

Gender Equality & Public Sector Capacity Development

Tipsheet #2: "Gender mainstreaming" – what? why? how?

Gender mainstreaming as defined by a CIDA partner: Government of the Philippines

"... the main strategy for ensuring that the government pursues gender equality in all aspects of the development process to achieve the vision of a gender-responsive society where women and men equally contribute to and benefit from development. It is a set of processes and mechanisms aimed at recognizing and addressing gender issues in legislation, policies, programs and projects and institutional mechanisms of the government on a sustained basis. It is essentially institutionalizing gender concerns in the mainstream development processes and agenda and not just peripheral programs and projects of the government."

www.ncrfw.gov.ph/insidepages/gendermainstream/gendermainstream.htm

What is "gender mainstreaming"?

The term "gender mainstreaming" came into widespread use as a result of the 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing. The international consensus on the need for more comprehensive approaches and stronger leadership on gender equality by governments was reflected in "mainstreaming paragraph" that was included in each of the major sections of the *Beijing Platform for Action* (PFA):

"...governments and other actors should promote and active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively."

Gender mainstreaming is therefore a strategy that aims to accelerate progress toward equality between women and men by bringing gender equality goals and women's perspectives into the centre of policy decision-making in all sectors. This includes both technical and political elements:

- ▶ that decision-making processes about policy directions and program design are informed by data, research and analysis that allow choices to be made in light of the goal of gender equality;

- ▶ that women as well as men are able to formulate and express their view and participate in decision-making;

Bringing gender equality and women's perspectives into the centre of decision-making also implies a rethinking of priorities and policies. It entails more than just seeking equal numbers of women and men with access to programs. Rather, it requires changes in policies and institutions so that they actively promote gender equality.

For example, a gender mainstreaming strategy in primary education would go beyond the issue of equal access by girls and boys. It would consider whether teachers were able to treat girls and boys equitably in the classroom, whether school management ensured personal security for girls, whether the curriculum and texts promoted understanding by all students of the citizenship rights of girls and women, and whether the education planning authorities had the data and skills to monitor and respond to differences between girls and boys in educational outcomes.

The implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategies involves challenges at several levels:

- ▶ government agencies and units must first *recognize the relevance of gender equality* to their particular mandate and their responsibility for ensuring that their policies and programs serve women and men equitably;
- ▶ government agencies and staff must *increase their capacity* to address relevant gender equality issues (including data and research resources, analytical skills, attitudes, community outreach, etc.);
- ▶ they must also obtain *sufficient specialized expertise* to provide the technical support needed to achieve change in policies, programs and institutional practices;
- ▶ *changes in the behaviour and performance* of these agencies toward more consistent consideration of gender equality issues and goals in decision-making.

In short, gender mainstreaming is a *strategy* to achieve more effective action by governments (and other actors) in support of the *development goal* of gender equality. It is a strategy that has been endorsed by partner governments and relates to the capacities of public sector agencies in all sectors.

Why not just programs for women?

This question is often asked: why complicate matters with a gender mainstreaming strategy? Why not just focus on programs for women?

The gender mainstreaming strategy adopted by most partner governments is a response to the lessons of experience. Specific programs targeted to women tend to be small in scale and have a limited impact beyond the women directly involved. These programs may be innovative and suggest new directions, but the lessons drawn from them generally must be incorporated into broader programs to have a significant impact.

That is, ***programs targeted to women can make a useful contribution to a strategy to achieve gender equality, but if these programs are the whole strategy then women continue to be bypassed by in the allocation of "mainstream" development resources and opportunities.*** The mainstreaming strategy therefore aims to ensure that women are also served by "mainstream" programs.

Another lesson from experience was that the major or "mainstream" programs in a sector could overwhelm or undermine other efforts in support of women or gender equality, even if these mainstream programs make no mention of women.

For example, a shift in fiscal policy that reduces investments in social services (e.g., health, water distribution, child care) transfers the work and costs of providing these services from the public sector to the household. This can have a significant impact on women's access to services, workloads, and ability to earn or increase incomes. The many examples of such impacts led to the conclusion that, ***to be effective, strategies for gender equality must include attention to the broader policy framework – the "mainstream" policies – that shape the conditions of people's lives.***

Thus the gender mainstreaming strategy was adopted in the expectation that it would move beyond some tinkering at the margins and be an

Common misperceptions about the implications of gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming has sometimes been interpreted in ways that work against the intent of this strategy.

- ▶ *"Because we are doing gender mainstreaming, we cannot have an initiative specifically for women."*

A gender mainstreaming approach does not preclude women-specific initiatives. The criticisms of strategies that relied on women-specific initiatives were that such approaches were too limited in reach and impact to result in real change. However, initiatives targeted to women can (and have) made important contributions to gender equality. For example, initiatives to strengthen the research and advocacy capacity of autonomous women's organizations have contributed to strengthening women's voice in public debate. The type of women-specific initiatives that are inconsistent with a mainstreaming approach are isolated women's projects, or women's components within larger projects, that are not part of a coherent strategy aimed at gender equality.

- ▶ *"Since we are mainstreaming gender equality, we cannot support an initiative unless it targets men as well as women."*

This is a very mechanical approach that ignores the problem being addressed. The problem is inequality between women and men. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy to address this problem. The goal of gender mainstreaming is gender equality. In some cases an initiative in support of gender equality is most appropriately targeted to women, in other cases to men, and in others to both women and men. Any of these could be part of a gender mainstreaming strategy, as long as it is in support of gender equality. For example, an initiative to promote the involvement of men in reducing the incidence of violence against women is appropriately targeted to men. It would also be appropriate to target women for special access to training where the goal of an initiative is reduce the "gender divide" in use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Both are examples of initiatives that support gender equality.

- ▶ *"Under our gender mainstreaming strategy we no longer need a women's equality unit, because now everyone is responsible for gender equality issues."*

While the principle is that all government agencies and units are responsible for taking account of the gender equality issues related to their mandate, this is not yet happening. Women's equality units and resource allocations are still necessary to provide the ideas, momentum and technical support to assist other units or agencies to increase their performance on gender equality. The continuing need for such units is evident in CIDA as well as its partner governments.

effective spur to progress toward gender equality. However, the optimism that first fuelled the pursuit of the mainstreaming strategy has dimmed somewhat.¹ While there have been notable steps forward with a mainstreaming strategy, there are also many instances of approaches to implementation that subvert the link between the gender mainstreaming strategy and the goal of gender equality. The box on common misperceptions indicates some of the ways that "gender has been mainstreamed into oblivion."² The implementation of gender mainstreaming approaches in ways that undermine their intent may be due in part to a lack of understanding, given that the terminology is difficult and perhaps not well explained. But it may also be from the institutional and individual interests that resist change in gender relations – a political dimension that has perhaps received insufficient attention in strategy development toward gender equality.

How do we start?

Efforts to implement a gender mainstreaming approach will stay on course if they maintain their focus on the key concern – that the results of the CIDA initiative contribute to greater equality in the partner country.

An important starting point is to identify the relevance of gender equality to the mandate or key policy responsibilities of the partner. For example, assume that you are planning an initiative to strengthen analysis and planning capacities of a ministry responsible for trade policy, and you wish to ensure that gender equality issues are appropriately addressed. It is difficult to communicate this concern to partners, or ensure that background and capacity analyses address the appropriate issues without some general understanding of how changes in trade patterns can have gender equality effects. While this may seem daunting, it is not – concise briefs are available in many sectors to support staff to take this step. The box on page 4 provides examples of briefs on a range of subjects that are readily accessible on the internet.

¹ For an overview of the debate, see: Spotlight, No. 3 (November 2004): *Gender Mainstreaming: Can it Work for Women's Rights?* <http://www.awid.org/publications/>
² *Ibid.*, p. 7 (statement by Everjoyce Win, ActionAid).

Means vs. ends

The point that gender mainstreaming is a strategy toward the longer-term goal of gender equality is perhaps better understood by analogy with "poverty mainstreaming," another frequently-used term.

The goal of "poverty mainstreaming" is to make poverty elimination a central part of government decision-making – that is, to make poverty reduction a consideration in policy choice in all sectors (including, e.g., trade, education, health) rather than a concern confined to specific programs addressed to the poor. A "poverty mainstreaming" approach would include attention to policies and programs that have an effect on factors that place people in poverty and that shape opportunities of poor people. "Poverty mainstreaming" aims to change poverty levels and the conditions of life of the poor.

Similarly a "gender mainstreaming" approach is intended to have an impact in reducing gender disparities and improving the conditions of life of women. Gender mainstreaming is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve progress toward the development goal of gender equality.

Focus on development results

For any public sector capacity development initiative, the statement of expected results should make clear what is different as a result of the initiative – what has changed. Similarly, the specific results in relation to gender equality capacity that an initiative is expected to achieve should also be stated in terms of change from the pre-project situation. This could be:

- a change in partner characteristics, e.g., staff skills in gender analysis, appropriate data (this would probably be an output level result)
- a change in the policies or programs for which the partner agency is responsible (this would often be an outcome level result)
- a change in the situation of women or in gender equality (this would likely be an impact level result)

Note what gender mainstreaming is not...

Many people find the term "gender mainstreaming" confusing and are not sure how it is related to gender equality or to women. It is therefore important to note *what it is not*.

- *It is not* a strategy directed to women in the bureaucracy – rather, it is a strategy that aims to equip both women and men in government agencies to serve the agency's clientele more effectively.
- *It is not* an end in itself – the strategy focuses on changes in government skills and decision-making process as a means of achieving an impact on women's lives.

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Identifying gender equality issues relevant to a sectoral agency: short notes available on-line	
Health	<i>Gender Inequalities and Health Sector Reform.</i> Policy Briefing for Health Sector Reform, number 2, October 2000. Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. www.liv.ac.uk/lstm/hsr/hsrpubns.html , see list of "publications on gender and equity"
	<i>WHO Gender and Health Information Sheets.</i> Set of concise 2-4 page notes on gender and blindness, mental health, tuberculosis, aging, etc. www.who.int/gender/other_health/en/
	<i>Background briefs on Women and AIDS</i> (includes briefs on prevention, violence, property rights, girls' education). Global Coalition on women and AIDS. http://womenandaids.unaids.org/resources/default.html .
	<i>Gender equality tipsheet: HIV/AIDS.</i> CIDA (2003). www.acdi-cida.gc.ca , click global issues, gender equality, publications, then CIDA resources
Education	Oxfam Programme Insights: Education and Gender Series: website that gives access to a set of clear and concise note on gender equality issues and strategies in education. www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/education/gender_education.htm
	World Bank website on girls education (with links to other resources): www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/thematic.htm , click links to education / EFA / girls' education
	UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI): website on progress on EFA goals : www.ungei.org
Trade	<i>Gender equality and trade-related capacity building: a resource for practitioners.</i> CIDA (2003). www.acdi-cida.gc.ca , click global issues, gender equality, publications.
	<i>Women's Rights, the World Trade Organization and International Trade Policy.</i> AWID Facts and Issues, Women's Rights and Economic Change, No. 4 (August 2002) www.awid.org/publications/ , link to PDF file on this page.
Labour & social policy	<i>Labour market regulations for women: are they beneficial?</i> World Bank, PREM Notes No. 94 (2004). http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/premnote94.pdf
	<i>Gender-differentiated impacts of pension reform.</i> World Bank, PREM Notes No. 85 (2004). http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/PREMNotes/premnote85.pdf
	<i>Social insurance and equality between women and men.</i> Sida (1998). www.oecd.org/dataoecd/3/10/1896600.pdf
	<i>Labour standards and equality between women and men.</i> Sida (1998). www.oecd.org/dataoecd/2/59/1896408.pdf
Legal system, justice, policing	<i>The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Optional Protocol.</i> AWID Facts and Issues, Women's Rights and Economic Change, No. 2 (August 2002). www.awid.org/publications/ , link to PDF file on this page.
	<i>The police and equality between women and men.</i> Sida (1998). www.oecd.org/dataoecd/2/44/1896480.pdf
Environment, energy, transport	<i>Gender equality and climate change.</i> CIDA (2003). www.acdi-cida.gc.ca , click global issues, gender equality, publications, then CIDA resources
	<i>Energy policy and equality between women and men.</i> Sida (1998). www.oecd.org/dataoecd/2/11/1896336.pdf
	<i>Gender and Transport: a rationale for action.</i> World Bank, PREM Notes No. 14 (Jan. 1999). http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDERTRANSPORT/Resources/transport.pdf
Budgets & public expenditure	UNIFEM website on gender-responsive budgets, with definitions & links to other resources: www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/gender_budgets.php
	Joint UNIFEM, Commonwealth Secretariat and IDRC website on gender-responsive budget initiatives, with manuals and country case studies: www.idrc.ca/gender-budgets/ .
Various	"Tipsheets" on various sectors and themes are available from the OCED/DAC site: www.oecd.org/document/34/0,2340,en_2649_34541_1896290_1_1_1_1,00.html