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Elements of a gender mainstreaming strategy: A 14-point framework

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Introduction

It is not possible to achieve a controversial goal, such as gender equality and equity, without a clear strategic plan setting out policy, objectives, action, time frame and resources. Yet, in many cases, the individuals and units within organisations who have been assigned responsibility for gender mainstreaming are attempting to deliver on this responsibility with no clear strategy in place.

This paper briefly describes the elements of strategically effective action for gender mainstreaming that have been developed over the decade since the term was firmly lodged in global policy at the Beijing Conference in 1995 and adopted as the development community's agreed methodology to achieve gender equality (United Nations 1995 and 1997). The paper touches upon the central issues in gender analysis that must guide gender mainstreaming activity, pointing out that although most program officers do not need to undertake a complete gender analysis, they need have a grasp of certain foundation principles that govern that analysis.

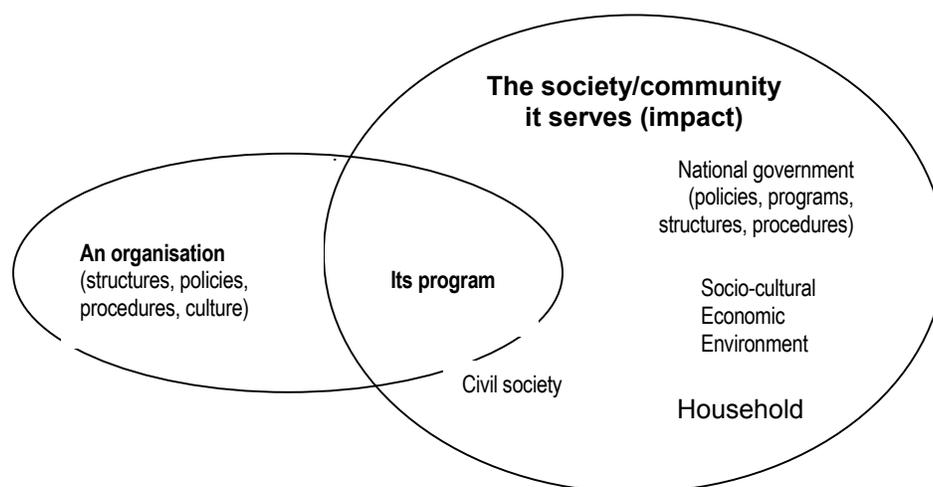
However, gender mainstreaming is about more than gender analysis. It involves all the steps between analysis and incorporating that analysis into the policy and program decisions that will contribute to equality of outcome for men and women in all development work (Hunt 2000; UNDP 2000). In other words, gender mainstreaming is about advocacy, networking and knowledge management as much as it is about analysis. It is about policy influence as much as it is about project and program design. Ensuring that such diverse elements produce coherent results requires a clearly defined strategic plan.

The Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) has identified gender mainstreaming strategies as being relevant in three linked arenas or 'spheres': (a) in an organisation's structures, policies and procedures, and in its culture; (b) in the substantive activity that it undertakes (its program); and (c) in the impact of this work on increased gender equality in the broader community (Schalkwyk, Thomas and Woroniuk 1996:3).

Figure 1 shows the inter-relationship between these three arenas. Activities in each arena are critical to ensure effective gender mainstreaming. However:

at times strategies and assessments have tended to blur these three arenas, and have often lost sight of the fact that change in the third level is the final goal ... it is important not to conflate these three arenas, as different strategies and indicators of change apply to each' (Schalkwyk, Thomas and Woroniuk 1966:4).

Figure 1 The interlocking arenas of gender mainstreaming



Source: Adapted from Schalkwyk, Thomas and Woroniuk 1996:3.

Fourteen elements of a complete gender mainstreaming strategy

While it is of absolute importance not to conflate these three spheres, it is also useful to think of them as 'levels' that a unified organisational gender mainstreaming strategy must encompass. At each level there are several of the 14 elements to be put in place, including tracking and reporting mechanisms adapted to the issues relevant to each level.

The three levels are distinct, with a need for networking, planning and capacity development predominating at the organisational level, socioeconomic (gender) analysis and consultation at the program level, and various forms of monitoring and information sharing at the level of impact. Taken together, these elements comprise a 14-point framework for an organisational gender mainstreaming strategy, which is discussed in brief schematic form below, grouped by the three levels indicated in Figure 1.

Level One: Organisational structures, policies, procedures and culture

AN ORGANISATION ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE SUBSTANTIVELY TO GREATER GENDER EQUALITY WOULD HAVE THE FOLLOWING SIX STRUCTURES, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES IN PLACE.

Element 1: A clear policy on its commitment to gender equality, supported by the proactive drive of senior and middle management (political will), and expressed in a written policy or mission statement.

Element 2: Time-bound strategies to implement the policy, which are developed in broad consultation with staff, and include mechanisms to ensure that staff understand the policy and its implications for their everyday work, and have the competencies and resources required to implement it effectively.

The competencies required, all of which can be developed systematically once identified, include the following (UNDP 2001)

- (a) political savvy, an adroit grasp of contingency and considerable resilience, because gender mainstreaming addresses issues of power that are not susceptible to purely technical solutions;
- (b) the ability to plan and act strategically, and to identify and seize ad hoc opportunities at all stages of policymaking, and throughout the full program planning and implementation cycle;
- (c) a grasp of socioeconomic analysis, including the basic principles of gender analysis;
- (d) the ability to influence decision making productively (through networking, advocacy and sound information and knowledge management) because policy making and program design and implementation occur through sequences of decision making;
- (e) mindful, careful leadership, team membership and communication skills; and
- (f) strong process management skills (time management, meeting management, document management, etc.) because gender mainstreaming is a process.

Element 3: Human resource practices that are sensitive to the gender needs and interests of both men and women on the organisation's staff, as well as in their constituency. Human resource strategies have a dual internal/external function in relation to gender mainstreaming:

- (g) internally, they advance the organisation's ability to practice and model gender equality in its own internal functioning, for example to be equitable in its hiring and promotion practices, and recognise the links between the personal and professional responsibilities of staff; and
- (h) externally, they enable the organisation to contribute more effectively to greater gender equality in its program and impact, for example by including commitment and competence to work for gender equality in job descriptions, terms of reference and performance criteria.

Element 4: Internal tracking and monitoring capability to ensure that strategic milestones are being reached, and to support both organisational learning and management accountability. These might include monitoring of staff recruitment and promotion, budgetary allocations, procurement from companies that implement ILO conventions regarding female employees, and the performance of managers and supervisors in discussing and following up on gender equality initiatives.

Element 5: A central gender mainstreaming unit with policy responsibility and a mandate to guide the overall gender mainstreaming process. Some organisations also have specific units to support the incorporation of gender issues into their programs, while others combine the policy and program functions.

Element 6: A recognised network of staff responsible for gender equality issues in their respective work units, coordinated as a team by the policy unit (often called a Gender Focal Point Network). Ideally, this network takes the form of a community of practice that is self-organising, knowledge sharing, peer supporting and serves as an acknowledged channel for the integration of learning on gender equality into the organisation's functioning.

Level Two: The organisation's program

Although gender mainstreaming involves far more than project and program design and implementation, an organisation's program is the 'heart' of gender mainstreaming. It is the arena in which commitment to gender equality takes concrete form in the community served by the organisation. An effective gender mainstreaming strategy therefore includes at least the following four programming elements:

Element 7: Systematic ongoing consultation with women, as well as men, to identify their own priorities, success stories, lessons learned, tools and mechanisms. This is only possible in organisations that genuinely value consultation and the types of knowledge that it produces and allocate the necessary staff and budgetary resources. Consultation does not end with the design phase of the project, but must be undertaken throughout project implementation. This is of critical importance, because the ultimate impact will be watered down if the project strays from community concerns, or does not adjust to any changes in these concerns (see also Point 11 below).

Element 8: Project management that is technically proficient, aware of the implications of gender differences for project outcomes, remains in touch with the constituency, and establishes positive incentive and accountability mechanisms to ensure consistent results is extremely important.

Element 9: Effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms capable of reflecting how far the project is contributing to greater gender equality.

Element 10: Gender analysis (a subset of socioeconomic analysis) that explores the national and international context in which the concerned communities are operating, clarifies the ways in which this context impacts differently on women and men and the implications of these differences for project activity.

Gender analysis helps to make the difference between men and women, and the policy and program implications of these differences, more visible. Several gender analysis methods and tools are available (March et al. 1998). Whichever method is used, a grasp of basic gender analysis principles is important. However there is already a vast amount of information available, and most program officers do not need to undertake a gender analysis themselves. In almost all cases, they can or should call on experts to select the right analytic approach, and undertake a tailor-made analysis if needed. Therefore, program officers usually need only sufficient understanding of gender analysis principles to select relevant information, to guide consultants productively and to understand the implications for their programs of the outcomes of gender analysis.

These basic gender analysis principles may be summarised as follows:

The sexual division of labour

- (i) The sexual division of labour describes the contributions of men and women, boys and girls to social and economic processes, and the rewards they gain from these contributions.
- (j) The sexual division of labour underlies all human relationships and productive processes, and hence all development activity.

- (k) Differential access to and control over resources, assets and benefits are integral aspects of the division of labour.
- (l) The sexual division of labour is constantly changing, usually slowly, but often quite fast, especially in times of crisis. Typically the rate of change of the division of labour in different parts of the same economy varies (the division of labour within the household, for example, is notoriously inelastic). Often the actual division of labour changes more quickly than beliefs about what is appropriate for men and women to do, causing both stress to people forced to change their behaviours, but unable to change their beliefs, and denial about the real character of the division of labour.
- (m) Resources, assets and benefits are of two kinds (a) tangible, such as property or education, and (b) intangible, such as status, influence and, above all, time.
- (n) A critical aspect of the sexual division of labour is that significant amounts of economically important work is unpaid, hence not reflected in national accounts, or in the assumptions underlying legislation, national plans and other mechanisms through which the distribution of resources, assets and benefits is managed (UNIFEM, 2000:22–27).
- (o) Nevertheless, like all economic activity, this labour, often undertaken within the household, requires energy, inputs and time, which have costs. These costs are generally born by those doing the work. This kind of unpaid work has been described as the ‘care economy’ and is popularly defined as ‘women’s work’. It plays a central role in the maintenance and reproduction of current and future wage-earners and taxpayers, at a cost to the economy (both private and public sectors) that is highly subsidised.

Practical and strategic needs and interests

- (p) The distinction between women’s practical gender needs within the existing division of labour, and their strategic gender interests for change in the division of labour (Molyneux 1985; Moser 1993), is therefore critical, not only for the women concerned, but also, because it is one of the factors that affects the price of labour, for the economy as a whole.

Formal and substantive equality

- (q) Formal equality refers to equality enshrined in law, an essential first step, providing basic equality of opportunity. Substantive equality refers to the actual experience of equality in real life — the extent to which the law is enforced, and/or can counteract belief, custom and tradition, in order to achieve equality of outcome.
- (r) The core tasks of those working for gender equality are thus (a) to support the establishment of formal equality where this does not exist, and (b) to help bridge any gap between the formal situation and the actual enjoyment of equal rights and wellbeing. Full substantive equality between women and men is the goal.

Level Three: The outcomes and impact

The outcomes and impact of effective gender mainstreaming activity in Levels One and Two are seen in progress towards measurable improvement in meeting women’s

practical needs and strategic interests, and greater gender equality (both formal and substantive) in the communities served. It is important to show that substantive activity has not simply reached a certain number of women, but that it has improved equality between women and men.

This arena of an organisation's gender mainstreaming activity provides the ultimate purpose of this activity. If gender mainstreaming strategies are not systematically linked to the end in view and do not include mechanisms to measure and report upon changes in this arena, they are liable to become tautologous — ends in themselves (Schalkwyk, Thomas and Woroniuk 1996:7). The measurement of impact is currently the least developed of the areas for gender mainstreaming activity, just as it is for other development themes. However, strides are being made, and it is important that all internal gender mainstreaming strategies are crystal clear on the ways in which they contribute to the ultimate goal of gender equality in the communities served. Effective gender mainstreaming strategies therefore include the following final four elements.

Element 11: Relevant baseline information, and appropriate milestones and indicators, derived from gender analysis, so that progress towards greater gender equality can be identified and described.

Element 12: Consultation with the community concerned to check and compare their perspectives with the information revealed by formal indicators.

Element 13: Clear reporting mechanisms that can get the word out efficiently.

Element 14: Good relationships with the media, opinion leaders and decision makers both in the community being served, and in the wider society, so that lessons learned can be effectively disseminated, and absorbed into social practice.

Conclusion

An organisation's structure, policies, procedures and culture govern the kinds of programs it is capable of producing. It is logically impossible for an organisation consistently to produce projects and results that are at variance with its own internal practices and culture. A gender mainstreaming strategy is likely therefore to require considerable internal scrutiny, and strong alliances between those organisational divisions responsible for policy, program and human resource management.

The 14 factors above comprise important elements of a complete gender mainstreaming strategy that an organisation might pursue. The list can therefore be used as a preliminary assessment tool — a kind of checklist to identify gaps and opportunities for stronger organisational response to gender equality issues, although in many cases a more complete gender audit may be necessary. For organisations in which none or very few of these elements are in place, it may not be possible to work on every issue, especially in circumstances where human and other resources are limited (Hunt 2000; Morris 1999).

Successful action on each of these elements will ensure that the basic organisational structures that promote gender equality are in place. It will not necessarily, however, address the critical, and prior, question of organisational culture. Organisations in which work for greater gender equality has most potential have an organisational culture that is open, well connected to their constituency and environment, knowledge-sharing and

team-based. They are 'learning organisations' in the sense that diverse forms of knowledge are valued, that information and knowledge flow freely in the organisation, that individual knowledge is converted readily to team knowledge and team knowledge into organisational knowledge, and that management is proactive in incorporating new learning into decision-making processes.

The establishment of an appropriate organisational culture requires attention to staff capacities for leadership, knowledge sharing and positive working relationships, and how such capacities interact with, and impact upon, organisational structures and procedures, which are themselves the product of such capacities and which govern the extent to which they can be exercised. It also requires attention to the political processes by which knowledge is incorporated into policy, to the kinds of knowledge and knowledge channels are seen to have value in the organisation (Kolb et al. 1998). These comprise a much more complex and dialectical set of issues than can be addressed in the space available here.

Nevertheless, while a typology such as that given here cannot be absolutely definitive for all situations or sufficiently dynamic to capture adequately the question of organisational culture, such a framework does provide an opportunity to conceptualise the 'whole picture', and is a useful basis for the strategic process of setting action priorities according to individual organisational needs.

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