IWM Working Papers

ANOTHER VELVET REVOLUTION?
GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND
THE POLITICS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Mieke Verloo

IWM Publications

Mieke Verloo

Lecturer in Political Science and Women's Studies,
KUN – School of Public Affairs, Nijmegen;
IWM Visiting Fellow 2001

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A framework for the analysis of gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is seen by many as an attempt at innovation in gender equality policies, an attempt to overcome the limitations of previous gender equality strategies. Sonia Mazey puts it that "gender mainstreaming constitutes a clear example of policy succession or policy adaptation, prompted by the desire to overcome the limitations of existing policies, and need to respond to a changed policy environment". (Mazey 2000: 3) Mazey is just cited here as one exponent of the common understanding of gender mainstreaming as a "new" and more promising, transformative, even "revolutionary" strategy (see also: Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2000: 3; Rees 1998; Rees 2000).

This presentation of gender mainstreaming as an innovation needs a closer look. What is the reference point? Gender mainstreaming is better than what? Newer than what? The usual reference point is what is called specific (one could also say targeted) equality policies. In order to answer the questions above, not only a more detailed description of gender mainstreaming in relation to these other strategies is needed, but also a theoretical framework

that allows to assess the quality of policies. What is better? What is better in terms of gender equality? Before analysing concrete Dutch experiences with gender mainstreaming, this paper gives theoretically based answers to these questions, so that the implications of the claim that it is a new and better gender equality strategy can be clarified. But first a more general introduction to this strategy is needed.

What is gender mainstreaming?

There are several definitions of gender mainstreaming[1]. The definition of the Group of specialists on gender mainstreaming at the Council of Europe has been widely adopted because it accentuates gender equality as an objective, and not women as a target group, and because it emphasizes that gender mainstreaming is a strategy. This definition says that: "*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.* (Council of Europe 1998: 15)".

The essential element in this definition of the strategy of gender mainstreaming is its accent on what needs to be changed, targeting policy processes as the main change object. Gender mainstreaming, according to this definition is about (re)organising procedures and routines, about (re)organising responsibilities and capacities for the incorporation of a gender equality perspective. In further elaborations of the strategy, different tactics that are distinguished can concentrate on organising the use of gender expertise in policy-making, or on organising the use of gender impact analyses in this process, or on organising consultation and participation of relevant groups and organisations in the process[2]. Additionally, the accent in gender mainstreaming is on gender, not only – more narrowly – on "women" as a target group.

The underlying assumption is that most regular policies are gendered, that regular policies are a major constitutional element in the construction of gendered social institutions, and that

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[1]   The UN definition is: "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 of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality." (Source: Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system, ECOSOC July 1997. Chapter IV.) The essential differences with the Council of Europe definition are the accent on men and women versus on gender, and the accent in the latter definition on the necessity of a sustainable transformation of policy processses, to avoid incidental, or even accidental attention for gender.

[2]   See the report of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming, Part II.

gendered social institutions are an important component in the continuous reconstruction of gender inequality. Gender mainstreaming usually involves a reorganisation of policy processes, because existing procedures and routines are all too often gender-blind or gender-biased. In contrast to the standard assumption of policy makers and policy-making organisations that their work is gender-neutral, it has been proven over and over again that gender differentials are not recognised in regular policies, and that unreflected assumptions include (most often unintentional) biases in favour of the existing unequal gender relations (Verloo & Roggeband 1996; Siim 1988).

Gender mainstreaming as a strategy is meant to actively counteract this gender bias, and to use the normal mandate of policy makers to promote more equitable relations between women and men (Verloo 2000: 13). It addresses "systems and structures themselves – those very institutionalised practices that cause both individual and group disadvantage in the first place" (Rees 2000: 3). Because of this focus on a systems approach, "it has much more potential to have a serious impact upon gender equality than other strategies have (Rees 2000).

Let's have a closer look at the other approaches or strategies in gender equality policies that are frequently distinguished: equal treatment in legislation, and specific or targeted equality policies (Rees 1998; Nelen & Hondeghem 2000). *Equal treatment in legislation* is focused on providing equal access, and correcting existing inequalities in legislation, so that individual citizens are formally equal. This strategy is framed within a liberal discourse, where it is up to individual citizens to then use their formal equal rights. The starting point for the strategy of *specific or targeted gender equality policies* is the recognition that equal rights cannot always be used by all citizens to the same extent, because of persistent gender inequalities that exist at the level of society. This strategy aims at creating conditions that will result in equality in outcome, to counterbalance the unequal starting positions of men and women in most societies. Most often specific measures aim at mitigating unequal conditions and facilitate equality for (specific groups of) women. These measures are usually taken by specialised state institutions, mainly by gender equality agencies[3]. Positive action and positive discrimination, in the sense of a preferential treatment for women, can be part of this last approach. *Gender mainstreaming* addresses the problem of gender inequality at a more structural level, identifying gender biases in current policies, and addressing the impact of these gender biases in the reproduction of gender inequality. By reorganising policy processes so that the regular policy makers will be obliged and capable to 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

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[3]   There are many terms that are used to describe these institutions. Stetson & Mazur (1995) follow the UN definition in using the term "women's policy machineries". In this paper the choice for the term gender equality agencies has been made mainly to accentuate that the problem addressed by these institutions can be gender inequality and not only the position of women. As Stetson & Mazur point out, there is a huge variety in these institutions, and there is no easy categorization of the varying way that they are organised and positioned in the overall governmental structures.

of gender equality. Gender equality agencies still have a role, mainly as think tanks and facilitators.

The difference between the three strategies hence involves differences in diagnosis, in the attribution of causality, in prognosis and in the resulting call for action. (see table 1)[4].

Table 1: Different approaches in gender equality policies

STRATEGY	DIAGNOSIS	ATTRIBUTION OF CAUSALITY	PROGNOSIS	CALL FOR ACTION
	What is wrong?	Who/what is responsible for the problem?	What should be done?	Who should do something?
Equal treatment	Inequality in law, different laws/ rights for men and women	Individual responsibilities	Change the laws towards formally equal rights for men and women in laws	Legislators
Specific equality policies	Unequal starting position of men and women. Group disadvantage of women. Specific problems of women that are not addressed. Lack of access, skills, or resources of women	Diverse, both at individual level, and at structural level	Design and fund specific projects to address the problems of (specific groups of) women	Gender equality agencies, sometimes together with established institutions
Gender mainstreaming	Gender bias in regular policies and social institutions resulting in gender inequality	Policy makers (unintentionally)	(Re) organize policy processes to incorporate a gender equality perspective in all policies	Government /all actors routinely involved in policy making

Lost memories and the presentation of gender mainstreaming as new

It is clear that gender mainstreaming is presented as new, as revolutionary even. Why is that? And: is it true? Or: is that the only story?

One could easily defend the position that gender mainstreaming is not a new strategy[5]. In fact, countries like Canada and the Netherlands were among the first, in the middle of the 70s, at the beginning of the development of gender equality policies, to stress the importance of trying to effect change by fully integrating women and their policy concerns throughout the policy process. These are the Canadian wordings (Geller-Schwartz 1995). The Netherlands started equality policies from the beginning as a two-track policy, aiming simultaneously at

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4   These elements are borrowed from Snow et all 1986.

5   Mainstreaming was first developed as a concept in the fields of education and development. For an account of early attempts at educational mainstreaming see Wilcox & Wigle 1997.

producing specific targeted policies (called sector policies), and what was called facet policy, the integration of the emancipation of women as a facet of all general policies (Outshoorn 1995; Verloo 2000). Both in Canada and the Netherlands, the integration of gender equality in general policies proved to be much more troublesome than was expected, not in the least because of a lack of political will, and a bureaucratic wall of indifference, if not hostility. It would be interesting to make a more extensive study of these and other early and failed efforts to realise an integrative gender equality approach.

It is also interesting to know that an earlier attempt of the (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women to recommend a similar strategy hardly got any attention. I am referring to Resolution 42/60 that "recommends that State parties establish and strengthen effective national machinery, institutions and procedures at a high level of government, and with adequate resources, commitment and authority to (among other things) advise *on the impact on women of all government policies* (Italics MV) ". The problem with the CEDAW recommendation is similar to the problems that were faced earlier by Canada and the Netherlands. While the recommendation includes a clear statement that many or even all policies have a relevance to gender, and the goal of integrating a gender perspective into all gender relevant polices is adopted, it remains absolutely vague how this goal can be reached. The call for action is not articulated in terms of actors, responsibilities and activities.

With reference to the early experiences of the Netherlands, Canada and CEDAW, it can be concluded that gender mainstreaming is not really new. Its diagnosis, attribution of causality, prognosis and call for action can be found in a less articulated form in the early attempts at integration. Moreover, in this earlier form the strategy seems to have been seriously unsuccessful.

What is new however in the past years (since the World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995), is both the strong political support for this strategy, and a more precise definition and clarification of the strategy, along with a proliferating development of new instruments. Since the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the political support for gender mainstreaming has improved substantially. Together with the Platform for Action, the idea of gender mainstreaming, of "taking into account the impact on gender before decisions are taken" has been diffused widely, and a whole world wide process of further developing this strategy has started[6]. All member states of the European Union, and the European Commission have now adopted the strategy.

This increased political support, especially in Western Europe, has been attributed to changed political opportunities, notably the entrance of Scandinavian states to the European

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[6]   For a description of the diffusion of gender mainstreaming in international organisations see: Hafner- Burton & Pollack 2000.

Union, to strong mobilising of feminist groups facilitated by UN Women's Conferences, and to strategical framing, one could say "selling" of this strategy (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2000).

The answer to my question whether gender mainstreaming is a new strategy is both yes and no. Most importantly, it is clear that gender mainstreaming has been presented as new, and that its presentation as new is essential in explaining its success… In another paper, I have shown that the Council of Europe report on gender mainstreaming uses the "newness" of the strategy as a marketing argument (Verloo 1998). This argument was successful, obviously. One could say that the strategical framing of gender mainstreaming as new has been one of the ways in which the waning attention for gender equality has been reactivated.

A better strategy?

Along with this presentation of gender mainstreaming as new, goes a frame that portrays gender mainstreaming as a better strategy, especially in comparison with specific gender equality policies. I cite from a report of the DAC Expert Group on Women in Development (Schalkwyk & Woroniuk 1997): "Gender mainstreaming responds to a dissatisfaction with the major emphasis on separate projects for women. Although these projects were innovative and catalytic, most were small isolated initiatives that made minimal contributions to changing gender inequalities." In contrasting descriptions of gender mainstreaming and specific policies, gender mainstreaming appears as a strategy that can get gender equality out of the ghetto of "women's projects".

The contrast between specific policies and gender mainstreaming is typical of many texts. In this contrasting comparison, gender mainstreaming is always the "better" strategy. In non-academic texts that can be seen as part of the propaganda material for this strategy (such as how-to manuals), this comparison is most often combined with a reassurance that gender mainstreaming will not mean that specific equality policies will be unnecessary. Both strategies are then presented as complementary, as a twin track[7].

What can be said about this comparison? And what can be said about the presentation of gender mainstreaming as a better, yet complimentary strategy? Let's first have a look why it is considered a better strategy. At first sight, there might seem to be a contradiction between the failure of earlier attempts at integrating a gender perspective in all policies, and the optimism that surrounds gender mainstreaming. I mentioned already that there have been earlier attempts at integration of gender equality in general policies in a number of countries (notably Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Norway) that were not successful.

If I zoom in on the experiences in the Netherlands, it becomes clear that (at least for the period 1975 till 1995) successes in gender equality policies have been reported almost exclusively in specific policies (consider policies to counter violence against women and to offer support to women who are victims of sexual violence, or projects concerning women's participation on the job market). Facet policy (the name used in the Netherlands for policies that integrate emancipation in regular policies) has always been a problem child in this period, because it has been very rare for departments to put equality high on their agendas, because the problem definition in practice has been limited to "women lagging behind men", and because there have been few instruments with which to shape and implement this policy (Keuzenkamp & Teunissen, 1990; Verloo & Roggeband, 1994; Outshoorn 1995). In fact, facet policy was a more or less embryonic policy, since only the goal (integration) was clear, but elaborations in terms of strategy, prerequisites and tools were absent. Moreover, as in many countries, the existing equality infrastructure was often too weak to influence departments to incorporate aspects of gender equality in their policies (McBride-Stetson & Mazur, 1995).

From the Dutch example, it seems that the earlier negative experiences can be attributed for a large part to the conceptual confusion about the strategy, to a weak political and bureaucratic support, and to the lack of concrete tools and instruments to implement the strategy. I will come back to more recent Dutch practices with gender mainstreaming in the second part of my paper, where I will concentrate on the experiences with the Gender Impact Assessment instrument. At this point, it is sufficient to mention that it is definitively too early for a claim that gender mainstreaming is a better strategy on the basis of an empirical assessment of gender mainstreaming experiences. There is simply not enough material yet for an empirical evaluation.

Therefore, the claim that gender mainstreaming is better at this point in time must be based not on an evaluation of this strategy, but on an assessment of its potential to be a more comprehensive strategy than other available strategies, because of its diagnosis, which includes an accent on gender combined with its accent on the institutional level. Besides, now that the conceptual confusion has diminished, political support has grown, and more instruments are being developed, there is reason to assume that the earlier negative experiences can be overcome, and even a further development of the strategy can be expected. Evaluation of these practices will show if the potential of gender mainstreaming is really there, and if this potential can be realised.

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[7]   This claim is probably accurate, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this in more detail.

Another velvet revolution?

Let's now first examine the claim of authors such as Hafner-Burton & Pollack, who see gender mainstreaming as a (potentially) revolutionary strategy, in a more theoretical way. Why is gender mainstreaming considered to be a revolutionary strategy? And: what kind of a revolution would that be?

In the initial discussions on gender mainstreaming after Beijing, not only advocates of gender mainstreaming raised their voice. Antagonists warned of the danger that this might be the end of gender equality policies. The dangers described were sometimes linked to the early experiences with a strategy of integration. In the Netherlands, the experiences at the local level are revealing. There the idea that gender equality should be integrated "everywhere", had the sad consequence that all gender equality offices were closed, because gender equality was now to be "the responsibility of everyone". Such a vague attribution of responsibilities, without any sanctions, of course had no result whatsoever, but the predictable result has been the nearly total disappearance of gender equality policies at the local level.

Warnings also came from the field of development policies where attempts at "integrating women in development" had proven to be all but revolutionary[8]. In fact, the result of these policies often was to offer women a place within an agenda that was designed along traditional lines. Gender issues, or attention for women were then build into existing paradigms. Women had to twist themselves into even more stereotypical and unequal life positions than before to fit into those paradigms, and the mainstream was not changed at all.

Gender mainstreaming is certainly not an automatically revolutionary strategy, one can conclude. Just as other strategies for gender equality, and maybe any policy, it can easily be perverted[9]. The main dangers identified so far are the danger of disappearance of gender equality policies altogether, and the danger of being swept away by the mainstream instead of changing it.

This is not to deny that gender mainstreaming is a potentially revolutionary strategy. The main reason that it is being called revolutionary is because it explicitly aims at being transformative. With its accent on (re)organising policies, and its assumption that all policies are gendered, this approach implies the transformation of the existing policy agenda in favour of gender equality. Yet, the dangers involved seem real enough too, closely connected to the strategy, and possibly contra-productive.

A closer analysis of the dynamics of the transformation involved is necessary. The most essential element then seems to be that this transformation cannot take place by using force or

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[8] This is known as the "integration debate". See Esther Boserup (1970, Women's Role in Economic Development New York: St. Martin's Press.

[9] For a clear analysis of the pervertion of positive action see: Outshoorn 1991.

violence. Therefore, it cannot be a classic revolution. In order to better understand what kind of a revolution it then might be, we need to zoom in on the definition of gender mainstreaming and on further elaborations of the definition.

As it is defined, the transformative strategy of gender mainstreaming claims the involvement and even the co-operation of the regular actors, those who are routinely involved in policy making. This element is crucial in understanding both the promises and the hazards of gender mainstreaming. In the process of introducing gender mainstreaming these actors are handled with care. When we take a look at the parts of the report of the Council of Europe where these actors are addressed, for example, it becomes clear how this is taken into account. Nowhere is the report critical of these actors, they are never blamed, their mistakes are labelled "unintentional", and great care was taken to explain to them how using the strategy of gender mainstreaming will be in favour of their own goals, and will result in policies that are of better quality.

In more theoretical terms: because the regular actors have to implement the strategy, it is unavoidable to frame the strategy and all its elements in terms that are meaningful and positive to them. Newly proffered frames (such as gender mainstreaming in this case) must "resonate" or "fit" with the existing frames within which the regular actors, or the dominant elite among those actors, operate. In order to be taken on board, they have to resonate with the values and norms currently adopted by regular actors. Many typical examples of this can be found in the Council of Europe report on gender mainstreaming, for instance where it is explained that gender mainstreaming will improve the lives of all people, that it will lead to better government, that it involves both women and men, and that it takes into account the diversity among women and men. All these are examples of strategical framing[10].

This type of strategical framing is called frame extension, or frame bridging (Snow & Benford 1986). Frame bridging is when a link is constructed with an existing frame, and frame extension is when the boundaries of an existing frame are widened, so that they obtain a broader meaning. In these types of strategical framing, the attempt is to seduce the target audience (politicians, civil servants) by talking their language, by connecting to their goals and their values. Strategical framing is a delicate process. One tries to modify their discourse by expanding it, one tries to play a different reality using their script.

When I refer to gender mainstreaming as a velvet revolution, it is to accentuate this process of seduction.

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10 Hafner-Burton & Pollack describe similar cases of strategical framing within the European Commission (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2000).

Of course such a strategy is not without danger. Strategical framing is a rhetorical strategy, and one can easily get trapped in rhetoric. The current definition of the Council of Europe can be seen as an attempt to avoid the rhetorical entrapment that occurred in the first embryonic attempts at the integration of a gender perspective in the seventies. Its accent on the reorganisation of policy processes is grounded in these experiences where gender equality agencies were abolished, nobody else was responsible for gender equality, and routines and procedures remained unchanged. This accent can be seen as an attempt to present a more solid frame where the essence of the strategy is clearer and therefore easier to defend.

It would be quite naïve however to expect that this was the last "battle". In order to be able to bridge between a frame of gender equality and any regular policy frame, one has to get under their skin, understand their perspective, and connect to their values and norms. Rhetorical entrapment will always remain a risk in strategies that involve strategic framing. In other words: it will always be necessary to be alert not to be swept away by the mainstream.

To enhance our understanding of the risks involved, a closer look at the dynamics of rhetorical action is useful. Rhetorical action (defined as the strategic use of arguments[11]) follows some rules, described by Schimmelfemming as: a need to appear convincing, and a resulting preference in favour of obscuring or hiding inconvenient facts or norms and against lying or direct contesting; a difficulty in changing points of view; and a requirement of consistency (Schimmelfenning 1999: 28-29). These rules result in limitations for the use of rhetorical action. If gender mainstreaming to a certain extent involves rhetorical action, then it is obvious, to give just one example, that its framing at the time of its introduction will necessarily set the terms for its further development possibilities.

So far I have addressed the notions that gender mainstreaming is a new, or better, or even revolutionary strategy. My conclusion has been that this strategy is a potentially very powerful one, but that it is certainly not an unproblematic one. It is most crucial therefore to have a closer look at the implementation process of gender mainstreaming. What is realised? What is going on? Before I take this closer look however, I want to take a short excursion into policy theories. What can policy theories offer? Do they have theoretical notions that are useful in answering these questions? Which theoretical frameworks to analyse gender mainstreaming are available? Which frameworks are most appropriate?

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[11] Schimmelfenning's definition of rhetorical action is quite close to the concept of strategical framing, when he describes it as: "choosing arguments that are both suitable to the actors claims, and promising to resonate well with their particular audience" (p.28).

Theoretical approaches to the assessment of the quality of policies[12]

Is it possible to assess the quality of policies or strategies at all? What has policy theory to say about the potentialities or success chances of policies in general, and of gender mainstreaming specifically?

Policy theory shows many parallels with other social science disciplines. The early approaches were dominated by a genuine belief in scientific rationality as a key to solving collective problems. Policymaking itself was largely interpreted as solving problems in society. This early science-politics nexus led to an increasing scientization of politics, and to privileged access to political decision-making through advisory positions for academics. One of the results has been that public and political debate has become dominated by purely pragmatic, managerial or administrative arguments. Or, more precisely, by arguments that are presented as such. On the whole, these approaches have a depoliticising effect (Fraser 1989). In these approaches a pragmatist view of politics prevails: politics is seen as a dialogue between expert opinion and the opinion of a larger public, in a community united by the quest for answers for shared problems. The policy scientist is then supposed not to replace political debate, but to (re)invigorate and systematize the debates. Policy science is seen as a service to democracy (Lasswell & Lerner 1951; Lasswell 1971).

Later approaches claimed to be able to explain the emergence of policy problems and to predict the impacts of policy interventions with a better knowledge of causation and application of scientific logic in decision-making. The more sophisticated branches in these rational approaches saw a policy's content as a hypothesis, and the implementation as an experiment[13]. Policy science could then compare the impact of different interventions to create knowledge. The main problem of these lines of thinking is obviously that they are based on the assumption that there is one standard of appraisal to judge these experiments. And, that there is consensus over the problems that need to be solved too.

As a result of these – all too familiar - crises of rationalist and technocratic approaches, policy science took a post-positivist turn. Some of the currents developed since are extremely relativistic, in that they see policy analysts as "condemned to provide argumentative ammunition for the rhetorical struggle of politicians" (Weiss 1991). More optimistic currents see policy science as a balancing act in which the policy analyst helps both politicians and citizens to find a practical middle ground between the ever-present tensions of resources, constraints, dogma and scepsis (Wildavsky 1979/87).

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[12]   This paragraph has profited significantly from Robert Hoppe's historical overview of policy sciences (Hoppe 1999).

[13]   Hoppe (1999) puts analycentric, neo-positivist and critical-rationalist approaches in this category.

A further development was to concentrate on the (political) conditions for consensus formation. This accent is combined with a normative perspective that sees the policy analyst as the main figure in the process of monitoring consensus formation (Forester 1985; 1989; Dryzek 1990; 1993). Hence, there is a tendency in this approach to downplay divergent opinions. A more discursive approach sees policymaking as "a continuous construction of goals and means in intelligent deliberation and political argument, in a process of 'naming and framing'". (Schön 1983)

Although there are different views on the future of policy science theory, it seems that there is a split between the more discursive and more structural or rational approaches, and it is unlikely that this split will be overcome soon. My rudimentary sketch of developments in policy science (based mainly on Hoppe 1999) shows business as usual: competing paradigms, combined with an ongoing tendency to downplay the political dimensions of policy making. As policy science has been informing policy making, we can expect to find traces of the mentioned paradigms in the practices of policy making itself, and we can use them to describe more precisely different practices of gender mainstreaming. For a framework for the analysis of gender mainstreaming to be satisfactory however, we would need exactly the combination of discursive and structural approaches that is still missing in policy science. For it is clear that discursive processes are important in gender mainstreaming, and at the same time, it would be extremely naïve to thrust aside attention for the structural political context in a more classical sense.

Theoretical approaches to assess the emergence and quality of gender mainstreaming

In light of the overview given in the previous paragraph, it should come as no surprise that the analytical framework that has been used recently to analyse gender mainstreaming comes from another branch of social science (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2000). In this framework - borrowed from social movement theory - which can be seen as the result of a coming together of different schools in social movement theory, a combination of political opportunities, mobilising networks, and strategical framing is used to explain the rise (and fall) of social movements, their successes, and their failures (Tarrow 1998). Its advantage is precisely this integration of an accent on the discursive dimension with more classic accents on institutions and power relations. If one wants to study the implementation of gender equality policies as a political process, then this theoretical framework from social movement theory seems to be more comprehensive than most policy theory frameworks.

The concept of *political opportunitie*s in social movement theory refers mostly to the openness of the political and the administrative arena to actors seeking change, to the existence of allies within the political and bureaucratic system, and to the absence of major

political cleavages. Applied to the understanding of gender equality policies, the main hypothesis is that a new strategy such as gender mainstreaming will only have a chance when certain political opportunities are present. The better the opportunities, the easier its introduction, acceptance and implementation will be. Parallel to results from social movement analysis, it can also be expected that specific sets of political opportunities can shape both the form and content of gender mainstreaming.

The concept of *mobilising networks* refers to the groups and networks that already exist, and that can be a starting point for the formation of other groups, or that can put pressure on the system. In the use of this concept for the analysis of gender mainstreaming, the main accent has been on the role of these networks as pressure groups. The other element, the use of existing networks to build productive networks for gender mainstreaming, has not received much attention yet, but it could be very valuable for the analysis of the politics of implementation of this strategy (especially for a better understanding of the choice of actors that are involved in actually doing gender mainstreaming).

The concept of *strategical framing* refers to "the strategic efforts of people to fashion shared understandings that legitimate and motivate action towards a goal (here gender equality)". As described in previous paragraphs, strategic framing attempts at constructing a fit or a resonance between existing frames and the frame of the change agent. Strategical framing not only is essential for the acceptance of a policy or strategy, but it also channels its implementation in certain directions. Because of the rule of consistency, departure from earlier adopted frames is relatively difficult.

Not just a technical problem: gender mainstreaming and the politics of implementation

Since 1995, there has been a huge demand for manuals on gender mainstreaming, and more specifically for instruments of gender mainstreaming. I cannot recount the number of times that I have been asked to send the precise instructions for the Dutch Gender Impact Assessment, to Germany, or Italy, or Malta, or Ireland. There is always an element of disappointment when I have to explain that it is indeed possible to send a precise description, but that I have to warn against too high expectations, because this instrument has been carefully designed to the Dutch context. Therefore, I am not sure if it can be exported and adopted elsewhere so easily.

The assumptions behind these demands are rooted in a technocratic perspective in policymaking; they assume that the gender problematic is a simple problem, or that gender studies can provide the final analysis of the problem, and then action can follow. This denial of the political character of the gender problematic is a first problem. The gender problematic

is not a simple problem, but a messy one, or a wicked one, or simply a political one, meaning that there is no real consensus about what the problem is exactly, about why and for whom it is a problem, about who is responsible for the existence of the problem, who is responsible for solving it. This means that there is an ongoing political power struggle over these definitions. The words that are used, habitually suggest consensus, but more often than not these words – inequality between men and women, differences between men and women, equal opportunities between men and women – function as buzz words: they allow the illusion of consensus, until a hidden difference of opinion can no longer be concealed.

Implementation of policies moreover is always a political process, subject to all mechanisms of political processes. In the phase of implementation of gender equality policies, therefore it can never be a matter of just doing what has been agreed on. The involvement of new actors will often mean that the illusion of consensus about the problem diagnosis is shattered or challenged. Furthermore, there is an ongoing dynamic in political and bureaucratic contexts, which in itself would introduce a political dimension in the process of implementation.

In applying the theoretical framework that I explained before, these political dimensions can be highlighted. The accent is on the dynamic interaction between interests, ideas and institutions, between political opportunities, mobilizing networks and strategical framing. In describing experiences with gender mainstreaming in the Netherlands, I will use this framework.

Gender mainstreaming in the Netherlands: developing and implementing the EER (Gender Impact Assessment)

In 1998, Mr Ad Melkert, then co-ordinating Minister for Equality Policies in the Netherlands, spoke at a national conference on Gender Impact Assessment at all levels of governance. He admitted to having had serious doubts about the Dutch instrument EER (Emancipation Effect Report, a gender impact assessment) in the past: too much trouble, too much time, too costly. However, he said he was converted and convinced by the fact that the instrument was apparently 'working', that it did what it was supposed to do: show how and where a policy that was meant as general, as gender neutral, had a negative impact on gender relations. He stressed that thanks to the EER, policies now could be improved. He was one of a good many politicians and policy makers at that conference who were enthusiastic and positive about the instrument.

The EER was developed as a result of the early Dutch policy goal of integration of emancipation in the overall government policies. As mentioned before, emancipation policies in the Netherlands were never meant to be restricted to specific or targeted policies for women

only. Until 1994, however, there were no special instruments available to facilitate or improve this integration. The EER was designed in 1994 to analyse ex ante the potential effects of new government policies on gender relations in Dutch society (Verloo & Roggeband 1994; Verloo & Roggeband 1996). Since then, the instrument has generated a little family of its own variations. Recently, a comprehensive evaluation study on the EERs at the national level was published (Van de Graaf, Mossink & Groeflin 1999). There is enough experience now to answer the question if is it true that the Dutch instrument EER, is a success. And to try to understand why it is or why it is not.

At the time when the EER was made, there were only a few people who believed in its potential existence. There were no previous examples known. There was only a high level political will (Elske ter Veld, the Secretary of State for Emancipation Policies and well known feminist who had previously worked in the equality office of the country's largest trade union), a firm will in the equality bureaucracy (Joke Swiebel, working at the co-ordinating equality unit -DCE- and taking advantage of a vacuum at the top) and two researchers determined to make it happen.

The development of any new policy instrument is a delicate political process involving technical, theoretical, but maybe most of all strategic problems. It involves making compromises, in all parts of the development process. For the development of the EER, it was decided to use the general model of Impact Assessments. The goal of any impact assessment is to analyse the potential effects of new policy plans or programmes before they are implemented. In general this type of studies, known mostly in the field of environmental policy is designed in six steps:

1. Description of the current situation.
2. Description of probable development without new policy.
3. Description and analysis of the new policy plan.
4. Description of potential effects of the new policy plan.
5. Evaluation of the positive and negative potential effects.
6. Development of alternatives to avoid or to mitigate potential negative effects.

The decision to use the basic model of any Impact Assessment solved not only a technical problem, but also made the acceptance of the instrument easier, because of this connection to an existing and successful instrument. This connection on the other hand could not be stretched too far, because the terms of reference for the development of the instrument made it clear that the instrument should not be too demanding (in terms of costs, time, or even expertise). There was simply no political support for an EER to be compulsory or highly sophisticated like its environmental sister.

This weak support can be illustrated by the fact that the development of alternatives, normally the sixth step of an Impact Assessment, initially was not part of the EER. The

elimination of the sixth step is the result of a compromise. The civil servants in charge of supervising the development of the EER thought that this step would make the instrument too costly, and they did not want to accept it. As a result there was only a recommendation to develop alternatives in the first design of the EER, not a requirement. Along the same lines, the use of gender experts to conduct the EER was also only put as a recommendation.

In fact, some of the discussion partners at the Ministry would have preferred an instrument that was idiot-proof, that needed no gender expertise at all and could be applied in less than one day. Therefore the next problem was how to combine that 'wish' with a reality where gender relations are very complex and any gender impact assessment would necessarily need a certain degree of sophistication. Introducing a theoretical framework that was based on firm academic knowledge, yet also connectable to the existing emancipation policy history solved this problem.

The theoretical framework that was presented refers to three questions in its three main elements.

1. Where are the structurally unequal power relations between men and women to be found?
2. How do they function? What are the mechanisms producing them?
3. How are they to be evaluated?

The first element, structures, refers to the foundations of gender relations, showing which institutions and organisations are most crucial in the constitution of gender inequality. The second element, processes, emphasises the formal theoretical level: what are the mechanisms that constitute and reproduce gender relations? And the third element, criteria, is the normative element, necessary to be able to decide whether a certain situation is to be judged positively or negatively.

For a description of the most important *structures* a connection could be made to the 'Analysis of the Women's Question' that was made for the government in 1982 (and was considered still valid in the nineties, both by femocrats and by academic experts [see Keuzenkamp & Teunissen 1990]). Building upon this analysis and upon more recent knowledge the two main structures of gender inequality were described as the division of labour, and, secondly, the organisation of intimacy and sexuality. The importance of differences between women, in terms of their different positioning within these structures, was stressed, but not elaborated on in detail.

In operationalising the *processes*, the mechanisms of gender relations, the EER turned to academic knowledge about mechanisms of power in social practices. Anthony Giddens' structuration theory was the main source for this part (Giddens 1984). Here, a connection could be made to the established problem definition in the Dutch emancipation policies stating that there were 'unequal power relations between the sexes'. Two mechanisms related

to the constitution of power relations were distinguished, the first being the distribution and access to resources, and the second the use of rules (interpretations and norms) about or connected to gender in interaction and at an institutional level.

For the last element, the evaluation, *criteria* were used that had a long history in different Dutch policy fields. The first criterion – the most significant one in Dutch emancipation policies - is equality in the sense of equality before the law and equal treatment in similar circumstances. To avoid equality in the sense of sameness, or adaptation to a male norm, the criterion of pluriformity (a society where differences are not hierarchical) was added. Pluriformity was also a central principle in Dutch emancipation policies, be it a more recent one. To further accentuate how this pluriformity was grounded in different choices the criterion of autonomy (the possibility for women to decide for themselves what is a good life) was added. This criterion of autonomy was the central principle used in Dutch development policies.

In the final design of the EER, this theoretical framework of the instrument is then combined with the basic Impact Assessment steps. This means essentially that the current and future situation in a policy field has to be described for both structures, that the distribution of resources and the occurrence and functioning of gender rules has to be described and analysed for both the current and future situation in a policy field, and that the potential result of a policy plan then has to be evaluated in terms of equality, autonomy and pluriformity.

Gender equality policy frames and the EER

The development of the Dutch instrument shows the occurrence and the importance of connecting to existing policy frames. In the Netherlands, policy definitions of the gender problematic that were framed and analysed in terms of power could be found in the existing authoritative 'Analysis of the women's question'. Policy frames for the criteria could be found as well. The existing Environmental Impact Assessment functioned as a legitimising methodological frame, and thereby enhanced the political and bureaucratic opportunities. This linking to existing policy frames has been crucial for the acceptance of the instrument, and can therefore be seen as positive.

The specific strategical choices that were made in the course of designing the EER have problematic consequences too. The choice to use an existing theoretical framework and existing criteria also "freezes" its content to the state of the art knowledge of 1994, and downplays any political debate on its content. In that sense, the EER is a technocratic instrument, and as such can have a depoliticising effect. To assure a more dynamic connection to feminist academic knowledge, or to allow for renewed feminist debates on its analytical starting points, it would be necessary to at least organise evaluations and revisions of the EER

at regular intervals. Although this was not planned from the beginning, fortunately it has happened at least once, in 1999[14].

As a result of its strategical designing, the EER may not be easily exportable either. Not because of its qualities in an academic sense, but because of its qualities as related to specific policy contracts, to specific political contexts. The very qualities that can make it accepted and used in the Netherlands can make it more difficult to use elsewhere. When Petra Meier and Allison Woodward were asked to develop a similar instrument for Flanders (one of Belgium's parts), they were critical towards the EER because of: the high degree of specialisation needed; the cost in time and money; the dependency on the quality of information and the lack of construction of alternatives (Woodward & Meier 1997). In Flanders the problem was that there was almost no expertise on gender available, that there were even less data on gender relations, and less support to tackle the problem. In addition, the theoretical framework of the EER did not connect to the young policy history of Flanders. In fact, there was hardly any policy history on gender equality in Flanders. There was no accepted definition of the gender problematic, and there were no accepted criteria to connect to. Because of the absence of gender equality policy frames, the (almost) non-existence of gender segregated data and the weak political support, both researchers decided to develop an instrument that is much more educational and process oriented, to try to increase awareness and knowledge on gender by asking questions at all moments in the policy process[15]. Unfortunately, the Flemish instrument has not been used since it was finished in 1997.

Evaluation of the experiences with the EER

The strength of the Dutch EER instrument is that it has been used. In 1999, nine EERs were completed at the national level. There have been EERs in the fields of education, justice, tax policy, and agriculture. The conclusions of the recent evaluation study are positive. In principle, they say, it is a good instrument. It only needs more attention and further development and elaboration, not because of the quality of the instrument, but mainly

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14   See Van de Graaf, Mossink & Groeflin 1999. In 1998, I also published a proposal to extend the theoretical framework on a personal base. M. Verloo, Alle goede dingen in drieën. Van kritiek naar ontwerp (Three is a good number. Moving from critique to design). In: *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies,* 1998, 1, nr 4, november, pp.55-59. This article basically proposes to add one more structure, "The organisation of citizenship', one more mechanism, "violence", and one more criterium, "care/ social repsonsability".

15   The Flemish instrument is more similar to Canadian and New Zealand gender analyses. See:
Ministry of Women's Affairs (1996). The Full Picture: guidelines for gender analysis. Wellington: Ministry for Women's Affairs.
Status of Women Canada (1996). Gender-based analysis. A guide for policy making. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada.

concerning the context around it. The main points of attention are: the position of the EER in the policy making process, the political support for the EER, the translation of its conclusions to alternatives and recommendations and the availability of guidelines for the people who commission it. According to the evaluation the points mentioned by Woodward & Meier were not a problem in the Netherlands: there was enough expertise - often hired from outside -, it was not too time and cost consuming, and in reality it nearly always did include recommendations or alternatives.

Two elements in the evaluation report are most important. The first concerns the quality of the critical assessment of the policy documents. It emphasizes that the analysis of the proposed policy plan should include a very precise analysis of its problem/solution combination. It should analyse not only the solutions proposed but also the problem definition on its gender impact. According to the researchers, some of the EERs have not been critical enough towards the overall framing of the policy problem at hand. The evaluations also warn of a simplification of the instrument (on the basis of experiences on the local level with simplified checklists), arguing that the gender perspective is easily lost, leading to 'sex without gender', often presenting women as only vulnerable victims again. In fact, these points are related to the transformative potential of the EER, because they accentuate that this potential can only be realised when the EER can be fundamentally critical about the way policy proposals construct problems.

The second important point from the evaluation report is related to the place of the instrument in the policy process. The researchers discerned a tendency to conduct the Gender Impact Assessment at too late a stage, when policy plans can hardly be changed any more. As can be expected, this seriously weakens the impact of the instrument. This point is presented as a technical problem in the evaluation report. Probably this problem is more complicated, and of a more political character. Part of the problem is the process character of policymaking in the Netherlands, resulting in a cascade of draft texts that makes it difficult to decide when there is a text to apply an EER on. The problem could also be that at each specific level where (parts of) policies are in fact constructed, different sets of actors are present or absent, to the extent that previous support for the use of the instrument is not shared, that previous existing opportunities are absent, and that other frames, values and norms prevail.

The evaluation report also makes a comparison between the work of 'internal', 'external', and 'joint venture' teams in executing the EERs. It shows that 'joint venture' teams worked best, combining the advantages of distance (the external experts) and defining power (the internal policy makers). Next best was an external team, because some distance proved necessary in order to be critical. In terms of the theoretical framework presented earlier, the difference in performance between these teams seems to be related to their respective capacities for strategical framing, networking and the access to opportunities. In joint venture

teams, two frames are present, and that could explain their better performance in frame bridging. Moreover, joint venture teams could potentially offer access to more than one set of (mobilising or supporting) networks. Furthermore, compared to the "external" teams, the joint venture teams probably have better access to whichever opportunities are available.

The EER and gender mainstreaming: a critical assessment

Some reflections can be added to the evaluation described in the previous paragraph. At the time of its development, the EER was constructed as an instrument that could (and, ideally, would) be used for all policies that possibly had a relevance to gender. Now, six years later, eleven EERs have been finished. During these six years probably more than a hundred new policies have been launched, to give but a very low estimate. The process of selecting policies for an EER therefore is highly significant.

If the EER were truly an instrument for gender mainstreaming, then it would be necessary to (re)organise the policy process in such a way, that an EER will be undertaken for at least the most crucial, the most important policies. So far, this has not been organised. The instrument is supposed to sell itself, to be adopted in a voluntary way. In fact, it did sell itself, but very slowly. Solely the Ministry of Education tried to adopt a strategy where all parts of its organisation were supposed to use the instrument in a pilot project, but this strategy failed for lack of supporters and expertise. Possible solutions for a better selection process are not hard to find, but all of them would depend on political and bureaucratic will. One solution would be an EER screening committee that should decide for all policies whether an EER is necessary or not (parallel to the procedure for an Environmental Impact Assessment in the Netherlands). Another one would be to institutionalise the use of a screening instrument like SMART[16]. Or simply to make the use of the EER compulsory, of course…

A second reflection is on the further development of a gender mainstreaming strategy. Much more would be needed for successful gender mainstreaming than only the use of this first instrument. Gender mainstreaming cannot be restricted to the screening of policy proposals by an analytical, technical instrument. A more comprehensive process of gender mainstreaming also involves the inclusion of gender expertise and gender training, and the organisation of consultation or participation of relevant experts and users into the policy making process. Such a mix of different tools can work as triangulation, where the combination of the three types of tools can maximise the advantages, and minimise the weak points[17]. Unfortunately, so far the Dutch government has not made a comprehensive

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[16]   For a description of SMART, see Gender Mainstreaming (1998), p.66.

[17]   This can be seen as a form of methodological triangulation. See: Denzin (1984). This is called triangulation because normally at least three methods or points of view are needed for

mainstreaming plan. Only recently has the Dutch government started to consider the development of a more comprehensive approach on gender mainstreaming, including a further elaboration of the EER. This new initiative could be very promising.

Weaknesses of the EER

Looking at discussions within gender studies, there is also a need for improvement of the EER itself. In its current form the EER gives some attention to differences within the category of women, but there is no substantial consideration of other structural inequalities. What could be done to counter the growing (and justified) criticism that a focused attention on gender only and not on other structural inequalities is totally inadequate? The current component in the EER where there is just one question that asks demands attention for differences within the category of women is unsatisfactory. Just to "add other differences and stir" will not work. The relationship between gender and ethnicity/or race, between gender and sexuality, or between gender and class, to name just three of the most important structural inequalities, are much too complex for that. In the Netherlands, the EER has been designed to point at the most important structures, mechanisms and criteria that concern gender. There is no reason to believe that exactly the same structures, mechanisms and criteria are the right ones when other structural inequalities are concerned. To give but a few examples: we have equal legal rights for both genders, but not for Dutch citizens and migrants living in the Netherlands. We can analyse the 'organisation of intimacy' as a fundamental structure for gender inequality, but why should that be one of the structures of racial/ethnic inequality? People can escape homophobia and discrimination on the basis of sexuality by hiding in the closet, but people cannot escape racism and sexism in the same way, it is difficult to hide sex or colour. Therefore the analytical elements that are important for other structural inequalities should be established first before anything resembling a Diversity Impact Assessment can be designed. Because of these weaknesses at the theoretical level, the most obvious "diversity"[18] mainstreaming strategy would be not to start with analytical tools, but to start with tools that use consultation or participation of relevant experts and organisations[19]. There are some

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comparisons and contrasts to be illuminating, and to allow conclusions to be drawn. This is because three-way comparisons are less likely to lead to simple polarized oppositions which merely move back and forth without allowing for resolution.

[18] The word diversity is used here as a parallel goal to gender equality, implying the abolition of all structural inequalities.

[19] Although these type of tools allow for a more political accent in gender mainstreaming, their disadvantage –especially if this is the only tool used - can be that they put the burden of acting against a certain inequality on the shoulders of those groups who are suffering most from this inequality, thereby reinforcing the existing dominance patterns.

initiatives to work on this, but so far only at an informal level. It would be most urgent to formally develop more knowledge and practices on the intersection of gender and other inequalities.

Explaining the relative success of the EER

Returning to our three main theoretical concepts, we can clearly see the relevance of all three factors in explaining the relative success of the EER. There have been good *political opportunities*. In general, the Netherlands has had a relative long history of equality policies, and a traditional openness towards NGO's. More specifically, there were particular political opportunities because the State Secretary wanted to develop the EER, and because, due to the facet policy, there was already some inter-ministerial co-operation on gender equality. Later the political opportunities diminished, especially the support of top politicians and top bureaucrats. Recently, the prominent attention for gender mainstreaming at the international level stimulated a renewed interest in the instrument, and a new élan that could lead to incorporating the instrument in a more comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy.

There were also strong *mobilising networks*, both within and outside the bureaucracy. At times when political opportunities were lower, feminist NGO's repeatedly have put high pressure on state agents to use the EER. The support and strength of the equality unit within the state bureaucracy has varied considerably, due mainly to changes in staff and to varying opinions of civil servants.

Concerning *strategical framing*, it is striking that the theoretical framework of the EER was carefully constructed out of already "adopted" elements, both in its methodology (referring to environmental policy), and in its theoretical framework. This framing made it almost impossible not to accept the instrument.

Maybe the concepts can also help to explain how relative this success is. The political opportunities and the mobilising structures allowed for the design, and the introduction of the EER on a voluntary basis. This is more than can be found in almost any other country, but it is still quite limited. There is no formal reorganisation of policy processes so that the instrument will be used. In that sense, there is no gender mainstreaming yet. No revolution at all.

When I look back, I realise that there has been little pressure on the Dutch government till now to take a further step. Feminist NGO's have been active in demanding specific EERs on policies that they considered highly relevant, such as tax policy, or a new electoral system, but they have not requested a more structural use of the instrument. This could be related to the fact that many feminist NGO's in the Netherlands are organized around specific issues, and that there is not a more general national feminist umbrella organisation. The characteristics of

the mobilising structures in the Netherlands could help to explain the lack of pressure for a more structural approach.

The absence of mobilising structures has also meant that there have been no efforts, inside or outside the bureaucracy, to even frame the necessity of a more formally organised process. More analysis would be needed to find out why this has not been the case. One of my hypotheses would be that such a frame would be too much of a contrast to the Dutch style of policy making, which is rather consensual, and reluctant of too formal organising[20]. The Dutch state is rather weak, it depends on consensus for the realisation of its policies. Another hypothesis along the same lines would be that this is related to weariness of Big Efforts. The Dutch culture favours pragmatism, and pragmatism is hard to combine with a Major Project to Change All Policies…

Finally, we can use the concepts to clarify the specific form and content of the EER, and of the Dutch gender mainstreaming enterprise. The specific Dutch opportunities-networks-framing mix has put the gender mainstreaming enterprise in a technocratic track that can be expected to resonate for a long time in future Dutch gender equality policy development.

Much more would be needed for a solid and more dynamic comprehensive gender mainstreaming framework. Because of the technocratic track that has been the result of the specific Dutch opportunities-networks-framing mix, it is not really impossible, but rather unlikely that such a gender mainstreaming framework will be developed. Rather it can be expected that future elaborations of a gender mainstreaming strategy will also get trapped into this technocratic framework.

Vienna, June 2001

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[20] See: W. Kickert & R. in 't Veld 1995; Toonen 1998; van Waarden 1995.

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Gender Mainstreaming in Practice:
A View from Rural Australia

MARGARET ALSTON

This article focuses on gender mainstreaming in practice using the example of agriculture departments in Australia. Gender mainstreaming is a policy initiative adopted internationally following the Beijing women's conference in 1995 to address gender inequality. The move represents a policy shift from a focus solely addressing women's disadvantage to a broader attention to gender inequality. This article provides an historical overview of the move toward gender mainstreaming in the international environment, as well as a theoretical critique. Using the Australian case example, the shift of attention from rural women to gender mainstreaming in Australian agricultural departments appears to be taking place with little understanding of the concept of gender mainstreaming or its goals. It is further argued that recent moves by government departments of agriculture toward gender mainstreaming may have disadvantaged women. This article argues that, while in theory mainstreaming is a more successful way of addressing gender inequality, in practice it risks reducing attention to women unless changes occur in departmental cultures and gender mainstreaming accountability measures are introduced at international and national levels.

Keywords: gender mainstreaming / rural women / Australia / policy

Around the world, gender mainstreaming has emerged as a key gender-equality strategy following the 1995 Beijing women's conference (see for example Kabeer 2003; UNIFEM 2002; World Food Program 1998; Alston 2003). This strategy represents a shift of policy focus from attention to women's disadvantage to a more strategic attention to mainstreaming gender across organizations as a means of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. This policy shift emerged as a strategic solution to the failure of women-focused policies to significantly change gender disadvantage. Gender mainstreaming has received significant support from the United Nations (UN) agencies, the World Bank, and other transnational networks of women's organizations and feminist groups (Kabeer 2003; ESCAP 2003; True and Mintrom 2001). Yet, there is some evidence that gender mainstreaming is little understood by many in positions of power at national levels, and consequently, the benefits for women at grassroots levels from a shift in policy focus may be meager.

At the institutional level, mainstreaming represents a change in policy from one that establishes women's units within organizations and directs

solutions to women, to one that gives attention to changing the power dynamics existing across departments and organizations. As Bhatta notes, this process is about "the radical alteration of the processes and structures which reproduce women's subordinate position" (2001, 28).

The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations defines gender mainstreaming as follows:

> 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 of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (UN 1997)

This article focuses on the shift to gender mainstreaming in Australia with a particular emphasis on its implementation within departments of agriculture. In these Australian departments, rural women's units were established in the 1980s and 1990s and were tasked with providing a focus on and for women, raising women's status, and giving women a voice in policy. Following the Beijing conference and Australia's support for gender mainstreaming, the focus within departments shifted in the late 1990s and early 2000s, resulting in women's units being reshaped, their resources cut, and their work changed. To illustrate the impact of policy changes, data is presented from a survey of the heads of rural women's policy units across Australia. This data reveals that gender mainstreaming, and Australia's commitment to it, is little understood by departmental personnel, and the move away from attention to women has allowed departmental resistance to gender equality measures.

The research demonstrates that, although mainstreaming is a more comprehensive strategy for achieving gender equality, the translation at the national level has left Australian rural women at a disadvantage. What appears to be happening is that some Australian national and state governments have used the move to mainstreaming as a reason to do away with, or downsize, rural women's policy units and the positive focus they provide for women. In their place is a policy vacuum with no organizations charged with taking responsibility for implementing gender mainstreaming. It could be argued that a move toward gender mainstreaming has resulted, whether by design or omission (and certainly by a lack of political will), in attention being removed from gender equality and women's empowerment altogether.

Gender Mainstreaming: An Historical Overview

In order to understand and contextualize the move to gender mainstreaming worldwide, a brief overview of international policy development reveals why gender mainstreaming is theoretically a more positive strategy. The second-wave women's movement of the 1970s was driven by activist and grassroots women tired of inequities in their own lives who drew attention to women's lack of equality. Of significance in the context of a discussion of Australian bureaucratic responses is that, both internationally and within Australia, the ongoing focus on gender equality has been driven by community women and groups. True and Mintrom argue that it is transnational networks of "nonstate actors" (international nongovernment women's organizations, feminist groups, and the UN) rather than state instrumentalities that are the primary forces driving gender mainstreaming across the world (2001, 27). Thus, it is significant that women's grassroots activism has driven gender policy globally, often forcing organizational changes.

A useful starting point for an historical overview of gender mainstreaming is the 1975 International Women's Year, which became a catalyst for attention to women's issues, as it captured the mood of women around the world. The UN-sponsored World Conference of the International Women's Year was held in Mexico, and despite their differences, women from across the world attending this conference recognized they shared the common experience of inequitable treatment. The conference called for equality for women in terms of "dignity and worth as human beings as well as equality in their rights, opportunities and responsibilities" (Skard 2002). The conference recognized that development was dependent on the participation of women and men and that involving women in international and national development was the key to progress. This position was endorsed at the Nairobi conference ten years later (Skard 2002).

The strategies endorsed in Mexico included the provision of integrated programs as well as programs specifically targeted to women. While this was an essential first step that made visible the productive work of women, it also allowed women to be viewed in isolation and targeted programs that were usually marginalized and had minor impact. The limited shift in the status of women between the first conference in Mexico in 1975 and the fourth in Beijing in 1995 saw activist women gradually change focus from a commitment to a focus on women's issues toward a more comprehensive attention to advancing and empowering women. Thus, by the time of the Beijing conference, emphasis was placed on incorporating a gendered perspective in all policies and programs, heralding the beginning of the gender mainstreaming approach.

A brief summary of the conferences between 1975 and 2000 shows this gradual shift in emphasis. The Mexico conference called on governments to establish agencies aimed at improving the status of women. This call resulted in national instrumentalities being established by governments to address the status of women, and in Australia, this resulted in the Office of the Status of Women being located in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Following the Mexico conference, which announced the beginning of the decade for women, a commitment was made to the advancement of women. The decade of women, from 1975 to 1985, carried with it the primary goals of equality, development, and peace. The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. The Convention defines discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" (CEDAW 1979).

At Copenhagen in 1980, the midpoint of the decade for women, the second UN world conference adopted the "Program for Action," stressing equality, development, and peace. This conference reinforced the benefits of the participation of women, noting that equality included the participation of women as beneficiaries and active agents of development policies (UN 1986).

At the conclusion of the decade of women, and representing the significance of CEDAW and the UN's efforts, the Nairobi conference held in 1985 attracted 2,000 delegates and approximately 15,000 visitors to the unofficial forum (Weinberg and Woodman n.d.). "The Forward Looking Strategies" developed at this conference called for sexual equality, women's autonomy, and power; recognition of women's unpaid work; and advances in women's paid work (Women and Sustainable Development 1995). It also called for a further conference to be held before 2000. In 1995 this was fulfilled with the Beijing conference, which was the largest UN world conference ever held, drawing up to 50,000 to the official forum and the unofficial forum held nearby (True and Mintrom 2001).

Criticisms of a women-focused approach emerged in the lead up to the Beijing conference. These included the dangers of viewing women as an indivisible category; focusing attention on women in one small area of organizational structures and thus ignoring the institutional/organizational cultures, the complex gender relations, and the ideologies that perpetuate women's disadvantage; and a lack of significant change in gender disadvantage over time (Chant and Gutmann 2000).

The Beijing conference reinforced a commitment to the advancement of women and called for equality and empowerment of women, naming the

rights of women as human rights (UN 1995). However, concern at the lack of significant changes in gender equality across the world led the Beijing delegates to formalize a commitment to gender mainstreaming as a more effective way for governments to respond to gender equality issues.

In 2000, the Beijing +5 conference was held as a special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York. A political declaration affirming commitment to the Beijing Declaration and previous strategies was released, the outcome of this session being termed "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century." The commitment to equality was further reinforced at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 (Annan 2000).

The UN world conferences provided the critical international focus for efforts to address the political, economic, and social status of women (True and Mintrom 2001). Following Beijing, national machineries set up to promote gender equality and the advancement of women have increased. Many of these programs also have been upgraded or located in more strategic areas and their roles are increasingly to oversee gender mainstreaming (Commission on the Status of Women 2003).

Further significant world summits where gender has been prioritized include the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 (where the human rights of women and girls were particularly prioritised), the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 (FAO 1999), and the World Summit on Sustainability in Johannesburg in 2002. The Johannesburg Declaration emphasizes women's empowerment and emancipation and the need for integration of gender equality in all activities included in Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Extra impetus to transnational gender equality has come through the European Union where legislation has been enacted in support of gender equality measures and women's empowerment (European Commission 2003). These significant international events have provided support for a move away from a focus on women, toward a focus on gender mainstreaming. Within organizations it is seen as imperative for gender equality measures to be implemented across departments and not just confined to women's units. One particular concern, however, is whether women's units should be disbanded or reframed as gender-expert units overseeing the implementation of gender mainstreaming (Kelkar 2003). Nonetheless, others argue that targeted activities for women are a necessary complement to gender mainstreaming (see Hannan 2003).

What is clear is that the move holds significant dangers for women if attention is not given to its implementation. As in this Australian case, it could entail the removal of women's units, the loss of gender expertise, and the failure of governments and organizations to provide infrastructure

to support gender mainstreaming. As Chant and Gutmann note, "it would seem inadvisable to eliminate [women-focused] machinery, until there is more convincing evidence for fundamental changes in gender attitudes and relations in organisations" (2000, 11).

However, while transnational activism around this issue has been strong, often the will to enact gender mainstreaming at a national basis has been limited. Of most concern to feminist scholars is an international backlash by national governments against any measure deemed feminist. For those of us from Australia who value a commitment to women's advancement and empowerment, the failure of the Australian government to ratify the Optional Protocol of CEDAW is of serious concern. Other countries were similarly reluctant providing evidence of a backlash in many countries against gender equality and empowerment of women. As a feminist, I fear that the adoption of gender mainstreaming without adequate international accountability measures or dedicated infrastructure may give further impetus to conservative policymakers in their efforts to dismantle the machinery of equality, which in Australian means the rural women's units. Before turning to the Australian example, however, the following section provides a more detailed conceptual understanding of gender mainstreaming.

Theorizing Gender Mainstreaming

In theorizing gender mainstreaming, Walby points out that it is one of three recognizable shifts in policy relating to women (1997). The first is a policy of equal treatment and generally relates to such issues as equal pay. In Australia, the Sexual Discrimination Act is an example of equal treatment being introduced through legislation. However, as Rees (2001) and Crompton and Le Feuvre (2000) argue, equal treatment is flawed, as it does not necessarily lead to equal outcome and is blind to the unequal position women and men hold in relation to the labor market. Women's caretaking and domestic responsibilities, for example, have meant equal treatment can lead to their disadvantage. Rees notes that equal treatment takes men as the norm and thus sees women as flawed or inadequate. Further, the discourse of equality has often viewed women as a problem to be addressed (Crompton and Le Feuvre 2000). Nonetheless, it is important to note that equal treatment principles are a necessary but insufficient means of ensuring equality for women.

Positive action represents the second shift identified by Walby and is indicated by measures introduced to positively favor women (1997). Initiatives introduced to allow positive discrimination include offering leadership training for women, providing childcare facilities, introducing

"family friendly" hours and, of importance to Australian rural women, establishing rural women's units tasked to address women's needs. Positive action is designed to offer women the opportunity to catch up to men (Crompton and Le Feuvre 2000) and, through a gradual process of incremental growth, to achieve equality of outcome. However as both Rees (2001) and Bhatta (2001) note, relying on incremental change does not work. As Rees persuasively argues, positive action provides the mechanisms to allow women to operate in male-dominated cultures without actually challenging that culture (2001). Women are expected to fit into a culture and systems that have been framed around a masculine point of reference, in organizations overwhelmingly dominated by men, and around an agenda that has been developed without consultation or respect for women's positions. This is the system in which the rural women's units currently operate. It is little wonder that they operate as a voice of resistance, are often ignored or trivialized, and are constantly challenged to work in a system where the language, processes, and culture treats women as secondary and dispensable.

This is where Walby's third shift becomes important (1997). In the European Union (EU), UN, and international environment, gender mainstreaming has become the critical phase designed to address the problems associated with positive action. Yet, in the EU there is some dispute as to what gender mainstreaming actually represents (Rees 2001). For some it is simply doing gender impact assessments on all departmental policies and practices to assess the impacts of these on women. This approach is termed by some as the integrationist approach (Beveridge, Nott, and Stephen 2000; Bhatta 2001). A second, more thorough and more radical approach is the agenda-setting approach (Beveridge, Nott, and Stephen 2000; Bhatta 2001), an approach that shifts the focus of attention away from women to the institution itself (Rees 2001; Crompton and Le Feuvre 2000). Under this approach, the very objectives of the department/organization are brought into question along with the priorities, strategies, structures, and processes. The very systems and institutions through which policy is formulated are completely overhauled. As Rees suggests, it means asking, how does this organization advantage men (2001)? Depending on the answer, the system is recast to ensure that women and men have equal access to, and treatment by, the institution itself. In order to achieve this goal, as Rees notes, gender statistics, monitoring of programs for gender bias, evaluation of programs, and gender-impact assessments are important tools for the reconstructed institution (2001). As Crompton and Le Feuvre (2000), Bhatta (2001), and Rees (2001), drawing on Schunter-Kleeman (1999) argue, the result is that organizations are no longer engaged in trying to change women to fit the system. Rather they are changing the system to incorporate women.

Australia's Support for Gender Mainstreaming

Australia's response to the Beijing conference has been complicated by a federal election of the conservative Howard government in 1996 and its re-election in 1998, 2001, and 2004. It is clear from this government's policy initiatives in the areas of child care, taxation policy, and family policy that it supports a particularly conservative view of women's role in society. Howard uses discourse to reinforce his appeal to do away with "special interest" groups and to govern for "mainstream Australia" (Johnson 2000). This rhetoric has allowed his government to push gender equality off the agenda. Its failure to sign the CEDAW optional protocol or to introduce legislation in support of maternity allowances for working mothers despite strong representation from the Sex Discrimination Commissioner and women's groups, indicates the Howard government is not focused on gender-equality measures. Further, following its 2004 re-election, Howard acted swiftly to remove the Office of the Status of Women from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (and hence from access to cabinet documents) to the Department of Family and Community Services and changed its name to the Office for Women. This move signals to women's groups that advice on the gender implications of policy is no longer welcome and that addressing women's status beyond their family role is no longer a priority. It is therefore clear that the federal government lacks the political will to implement gender mainstreaming.

The Australian government's reports to the United Nations on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) have been slow in recent years. In fact, the fourth and fifth reports were presented as a joint submission in 2003 (Commonwealth of Australia 2003). In this report, the government notes it has developed a "package of information resources (checklists and guides) and established a Gender Mainstreaming Help Line service for government agencies to assist them in integrating gender into their policies, programmes and services" (Commonwealth of Australia 2003, 10). Despite the paucity of this response, the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues, Kay Patterson, noted in a speech to the Women's Human Rights workshop in 2004 that the government has used the Beijing "Platform for Action" and Australia's "Beijing +5 Action Plan, 2001–2005" (Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women n.d.) "to enhance its efforts towards achieving equality for women in Australia and around the world" (Patterson 2004). More tellingly, AusAID, the Australian government's overseas aid program, notes that the introduction of the gender mainstreaming policy "marks a shift in Australia's approach to development from an exclusive focus on women and their specific needs to a broader approach that considers the gender roles, needs and opportunities available to both men and women" (2002, 5).

It is clear that the language of gender mainstreaming is understood in the context of international aid work programs. What is also clear is that political rhetoric does not translate to departmental levels inside the country.

Supporting this view is research conducted in Australia by Donaghy with senior bureaucrats, ex-public servants, and gender analysts, which indicates that the implementation of gender mainstreaming falls far short of the ideal (2003). She notes that while public servants should be familiar with the gender mainstreaming strategy, understand its importance, and know that the (former) Office for the Status of Women is the key resource, that this is not the case. In fact, she notes there have been major cutbacks in women's policy expertise and many women's units have been abolished, undermining any capacity to implement gender mainstreaming. Further, she notes "the overwhelming majority of senior bureaucrats interviewed did not know what gender mainstreaming was, or even whether the government had a strategy in this area" and that the term had been coopted to justify the abolition of women's units (2003, 8–9).

Australian research reveals that there are chasms between the new rhetoric of gender mainstreaming and the reality of departmental intransigence. As a result, it would appear that, in Australia at least, the new policy focus has led to significant disadvantage for grassroots women.

Australian Rural Women's Experience

Rural Women's Status

There are more than 70,000 Australian women who self-identify as farmers or farm managers (RIRDC and DPIE 1998) making them a significant part of the agricultural workforce. The activism of rural women is driven by an awareness of their significant economic contributions to agriculture through their on- and off-farm income-generating activities, and their understanding of the critical role they play in enabling their partners to remain farmers, a position rarely acknowledged in mainstream agricultural discourse. For example, work commissioned by the Rural Women's Unit in the then Department of Primary Industries and Energy reveals that Australian women contribute 48 percent of real farm income through their work on and off the farm (RIRDC and DPIE 1998). Despite this, women occupy approximately 5 to 8 percent of agricultural leadership positions in Australia's largest farming organizations (RIRDC and DPIE 1998; Alston 2000). This disparity causes considerable angst for agriculturally based women.

New grassroots women's community groups established during the 1990s such as Australian Women in Agriculture and the Foundation

for Australian Agricultural Women, called on governments across the country to make rural women visible, to raise their profile, and to allow rural women access to decision-making bodies where crucial industry decisions were being made in their absence (Alston 1996). Working with and through the departmental women's units, this movement of activist women and their organizations has been termed the Australian Women in Agriculture movement (Leipins 1998).

The Political Landscape

Australian agriculture is undertaken in all six Australian states and two territories. While all states and territories are held by Labor governments, at the federal level a conservative coalition government was elected under Prime Minister John Howard in 1996.

Adding to the complexity for rural women, however, is that the junior coalition party is the rurally based National Party, which has been under threat from popularist movements of the far right. To shore up its appeal in rural areas, it has resorted to adopting a number of initiatives that are attractive to its rural constituency, including initiatives for rural women. As a result, rural women's units have been created in the Departments of Agriculture, Forests, and Fisheries and in Transport and Regional Services. From 1999 until 2005, the Minister for Transport and Regional Services was John Anderson, also the Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the National Party. He created a regional women's advisory council of rural women appointed to advise him directly on policy. It is important to note that these initiatives have been developed at a time when women's units and "femocrat" positions in other departments are being dismantled (see Sawer 1999).

The "Femocrats"

The key points in the Australian story concerning support for gender equality are the activism of grassroots community women, the work of departmental femocrats, the establishment of the rural women's units, and the recent change in policy direction to gender mainstreaming. From the 1980s, Australia led the way in introducing women into bureaucracies in various departments to ensure gender equality in policy outcomes and to work for the advancement of women. This strategy is a typical positive action as described by Walby (1997). These women, usually located in women's units, became known as "femocrats," a term defined by Eisenstein as "a cohort of feminist women who became bureaucrats in a quest for social change . . . [who] helped change the gender landscape of their country" (Eisenstein 1996, xi). They provided a model to the world of bureaucrats in government departments working to bring about cultural

change, to raise women's issues, and to assess the gender implications of policy at the highest levels.

It is little wonder that, when Australian rural women in the 1980s and 1990s lobbied against the discrimination they were experiencing, the femocrat model was the one adopted by departments of agriculture to address these issues. Following a significant downturn in commodity prices and long periods of drought that resulted, not only in many families leaving agriculture, but also a rise in the numbers of women in farm families working off-farm to support their families, women demanded attention to their situation and invisibility.

Adopting the Femocrat Model— Positive Action for Women in Australian States

The genesis for the Australian Women in Agriculture movement occurred in Victoria through the appointment of two part-time women's officers in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs in 1986. The head of the national Office of the Status of Women in 1984 was Anne Summers. In that year, she organized a process called the Women's Budget where federal departments were required to report on the amount of money spent on women. Following the success of this process in highlighting gender-equality issues at the federal level, it was introduced into the Victorian State departments in 1986 by Victorian Premier John Cain. As a result, the Victorian Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs was forced to report that out of a budget of $50 million, it had spent $100 on women (Eisenstein 1996). The appointment of the women's officers followed this embarrassing admission. A critical role was also played by female Labor members of the Victorian parliament at the time such as Joan Kirner, Kay Setches, and Caroline Hogg. These women took a keen interest in raising the profile of rural women, developing a healthy liaison with the women's officers, and supporting their activist approach in addressing a rural women's agenda.

As a direct result of the work of the women's officers, and in concert with activist women in the Victorian community, the Australian Women in Agriculture group was formally established in 1992. One of their first tasks was to hold the first International Women in Agriculture conference in Melbourne in 1994. This conference brought over 850 women from 34 countries to Australia in a lively conference described by the then Governor-General, Bill Hayden, in his opening speech as the largest agricultural conference ever held in the country (Women in Agriculture International Conference Committee 1994). This conference stamped Australian Women in Agriculture on the map as a powerful lobbying group with energy and commitment to the cause of advancing women.

Following the conference, the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women was founded as a philanthropic organization to advance women in agriculture and their communities. Together with the more conservative Country Women's Association, established in 1922 and with a long history of activist work for rural women and families, the Australian Women in Agriculture and Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women formed the core of the nongovernment grassroots arm of the Women in Agriculture movement. These organizations work with activist women, academics, and femocrats. I am one of several academics who has worked closely with the movement assisting to articulate a discourse of gender equality.

Meanwhile, the 1994 International Women in Agriculture conference, its agenda, and the publicity generated captured the attention of governments across the country. Women's units were established in some state departments of agriculture following the Victorian model. These units, or rural women's networks as many were called, have acted to link rural community women to the policy process.

Moving to National Positive Action

Following the rapid development of state organizational structures, the growth of Australian Women in Agriculture, and the loud calls from women in agriculture across the country for more support for women, I was approached to organize and coordinate the first National Rural Women's Forum in 1995. This forum had the explicit aim of giving a national focus to the piecemeal and rapid developments occurring around the country. The forum, held in the federal Parliament House in Canberra, brought together representatives of community groups, departments of agriculture, women's units, and government representatives—all part of the burgeoning Women in Agriculture movement. A National Agenda for Women resulted from these discussions (Alston 1995). This document outlined 27 recommendations for government, industry, and community groups to overcome the invisibility of rural women, to give them greater recognition, and to increase their representation. As a direct result of this forum, the federal government also established a Rural Women's Unit located in the then Department of Primary Industries and Energy (now Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests) and was the first women's unit dedicated to rural women's issues at the federal level. This unit was to work with the state rural women's units and with rural women's community groups to address the Rural Women's Agenda.

The Rural Women's Unit held another successful forum in 1997, again bringing together representatives of women's groups, departmental representatives, and others to work on developing the women's agenda. Following this forum, the unit developed a National Action Plan for Women and

called on the states to develop their own state plans. These plans outline strategies for improving the status of rural women. The Rural Women's Unit works effectively to link state bodies through the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management (SCARM) process. Regular meetings are held with state and federal representatives of women's units working on a rural women's agenda. In 1999, following a departmental reshuffle, another unit, the Regional and Rural Women's Unit, was established in the federal Department of Transport and Regional Services.

The most recent development in the Women in Agriculture movement has been a June 2002 announcement of the successful tenderers for the Rural Secretariat funded by the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) (now the reduced Office for Women). A new coalition of groups, the National Rural Women's Coalition, has successfully tendered to establish this secretariat and gives advice to the Office for Women on rural women's issues. This is the first departmental initiative for rural women that has effectively moved beyond a focus on women in agriculture. As such, it gives a broader and non-industry-based definition of "rural women." Nevertheless, the Rural Women's Coalition includes key agricultural women's organizations, such as the Country Women's Association, Australian Women in Agriculture, the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women, and the newly formed Women in Seafood group, the Australian Local Government Women's Association, as well as the Isolated Children's and Parent's Association, the Rural Health Alliance, and Indigenous Women's representatives.

Women's Units—Organizational Ghettos

The political activism of grassroots community women has seen these developments occur over a relatively short period of time. It is arguable that the Australian Women in Agriculture movement has been so effective because of the relations developed among community women, corporate women, researchers, politicians, and femocrats in the rural women's units. These relationships have allowed the development of strong links inside and outside the bureaucracies. However, the work of the units has been critical in raising the profile of rural women, allowing the development of a rural women's voice, and giving a point of contact for that voice to be heard in government spheres. It would appear that the units have been a success in providing "positive action" (Rees 2001) for rural women.

However as was clear at Beijing, positive action for women does not significantly impact gender inequality, and significant changes have not occurred in bureaucracies or departments. When we assess the institutions through which the Australian rural women's units function, it is important to note that organizations are not gender neutral. Organizations are profoundly gendered, and operate to reinforce and maintain

gender divisions in society (Savage and Witz 1992). Still (1995) notes that organizations incorporate male managerial cultural elements and that women are "organisational migrants" (Still 1993, 153) in a masculine world. For femocrats entering the male-dominated domain of agricultural organizations, the culture has been doubly repressive.

Using the Language of Gender Mainstreaming—
Moving Away from Gender Equality

With gender mainstreaming rural women's units have become particularly vulnerable. Already the unit in Agriculture, Forests, and Fisheries has been subsumed into the larger Rural Industries Section and any reference to women has been all but deleted. At state levels, there are also moves to remove or change the units in favor of mainstreaming. However, the lack of discussion about what mainstreaming entails and the abandonment of some of the rural women's units suggests that at best this represents a failure on the part of conservative politicians and male-dominated departments to understand the complexities of gender mainstreaming. At worst, it suggests that the opportunity is being taken to remove attention to gender equality and women's empowerment altogether.

Ironically, the approach now championed in the UN is drawn from the Australian experience, and yet, in Australia under a more conservative regime, the approach has been largely abandoned. There has been a discursive shift from equality issues to market primacy and from public service to public management (Thomson 2001). Since 1996, for example, the federal Office of the Status of Women (now Office for Women) has been stripped of its gender-auditing role and, since 2004, has been significantly downgraded. Any semblance of committed attention to gender equality has been lost.

The tensions at national and state levels between community women and femocrats on the one hand, and departments and politicians on the other, are evident. The Australian case demonstrates that grassroots women continue to call for gender equality and women's empowerment. At the same time, policy has moved from support within departments of agriculture for women's units to a rhetorical championing of gender mainstreaming. Yet, I feel that the lack of resourcing given to gender mainstreaming and the failure even to define what it means, suggests the international discourse has been coopted to allow a sweeping away of the apparatus supporting gender equality and women's empowerment. Research with heads of Australia's rural women's units in 2002 allows an exploration of the resourcing, focus, impact on departmental culture, and climate within these departments to provide an understanding of the attention given to gender mainstreaming.

The Study

My engagement in the Women in Agriculture movement both as a rural woman and an academic suggests both strengths and weaknesses for this work. Strengths include the ready access to key players in the rural women's units and a lived understanding of the issues associated with being an Australian rural woman. These strengths indicate weaknesses may lie in a certain bias in collecting, analyzing, and reporting data. I am aware of a need for reflexivity in the research situation around these issues and address this by principally representing as an academic and a researcher, by maintaining confidentiality, and by reporting data faithfully. My role as an insider/outsider (Naples 2003) has nonetheless allowed a framing of knowledge and concerns around a discourse of gender equality.

A survey of the departmental femocrats, members of the SCARM Rural Women's working group (a national group auspiced by the federal government and bringing together all state and federal rural women's units heads), was conducted during 2002. Representatives include the two federal departmental rural women's units in Agriculture, Forests, and Fisheries (DAFFA) and Transport and Regional Services (DOTaRS). At the state level, representatives include the four dedicated women's units in New South Wales, Victoria, western Australia, and Queensland located in primary industry-related portfolios. Tasmania also has a Women in Agriculture Project Officer located in the primary industries department, while in South Australia the Rural Affairs Unit does some work related to women's issues. In all, the sample comprised heads of the eight units. However, one unit was represented by a new worker, as well as one who had recently moved on, so the final sample was nine. All respondents were female and they were employed at senior management levels.

All representatives were surveyed with a mailed questionnaire in 2002. The questionnaire comprises open-ended questions about their work roles and gender-equality issues but also included quantitative questions about the length of establishment and their staffing and funding arrangements. Several respondents included extra handwritten comments on their surveys and some followed up with telephone calls to further discuss the survey and the attitude of departments to their work and to gender equality.

Rural Women's Units—A Snapshot

Table 1 indicates the units and their establishment date. Within eight units there is the equivalent of 22 full-time staff across Australia working on rural/industry/agricultural women's issues. Of the many thousands of hours of departmental time devoted to agricultural matters spent

Table 1
Rural Women's Units

State	Date Established
Victoria	1986
NSW	1992
Tasmania	1995
Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Forests, and Fisheries	1995
Western Australia	1997
Queensland	1999
Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services	1999

Note: South Australia did not establish a dedicated women's unit but did allocate staff to work on a women's agenda in the 1990s.

across the whole of Australia, a total of 790 hours per week are spent on a women's agenda. There has been little staff increase in the units over the short period they have been in operation. Apart from salaries, in the five units that declared a budget, a total operating budget of $568,000, of the hundreds of millions of dollars spent in agricultural departments, is spent per annum on women's issues; the lowest in Tasmania ($8,000) and the highest in Transport and Regional Services ($200,000). Although this demonstrates a significant increase since the Victorian department's contribution of $100 in 1986, it still falls far short of gender equality in departmental resource allocation. While it could be argued that the remaining departmental budget is being spent on both men and women, it is clear from the comments from women's unit heads that many departmental personnel do not view women as clients.

Demonstrating that the units are largely focused on positive actions rather than gender mainstreaming, the mission statements of the units reveal a commitment to assisting women's participation. In essence, the units are focused on providing equal opportunities and positive action for women largely, at least in their mission statements, ignoring attention to gender mainstreaming and the culture in which the units are based (Rees 2001).

The stated catalyst for the development of the units was overwhelmingly community women's activism (DAFFA, NSW, Victoria, Tasmania). Although in western Australia prompting by the Minister for Women was a catalyst for development, and in both western Australia and Queensland,

the Action Plan process instigated by DAFFA was also a catalyst. There have, however, been some changes in focus with two units (Queensland and DAFFA) moving to incorporate work with young people, Victoria including a stronger emphasis on community development and policy, and Tasmania receiving secretarial support.

Departmental Resistances

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to comment on their relations with other sections of the department, and it is here that the extent of organizational cultural resistance is hinted at and the need for gender mainstreaming is made evident. Only one of the nine respondents felt that their unit's relationship with the rest of the department in which it is located was "successful." Others felt it was "sometimes difficult," "tense," "steadily improving," "slowly influencing," there was a "need to leverage," or the department was only paying "lip service" to gender equality.

The resistance of, or support for, gender equality is strongly influenced from the top of an organization. Respondents were asked to comment on their relations with their minister. Of importance is that five felt that this relationship was strong or positive, one was "less than engaged" (a view reflected in the unit's falling position in the organization), and one felt that the support of the minister was dependent on the unit presenting women as dependent on men.

The strongest allies nominated by the unit respondents are those in their department's senior executive positions who support their work, the relevant minister, the nongovernment women's organizations, the national broadcaster (the ABC), and some industry groups. The weakest allies nominated are rural and remote communities with particular views of women, middle managers in the departments, and some very influential agricultural industry groups. The resistance of these groups to gender equality means that any attempts by the unit staff to move toward gender mainstreaming within their departments is actively resisted.

Positive Actions

Asked about their most successful strategies for implementing positive changes for women, most units nominated their interactions with grassroots community women either through formal arrangements, such as departmental advisory bodies, or informal partnerships with women's organizations. Other successful strategies nominated are women's Gatherings (conference-style gatherings of women organized along feminist principles), newsletters, and the Action Plans that guide their work. In listing their key achievements, most nominated their Action Plans

and newsletters, other publications, research initiatives, obtaining scholarships for women to enter leadership training, the state and national Rural Women's Awards, their conferences and Gatherings, celebrations of women's achievements and the "positive changes in women." These comments reveal that the units focus squarely on women's disadvantage rather than gender mainstreaming across their departments.

Asked about the prospects for the units, four felt they would continue as usual into the future providing positive action for women, two were very pessimistic about their future, and three expressed strong concerns about their future budgetary allocation. The mood of pessimism of some and the difficulties of working with a resistant organizational culture was best captured by one respondent who felt that in five years' time she would "hopefully be gone, cultural change has been achieved. JOKE!"

Asked to nominate two things they would not change, respondents nominated their relations with community women and their groups, their newsletters, and the results of their work with women that resulted in the "change in individual women—from mouse to butterfly." Asked about two things they would change, most nominated the attitudes of male departmental colleagues and the rural perspective on women's position in society; others expressed strong concerns about funding and the need for their own work to be valued within the department. Several expressed concern that their managers often did not recognize women as legitimate clients of the department and that "cultural change is so slow." We are "repeating the message all the time," suggested one respondent. "Women's attitudes change but the environment in which they operate doesn't," wrote another. "We are not able to get women in agriculture seen as 'core business,'" wrote another. Limited funding means that units cannot "resource and grow women's industry groups." The need for gender mainstreaming is evident in these comments that suggest departmental resistance to gender-equality principles and a failure to view women as legitimate clients of the departments. What is evident from these comments is that departments have not embraced gender mainstreaming despite ministerial and departmental rhetoric and, in fact, actively resist attempts by femocrats to achieve gender equality.

Achievements for Women

The Labor government in power when the International Women in Agriculture conference was held in 1994 set a target of 50 percent representation of women on statutory boards and committees by the year 2000. A change in government at the national level saw the Liberal/National Party withdraw this commitment, opting instead for encouragement of women and a natural process of progression. The move away from equality targets has resulted in only limited achievement of equitable representation

women occupying between 5 to 8 percent of agricultural leadership positions only (RIRDC and DPIE 1998; Alston 2000), and there is little evidence of natural progression.

What, then, have the units achieved for women in agriculture and rural communities? There is no doubt that they have raised the profile of women, provided a voice for women into the policy arena, assisted individual women to achieve publicly, made strong links with women's organizations in the community, and generally ensured that women should not be ignored in the policy process. However, the agricultural femocrats also have found that resistance within their departments and the industries they serve is high and that attention to gender equality beyond the units is limited. Many bureaucrats merely tolerate the location of a women's unit, ghettoizing its work and often trivializing its requests. Similarly, many powerful and traditional farmer organizations do not view women as legitimate industry participants. The resulting culture in which the units operate suggests that a high personal cost ensues for the femocrats.

In commenting on her research with Australian femocrats in a wider policy context, Eisenstein notes "the experience of the femocrats replicated that of other contemporary women pioneers in previously male-dominated areas of work. They encountered hostility, ridicule, harassment and outright attempts to subvert and undercut them" (1996, 206–7). Femocrats working in areas affecting women in agriculture often experience resistance in the form of negative comments and a lack of attention to rural women's agenda (Alston 2000). The move to conservatism has resulted in some cases in the very questioning of the need for women's units in some departments and a withdrawal of support. Additionally, there has been a significant shift in language away from feminist concepts of equity and justice for women toward economic indicators of success. There is a backlash in many departments, and very quickly, a culture of devaluing and ignoring the potential input of women has been enacted. The voice of rural women in the machinery of government is still marginalized and remains a voice of resistance. Changes of government have proved how illusory the inroads of women can be.

Discussion

It is important first to note the limitations of the data presented in this study. Only key informants were surveyed, and they have largely presented their *perceptions* rather than significant issues of fact. Surveys with rural women may have shown quite different results. Nonetheless, as noted by delegates at the Beijing conference in 1995, this research clearly demonstrates that the positive-action strategies adopted by the rural women's units have been significant for rural women but have been

less successful in enacting gender-equality measures within departments more generally. Under the positive actions undertaken by rural women's units, individual women have benefited in large measure, and the nongovernment organizations that form the core of the Women in Agriculture movement have gained a significant profile. However, government funding of nongovernment women's organizations was withdrawn in 2002. The voluntary efforts of activist women cannot be sustained for long periods and activism will wilt in the long-term. The period of positive action during the 1990s has not changed the public profile of women in agriculture in any significant way. They are still underrepresented in agricultural leadership positions and senior executive positions despite their significant contributions to agriculture.

The units have had negligible effect on departmental culture, corroborating the concerns expressed in the international forums from Mexico to Beijing. The move toward gender mainstreaming in these international forums was adopted for the very reasons identified in this article—positive actions have had little lasting success in changing the position of women. It is clear from this research that gender mainstreaming as defined by ECOSOC would be a significant move for femocrats and grassroots women as it would focus attention on departmental structures and processes and force a reappraisal of gender blind policy. However, the problem that this research reveals is that there is a lack of political will to support this move, limited understanding of gender mainstreaming, no attempt to resource its introduction, and significant departmental resistance to anything to do with gender equality or women's empowerment. This research reveals entrenched sexism within departments of agriculture and a lack of endorsement of gender equality. For over a decade, rural women's units have been tolerated within departments as their work has been marginalized and ghettoized. By comparison, gender mainstreaming represents a threat to existing male-dominated organizations and, if it is understood at all, is actively resisted.

In some Australian departments it would appear as if mainstreaming has been coopted as a useful dismissive device whereby departments can go back to business as usual. There is some concern expressed by women's unit representatives that mainstreaming means getting rid of the irritant women's units and paying lip service to the process of incorporating women by occasionally ensuring a woman is appointed to a board or committee. Gender mainstreaming becomes a very useful, internationally sanctioned vehicle for this dismissal of women.

Nonetheless, this research reveals that the role of femocrats is crucial if we are to have any change at all. Their role in linking women to the policy arena is well recognized. As Hannan notes, not only is there a need for positive actions for women, it is also important that budgets targeted

to women are not sucked back to the task of gender mainstreaming, leaving no dedicated women's budget (2003). Because of this it is important to retain the units and to enhance the mandate of femocrats, to extend their work beyond positive actions, and to operate as gender-equality experts. It is important that the women's units act as gender-expert units, tasked with overseeing gender mainstreaming within and outside organizational structures. This will require significantly enhanced resources.

Many femocrats recognize the way forward is complicated by conservatism and departmental inertia. There is some concern among femocrats that conservative governments and departmental hierarchies are suggesting that women "have had their turn," as stated in a personal comment on survey form. This attitude suggests a particular disregard for women as clients and citizens and overlooks an intransigent cultural milieu that devalues women.

Whereto Mainstreaming?

This article has addressed gender mainstreaming through an examination of policy directed toward women's equality and empowerment in Australian departments of agriculture. It has been noted that international forums have called for a policy shift from a focus on women's disadvantage to a need for more comprehensive gender mainsteaming policies across organizations. It is clear that the move to gender mainstreaming has inherent dangers in nations where conservative governments hold sway as it allows a vehicle for dismantling dedicated gender-equality infrastructure. Research with heads of women's units in Australia shows the difficulties facing those charged with addressing gender inequality, the lack of understanding of gender mainstreaming within departments of agriculture, and a deeply entrenched antagonism toward gender equality.

Women's units established within departments of agriculture during the 1980s and 1990s have been successful in focusing attention on women, providing them with information and skills, and exposing their invisibility within agriculture. What they have not been able to change in significant measure is the profile of rural women in the public sphere. Women remain invisible within the agriculture industry despite their economic contributions and their activism. A move to gender mainstreaming would appear to be a positive initiative designed to address gender inequality and women's empowerment. However, what this research demonstrates is that there are huge gaps between rhetoric and action at national levels. Gender mainstreaming has provided internationally endorsed support to remove women's units without the establishment of organizations

charged with overseeing gender mainstreaming. It is clear that internationally sanctioned accountability measures are needed to hold national governments to their gender-equality commitments. Transnational organizations must ensure that in moving forward they are not leaving rural women behind.

Margaret Alston is Professor of Social Work and Human Services and Director of the Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW, Australia. She has written widely on rural social issues and rural women. Her books include Women on the Land: the Hidden Heart of Rural Australia *(1995) and* Breaking through the Grass Ceiling: Women, Power and Leadership in Rural Australia *(2000). She is also a farm partner with her husband; together they farm 23,000 acres in rural NSW. Send correspondence to malston@csu.edu.au.*

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