

INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

a) Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a way of ensuring that policy and decision-making take account of men's and women's different interests and needs. The aim is for policy to make a genuinely sustainable contribution to equality between men and women, rather than unintentionally increasing inequality in some unforeseen way. This is neither simple nor straightforward. For gender mainstreaming, decision-making on policy measures and priorities has to be organised and documented in such a way as to do justice to the differences between men and women. The gender mainstreaming process and its outcome shows that great care has been taken in dealing with men's and women's specific opportunities, obligations and rights. In every culture and every society, these opportunities, obligations and rights are the product of popular perceptions concerning the position of men and women and their roles in both public and private life. This factsheet looks at the background to, importance of, conditions for and application of gender mainstreaming. It examines the role of parliament and civil society. It also uses contribution made by the Netherlands and its partners as an illustration, and sets out a vision for the future.

Background

Ever since the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, gender mainstreaming has been an integral part of equal opportunities policy throughout the world. Gender mainstreaming takes many different forms since it is a process that unfolds within the social context of a country or region. In June 2000, a special session of the UN General Assembly met to assess implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the agreements reached during the 1995 conference. The session ended by reconfirming the importance of gender mainstreaming, since it is not yet automatically incorporated into policy-making and implementation. What is so

special about the process of gender mainstreaming that it contributes to equal opportunities, obligations and rights for men and women?

The importance of gender mainstreaming

Throughout the world, women suffer disadvantage. There are differences from country to country and region to region, because disadvantage is caused by cultural, historical and social factors. Nonetheless, agreements have been made – by, for instance, the UN member states – on improving the position of women and on the efforts governments and non-governmental, private and multilateral organisations must make towards this goal. Many donors and governments follow a twin-track policy based on these international agreements. The Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs' policy is aimed at gender mainstreaming and improving the position of women. Continual investment in women's empowerment is called for, so that they themselves can help shape the mainstream.

Through policy-making and implementation, gender mainstreaming should lead to changes in the structure of the mainstream. In other words, policy must respond promptly to changes in requirements, interests, and perceptions with regard to men's and women's social roles, and promote equality. It should not have unintentional side effects which worsen the position of women. Gender mainstreaming requires sound knowledge – gender expertise – on the way in which the differences between men's and women's power positions manifest themselves in society. Gender expertise enhances knowledge of these differences, which are not only caused by cultural and historical factors, but may also be affected temporarily by current events. In times of conflict when men are away from home, women may wield political power.

When natural disasters occur, it is often the women who are the last to seek shelter, if at all. What are the reasons? A woman's religion may forbid her to leave her home and mix with men who are not members of her family. And shelters rarely have a separate area for women. In an economic boom, more women may take jobs. That can sometimes lead to a permanent change of roles, but more often than not, women lose their jobs when boom is followed by recession. Conversely, full participation of women and girls in all the services provided by society, such as education and health care, frequently leads to greater economic growth.

Application of and conditions for gender mainstreaming

As soon as it becomes clear that policy intentions may have a direct or indirect impact on women, men, girls and boys, gender mainstreaming has an important role to play at all stages of policy development. It is essential to identify the target group clearly. What is more, new policy may never in any way adversely affect the position of one group in society vis-à-vis another. After all, we are talking about drafting policy measures that contribute to gender equality. Gender mainstreaming boosts the quality of policy, because it dovetails with current practice, the international agenda, and the aspirations, opportunities and perceptions of men and women within the cultural and social context of a particular country or region.

Gender mainstreaming can only be achieved or attempted, however, if the entire policy process meets a number of conditions. The Netherlands specified these in a document published in June 2001 in which the government set out its standpoint (based on the recommendations of an interministerial working group). In 2002, the ministries will report for the first time on how they have fulfilled the conditions for gender mainstreaming. The conditions are as follows:

- Policy on equal opportunities and on women and development must be clearly defined. What is this policy, and how is implementation assessed?
- Directors and heads of departments must devote sufficient attention to the question

of equality and equal opportunities. After all, the ultimate aim is a more just society.

- Everyone within the organisation must know how they can contribute to gender equality in their own policy field.
- Gender experts should take part in decision-making on policy, and be there to answer specific questions.
- There must be enough money and enough manpower for policy making and implementation.
- Finally, it is important for policy to be assessed and accounted for at specific stages.
- Reports are regularly submitted to parliament on the deployment of the Women's Fund, set up to strengthen the position of women and their organisations in developing countries.

The role of parliament and civil society

No one actively involved in the world of work and decision-making could have failed to feel the impact of the second wave of feminism. From the membership of women's organisations, we can conclude that interest in efforts to increase equality between men and women is unabated. By organising lobbies on subjects they consider important, women now help to shape policy the world over. They maintain contact with members of parliament, who have instruments at their disposal to assess policy on gender mainstreaming and women and development. These instruments include the Beijing Platform for Action referred to above and the reports governments are obliged to submit to the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women on compliance with the UN Convention of the same name. Resolution No. 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted recently by the UN Security Council, was used effectively to ensure that Afghan women would be involved in the reconstruction of their country. Up to now, the role they have played has earned the respect of the international community. In countries that comply with the democratic standards of good governance and transparency, one of concerns legislation on emancipation, women's rights and discrimination can be a major focus. The drive to reduce poverty is linked to the problem of

redistributing resources and can be a parliament's task to ensure that any redistribution benefits women, since they are often the poorest members of society.

An example of how one country promotes gender mainstreaming in development assistance: the Netherlands

The Netherlands has entered into a multiyear bilateral partnership with the following 19 countries:

Bangladesh	Mozambique
Benin	Nicaragua
Bolivia	Rwanda
Burkina Faso	Sri Lanka
Eritrea	Tanzania
Ethiopia	Uganda
Ghana	Vietnam
India	Yemen
Macedonia (Rep. of)	Zambia
Mali	

It has entered into a temporary, five-year aid relationship with the following three countries, which, for historical and political reasons, enjoy a special status: Egypt, Indonesia and South Africa.

The Netherlands has gender experts on embassy staff in 19 + 3 countries (see box). Their job is to advise on the specific social context of emancipation issues in the host country, focusing in particular on women's rights. By devoting continual attention to institutional strengthening of gender equality, they support national poverty reduction strategies and the development of sector-wide programmes. Examples of specific focal points include credit facilities, legal assistance, access to land for farming, legislation and violence against women. The embassies also use the Women's Fund to support the implementation of new initiatives. For instance, it was used to strengthen the role played by women's organisations in Mali in preventing female genital mutilation, and to amend land registry legislation in Guatemala, so that women, too, could own land. In Tanzania, women's organisations are actively involved in the process of gender budgeting, and in Burkina Faso and Vietnam in the poverty reduction strategy process. Thanks to the Fund, local counterparts can take part in gender training so

as to become actively involved in bringing about changes to their work. Organisations are also screened to assess how they deal with emancipation issues in their personnel policies.

Gender mainstreaming is not a game for a single player, but calls for close cooperation between people and organisations. Coordination takes place at local, national and international level. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is highly visible, since it is an active member of various fora. They include the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Union's Network of Gender Experts, the annual meetings of the UN's Commission on the Status of Women, and networks of gender experts and other fora in the 19+3 countries.

Gender mainstreaming increasingly helps to highlight the following qualities in an organisation:

- the focus of equal opportunities policy, and views on equitable distribution of resources; whether policy takes account of the aspirations, interests and perceptions of men and women;
- support for equal opportunities policy and gender mainstreaming at all levels of the organisation;
- availability of resources, both financial and human, to formulate and implement policy;
- engendering of knowledge, skills and attitudes on emancipation and gender equality, and availability of gender expertise;
- identification of responsibilities and accountability for gender policy and gender mainstreaming.

In the future, many will focus on the way in which organisations structure their own work, to ensure an efficient contribution to gender equality. Women and their organisations will be actively involved, since they can act as role models in identifying changing aspirations, interests and perceptions.