureaucratic politics, organisational culture, and political pressure into organisational action. This happens through programmes, policies, and services. The question is whether there are sufficient resources, and sufficient skilled and knowledgeable people, to lead the process of learning and change. Ultimately, knowledge must be spread through the organisation, and gender equality must become part of the organisational skill set, along with other aspects of development. If resources and expertise are the grease of organisational process, then approval mechanisms that require gender analyses are the drivers. For example, some development agencies require a gender analysis and strategy as a component of all projects. Finally, because gender equality has never been achieved, organisational learning needs to be seen as a key capacity. This leads us to work on the ground.

Programmatic interventions

These constitute the last (and first) sphere of power. It is here that the work of the other spheres is validated. It is also here that the organisation delivers value or not. In the

Figure 4: The organisational likelihood of promoting gender equality
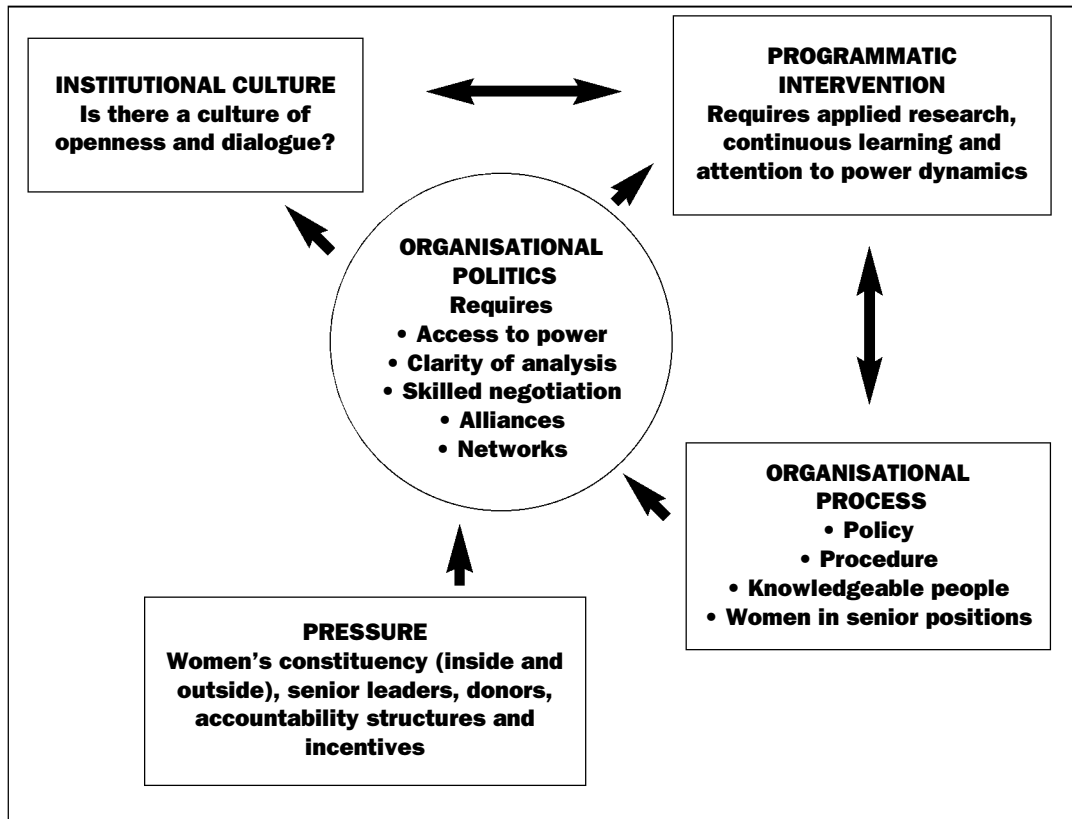
area of gender equality, what is of value is still contested. What used to be thought of as good practice is now challenged as insufficient. What this means is that this sphere must be energised by applied research, and by the development of new methodologies that can make a difference. These methodologies must also capture the attention and support of other parts of the organisation, as well as its partners.

Figure 4 shows some of the relationships between these spheres of power.

Even when the focus is at this level, however, we have reservations regarding the usefulness of organisational change strategies for making large organisations more interested in working towards gender equality. These strategies are helpful when managers feel strong and continued pressure

to change. But in many cases, in large multilateral organisations, the pressure for work on gender equality is intermittent and muted. The difficulty with governmental systems is similar: seldom is there significant pressure to take gender equality seriously, and many government officials are in any case isolated from the pressure.

Building knowledge for transformation and a 'politics of solidarity'

In this article, we have argued that life after mainstreaming must be focused on institutional transformation. This envisions changes not only in material conditions of women, but also change in the formal and

social structures which maintain inequality. Organisations must also be transformed, so that women's empowerment and gender equality are firmly on the agenda, and are supported by skilled, politically influential advocates. None of this will happen without the simultaneous creation of enabling environments (supply), and the mobilis-ation of women's groups for rights and access to power and resources (demand).

This vision is not the reality we now face. Our experience to date is telling us that there is a frightening lack of knowledge with which to accomplish the institutional changes we need. Parts of this knowledge do exist in the work of organisations in different parts of the world. We need to bring these pieces together, and forge a new set of understandings, which can guide our work beyond mainstreaming.

Finally, in these times of political and economic conservatism, gender advocates within development organisations, and feminists working in all kinds of spaces, need to come together to build what some have called 'a politics of solidarity'.[5] This is needed to infuse our work with vision and energy. A politics of solidarity can help us to assess strategically how to advance this transforming agenda, particularly when different political and institutional arenas are not working in synergy with our understanding of social change.

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Gender at Work (www.genderatwork.org) exists to build knowledge and capacity on strategic change for women's empowerment, gender equality, and social inclusion. It was created in June 2001 by AWID, Women's Learning Partnership (WLP), CIVICUS, and United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM). It works with development organisations and focuses on the links between organisations, gender equality, and institutional change.

Notes

1 Beijing Plus Ten is the UN-led ten-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995.
2 Gender at Work is a knowledge and capacity building organisation focusing on the links between gender equality, organisations, and institutional change. Gender at Work works with develop-ment and human rights practitioners, researchers, and policy makers.
3 This framework is adapted from the work of Ken Wilber.
4 This framework owes much to all the previous work in this field, but particularly to Graham Allison (1969) and Caren Levy (1996).
5 See for example Deniz Kandiyoti (2004).

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