

AN OVERVIEW OF ISSUES AND CONCEPTS IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of gender mainstreaming as a strategy for sustainable development. It views gender mainstreaming as central to the attainment of sustainable development. The paper examines the historical development of gender mainstreaming, the rationale for gender mainstreaming and the challenges to gender mainstreaming.

Keywords: gender, gender equality, gender equity, gender mainstreaming, development

Introduction

Gender mainstreaming is now widely accepted as the most effective strategy for institutionalising gender equality concerns in any society. The recognition in the 1980s that efforts to “integrate” women into development had failed to achieve significant results primarily because of the “gendered” nature of societies, led to a corresponding emphasis in the 1990s on restructuring society to ensure that they reflect and represent women’s interests. In this regard, gender mainstreaming has not only become a buzz word, but the only alternative to meaningful sustainable development. This paper provides a general overview of gender mainstreaming and its role in the quest for sustainable development.

Conceptualisation of Terms

Gender refers to the social relations between men and women. It refers to the relationship between men and women, boys and girls, and how this is socially constructed. Gender refers to human traits linked by culture to each sex (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004). Within a society; males are socialized to be masculine as females are taught to be feminine. Thus, gender is the difference that sex makes within a society, guiding how we are to think of ourselves, how we interact with others, the social opportunities, occupations, family roles and prestige allowed to males and females.

Gender analysis is a critical examination of how differences in gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities and rights/entitlements affect men, women, girls and boys in certain situation or contexts (March et al, 1999). It examines the relationships between females and males and their access to and control of resources and the constraints they face relative to each other. A gender analysis should be integrated into all sector assessments or situational analyses to ensure that gender based injustices and inequalities are not exacerbated, and that where possible, greater equality and justice in gender relations are promoted.

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of males and females. It is defined as “women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere,” (Reeves and Baden 2000). Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people centred development. Gender equality refers to a relational status between women and men.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to men and women, boys and girls and is about equality of outcomes and results. Gender equity may involve the use of temporary special measures to compensate for historical or systemic bias or discrimination. It refers to differential treatment that is fair and positively addresses a bias or disadvantage that is due to gender roles or norms or differences between the sexes (Reeves and Baden 2000). It is a means to ensure that women and men, girls and boys have an equal chance not only at the starting point but also when reaching the finishing line. It is about the fair and just treatment of both sexes that takes into account the different needs of the men and women, cultural barriers and (past) discrimination of the specific group. Gender equity refers to an approach where measures are put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field.

The formal definition of Gender Mainstreaming by the UN Economic and Social Council (1997/2) cited by the United Nations states that:

Gender Mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, 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 all policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (United Nations 2003).

It is thus, a strategy for promoting gender equality, involving integration of the gender perspective and the promotion of gender equality in all activities, i.e. moving them into the mainstream of activities. This is the process of ensuring that women and men have equal access to and control over resources, development benefits and programme operations, gender mainstreaming (integration) entails that account must be taken of the gender perspective in all programming and the activities of all projects throughout their lifecycles.

The process of gender mainstreaming can be visualised as a continuum, starting with “gender as a good idea”, and moving through a phase of “taking gender on board as a paper policy” to the final stage of “integrating gender into living practice (Macdonald et al, 1997). According to Carney, there appears to be confusion around the Gender Mainstreaming definition, as it seems ambiguous to implementers and it does not provide clear ways to apply it practically and not theoretically (Carney 2004). Lombardo too, makes the point that the ambiguity of the definition of Gender Mainstreaming makes the approach challenging to achieve in practice and this vagueness of the mainstreaming could prove difficult to apply to the reality (Lombardo 2003). Gender Mainstreaming is a political process as well as a technical one. It involves new ways of devising and approaching policies, with the belief that these approaches will cause a shift in organizational or in institutional culture and that should eventually lead to changes in societal structures.

Gender mainstreaming is a contested process. Walby identifies two frames of reference for gender mainstreaming. The first emanates from “a gender equality stance”, while the other is from a “mainstream” point of view (Walby 2003/4, 3). The normal practice, she contends, is to identify links between gender mainstreaming and gender equality. This is expressed by having two concurrent aims, which are the promotion of gender equality and gender justice, as well as ensuring that mainstream policies are more effective by including a gender

analysis. In line with this, the definition of gender mainstreaming can be understood in different contexts (Walby 2003/4, 3). These contexts can be divided into three questions, namely, whether a set of principles for gender mainstreaming can be identified, and whether gender mainstreaming can always be understood in the context of a social construct; whether there is an understanding that models of sameness, difference and opportunities are alternative and inconsistent visions; and finally, whether the extent to which the different policy domains are seen as closely interconnected or as relatively independent, since this would affect whether ‘sameness’ may be held as a standard in one domain simultaneously with ‘difference’ in another.

In general terms, development means an event constituting a new stage in a changing situation or the process of change *per se*. If not qualified, “development” is implicitly intended as something positive or desirable. When referring to a society or to a socio-economic system, development usually means improvement, either in the general situation of the system, or in some of its constituent elements. Development may occur due to some deliberate action carried out by single agents or by some authority pre-ordered to achieve improvement, to favourable circumstances in both. It refers to a, qualitative and quantitative measure of progress in a given community or country at a particular stage. It is the process of expanding freedoms that people enjoy. It entails removing the barriers to human freedom such as poverty, unaccountable government, social deprivation, lack of functioning infrastructure, tyranny, repression etc (Sen 2001). In this context, therefore, the general goal of gender policies is to achieve gender equality and equity in all sectors and at all levels taking cognisance of the nexus between gender and development.

Historical Development of Gender Mainstreaming

The historical development of gender mainstreaming is traceable to the 1975 International Women’s Year, which culminated in the holding of the World Conference on Women in Mexico, which was sponsored by the United Nations (UN), (Alston 2006, 125-128). At this conference, women recognised the fact that despite their differences, they share commonalities with regard to their unequal treatment by society. Furthermore, apart from being defined as the beginning of the decade for women, according to Skard cited in (Alston

2006, 125), the conference also recognised that international and national development depends on the participation of both women and men.

The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. In 1980, halfway through the decade of women, the UN further adopted a Program of Action, which emphasised equality, development and peace. At the end of the decade of women, the UN held a conference in Nairobi in 1985 to consolidate the organisation's efforts in the area of gender equality. At this conference, the "Forward Looking Strategies" was adopted. The strategy called for sexual equality, women's autonomy and power, recognition of women's unpaid work, and advances in women's paid work (Alston 2006, 125-126). Alston further states that women activists progressively changed their direction from focusing on women's issues to the advancement and empowerment of women. This change of direction assisted in that by the time the Beijing Conference was held in 1995, the emphasis had changed to ensuring that a gendered perspective is included in all policies and programs, thereby leading to the beginning of the gender mainstreaming approach.

The change was also brought about by criticisms of a women-focused approach, which occurred in the run-up to the Beijing Conference. These criticisms included "the dangers of viewing women as an indivisible category; focusing attention on women in one small area of organisational structures and thus ignoring the institutional/organisational cultures, the complex gender relations and the ideologies that perpetuate women's disadvantage; and a lack of significant change in gender disadvantage over time"(Alston 2006, 126). Overall, these international conferences reinforced the need to ensure that gender mainstreaming is operationalised at all levels. Although the involvement of women within multilateral institutions came to the fore in 1975, this involvement can be traced back to the League of Nations (Karl 1995, 121-148). She highlights the fact that throughout the history of the League of Nations, women's organisations were able to mobilise and form consultative bodies to lobby on a number of issues, including social reform, women's rights and peace. She does concede that the actual involvement of women within the League itself was limited, as few women worked in the international political arena. Nevertheless, the work undertaken by these women within the League of Nations set the tone for women's involvement in the UN. Karl(1995) also concurs with Alston (2006) with regard to the origins of gender

mainstreaming from the 1975 Mexico conference, as well as other conferences highlighted in preceding paragraphs.

In fact, the Council of Europe (1998: 12 - 13) points out that gender mainstreaming “as a new concept, appeared for the first time in international texts after the UN Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi, 1985) in relation to the debate within the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on the role of women in development”. Furthermore, Pietilä (2007, 1-9) states that when the League of Nations was founded in 1919, women realised the organisation and worked together to promote peace and empower themselves through new policies drafted by the League. Despite the onset of World War II, which led to the dissolution of the League of Nations; women in different entities still interacted with each other. This interaction assisted women in gaining experience and expertise in international issues, which assisted them during the founding conference of the UN in 1945.

Pietilä also provides an analysis of the three UN World Conferences on Women held in 1975, 1980 and 1985 respectively. She states that although women acknowledged that some of the objectives had not been met, significant gains had been made in other areas (Pietilä 2007, 42-55). One of these gains is that putting the spotlight on women highlighted the issues they grappled with on a global level. Secondly, the UN revised the manner in which it collected its data, as it became apparent during country evaluations that national and international statistics failed to provide gender-disaggregated data. Additionally, the focus on women led to the creation of more agencies dealing with women’s issues, such as The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) within the UN system.

However, it is vital to note that gender mainstreaming was not a new strategy when it was endorsed as a global strategy for promoting gender equality in the BPFA (Hannan 2000, 1-14). In effect, it had been under development for some time for a number of years before then. Furthermore, Hannan also points out that in order to understand gender mainstreaming, one must understand what gender equality is, and distinguish the difference between giving attention to gender perspectives versus the goal of promoting gender equality. For Hannan,

the implementation of gender mainstreaming requires a clear understanding of what the gender perspectives/implications of different sector areas and issues are.

A number of factors motivate gender mainstreaming. According to Hannan (2000, 1-14), gender mainstreaming as a strategy is motivated by the rationale for human rights and social justice, which translates into the equal involvement of women in all areas of societal development. In this regard, gender mainstreaming does not only focus on the gender equality situation within an organisation, but also on equal opportunities in terms of recruitment, advancement, conditions of work, norms, attitudes, values, organisational culture, management style, and others. Furthermore, gender mainstreaming is not only concerned with increasing equal opportunities and gender balance within an organisation, but also with incorporating attention to gender perspectives and the goal of promoting gender equality in the substantive work of an organisation. Similarly, (Jahan 1996, 826) argues that although women have made significant gains since the 1970s, the challenges they face remain significant, particularly in the Southern Hemisphere.

Gender mainstreaming developed over several decades, and has its roots in the Women in Development (WID) approach, which called for more focus on the WID policy in practise, and emphasised the need to integrate women into the development process (De Waal 2006, 210-211). The second approach is Gender and Development (GAD), which focused on the social differences between women and men and the need to challenge existing gender roles and relations (Reeves and Baden, 2002, as quoted in De Waal, 2006).

International agencies pursued the WID and GAD models at the expense of gender equality and women's empowerment, and accordingly measured the impact of development according to WID and GAD, rather than gender equality and women's empowerment (Jahan 1996, 828). Jahan further argues that there must be a shift from an "integrationist approach", which seeks to add gender issues in all sectors, to an "agenda-setting approach" (Jahan 1996). An agenda-setting approach would entail change in the manner in which decision-making processes are undertaken, by strategically positioning gender issues amongst other competing issues. Secondly, women would not only be expected to play a leadership role in decision-making structures, but also actively participate in the drafting of policies that will affect them. More importantly, development priorities would focus more on women of the Southern

Hemisphere, who are marginalised and poor, rather than their privileged counterparts in the Northern Hemisphere.

An agenda-setting approach also implies that policies for women would differ, because women are not a homogenous group, as well as a focus on gender equality and women's empowerment within international agencies. Other important aspects of an agenda-setting approach are identified as giving attention to women's organisations and groups, a new advocacy and communication strategy to advance women's issues, the development of concepts and analytical tools in different languages and different development contexts, as well as building institutional capacity for those receiving aid to set-up and implement their own agendas (Jahan 1996).

Why Gender Mainstreaming?

The aim in gender mainstreaming is to incorporate dimensions of equal opportunities and gender equality for women and men in all the policies and activities of society. By specifying gender equality of men and women as a common objective in gender mainstreaming, the legal basis for the implementation of the gender equality concept is reinforced on a state level. This ensures that the implementation of equal opportunities and gender equality becomes the central theme of political and organisational action. Taking from the above, it is clear that there are several reasons that necessitate gender mainstreaming.

Firstly, gender mainstreaming "puts people at the heart of policy-making". In effect, this means that once policymakers get used to gender mainstreaming, it will ensure that the practice and evaluation of policies will be people-centred, rather than based on economic and ideological indicators. Secondly, gender mainstreaming will lead to "better informed policy-making and therefore better government". Thirdly, instead of a small group of women, the practice and inclusion of gender mainstreaming will ensure that both women and men participate. Fourthly, gender mainstreaming will provide "a clear idea of the consequences and impact of political initiatives on both men and women and of the balance between women and men in the area concerned". Finally, gender mainstreaming "takes into account the diversity of women and men", and acknowledges that women and men are not a homogenous group (Council of Europe 1998, 19-20).

Thus, the idea of gender equality must be taken into consideration during the planning phase as well as during the realisation, accompaniment and evaluation of state measures. And this must take place on all levels of responsibility in politics and administration.

Furthermore, there are seven fundamental issues for gender mainstreaming. These are identified as political will, where the state defines gender equality as one of its main objectives and sets out clear criteria for gender mainstreaming; specific gender equality policies, which would contain aspects such as equal opportunities legislation and anti-discrimination laws, equality commissions, national equality machinery, specific equality policies, as well as research, training and awareness on gender equality issues; statistics, which would entail having data on the current situation on women and men, as well as current gender relations; a comprehensive knowledge on gender relations, which essentially means that policy-makers must be equipped with the necessary knowledge on gender equality issues; knowledge of the administration, which means that there must be the necessary expertise in ensuring that all the necessary processes in relation to gender equality are followed; financial and human resources, which means that structures entrusted with implementing gender mainstreaming must be equipped with the necessary financial and human resources; the participation of women in political and public life and in decision-making processes, which entails ensuring that the recipients of gender mainstreaming policies must be involved in all aspects of conceptualising the policies The Council of Europe (1998: 21 – 23).

The importance of undertaking gender mainstreaming is critical, as all policies and activities have a gender perspective or implication. In addition, policies and programmes become more effective when the impact of gender is considered and addressed when these policies and programmes are conceptualised. Finally, gender mainstreaming contributes to the rectification of systemic gender-based discrimination.

As a strategy, gender mainstreaming is important in order to redress the cultural, historical and social factors that disadvantage women across the world. In essence, gender mainstreaming should lead to changes through policy-making and implementation, by being able to conceptualise policies that respond to changes in requirements, interests and perceptions with regard to women and men's social roles (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002).

Three principles underlie gender mainstreaming. However, these principles are not limited to gender mainstreaming as an approach. The first principle is treating the individual as a whole person. This would entail aspects such as work and life balance, dignity at work, equal pay

reviews for men and women, as well as the modernisation of human resources. The second principle is democracy and participation. This would include aspects such as gender monitoring, gender disaggregated statistics, equality indicators, transparency in government, legislation on gender balance, consultative procedures, as well as national machineries for women. The final principle is justice, fairness and equality. This involves gender monitoring; gender budgeting, gender impact assessments, gender proofing, women's studies and gender studies, as well as visioning (Rees 2005, 563-564).

For some, the rationale for gender mainstreaming is critical, as it articulates the need for a collective process (Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) 2006). Secondly, gender mainstreaming recognises the need for a combined strategy which addresses issues related to the empowerment of women, while also promoting gender mainstreaming as a tool for promoting gender equality.

In line with this, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) states that gender mainstreaming must have the following basic principles: establish adequate accountability mechanisms for monitoring progress; identify issues and problems across all areas in such a way that gender differences and disparities are diagnosed; assume that issues or problems are neutral from a gender-equality perspective; carry-out a gender analysis; have clear political will, allocate adequate resources for mainstreaming, including additional financial and human resources; make efforts to broaden women's equitable participation at all levels of decision-making (International Labour Organisation 2002).

However, gender mainstreaming can only be achieved if certain conditions are met. These conditions are defined as follows:

Policies on equal opportunities and on women and development must be clearly defined; Directors and heads of departments must devote sufficient attention to the question of equality and equal opportunities; 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; there must be enough resources for policy-making and implementation and policies must be assessed and accounted for at specific stages (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002).

One of key problems with regard to gender mainstreaming is that it has lost its principal and fundamental elements. Williams argues that gender mainstreaming should be viewed as a

process for ensuring equity, equality and gender justice in all of the critical areas for women and men, rather than a destination that organisations and governments currently aspire to (Williams 2004, 2). She further argues that gender mainstreaming must be the foundation for development, poverty eradication, environmental protection policies, good governance and democracy processes. Furthermore, she argues that there is a need to return to the fundamental basics of gender mainstreaming, since there are indications that the international community has lost touch with gender as a category of analysis that focuses on the relationship of power between women and men in terms of access to and ownership of resources and power dynamics(Williams 2004). Moreover, gender mainstreaming now faces issues related to deep value conflict, power politics, analytical tensions, contradictions and dilemmas bound up in different interpretations and expectations at the institutional, policymaking and operational levels. Finally, she identifies two reasons that have led to this development: there is a lack of focus on strengthening analytical and policy-oriented initiatives to improve the different categories of gender mainstreaming policies; there is an increasing gap and a lack of consultation and coordination on gender mainstreaming at all policy-making levels, leading to a disjointed approach to gender mainstreaming issues (Williams 2004).

Sandler reinforces the arguments made by Williams and argues that the manner in which gender mainstreaming is practised differs significantly to the manner in which gender mainstreaming is conceptualised(Sandler 2004., 3). She further contends that the situation today would be different if there was an understanding and an application of gender mainstreaming as a strategy to address gender inequality at a structural level, by eliminating gender biases and power imbalances between women and men.

Both Williams and Sandler's views on the purpose of gender mainstreaming are supported by Win who also states that the main goal for gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality, rather than being an objective or an end in itself (Win 2004 , 7). She also argues that the “transformatory” aspect of gender mainstreaming has been neglected, with gender mainstreaming strategies focusing more on technical aspects.

Gender mainstreaming includes all aspects of planning, implementing and monitoring of any social, political or economic actions (Mehra and Gupta 2006, 2-3.).This means that there

would be changes in both the manner in which organisations function internally and externally. Internal change refers to a situation where organisations adopt a change management process to embrace the goals and values of gender mainstreaming and to alter systems and procedures to meet these goals. The external aspect is related to the steps needed to mainstreaming gender into development operations such as design, implementation and evaluation.

Moser provides another perspective to gender mainstreaming, arguing that an analytical approach should be adopted in order to work towards the eradication of gender inequalities (Moser 2007, xx-xxi). This approach assumes that societies, their social relations, economies and power structures contain deeply etched gender divisions, in the same way that they reflect class, ethnic and racial divisions”. She further argues that, for example, markets and macro-economic flows are not always subjected to gender analysis, since an assumption is that these aspects are gender-neutral.

Evolution of National Gender Machineries

The UN Decade for Women saw the establishment of national gender machineries in more than 140 countries (Beall 2001.). These gender machineries took different formats in different countries. Some countries created fully fledged women’s ministries; others were located within ministries of welfare or community development, while others opted to place the gender units within Presidential Offices, as is the case in South Africa.

Beall further states that gender machineries in earlier years were not particularly effective, as they had no status, resources and influence. In addition, the gender machineries had no goals of their own, and relied on the agendas of international development agencies. She attests that these machineries spent more time on raising public awareness at the expense of defining their role and responsibilities. She further cites national gender machineries in the Caribbean as an example, where the machineries failed to make an impact within government on the importance and relevance of gender equality within the context of developmental policies. The presence of pre-existing structures dealing with women’s issues also exacerbated the problems faced by national gender machineries (Gordon, as quoted in Beall, 2001).

However, Beall does point out that in 1997, the Philippines and Colombia set up successful gender machineries, which were able to link gender issues and national policy, and also involved all relevant stakeholders such as civil society and international development agencies in the process. In Colombia the role of inter-agency collaboration on a project to mainstream gender was hampered by domestic factors such as “state-society relations, administrative corruption, political mistrust, social fissures and endemic violence”. Other factors included the “unresolved tensions between implementing internationally fostered neo-liberal economic reform measures and the more radical task of addressing poverty and social inequalities” (Beall, 2001: 137 – 142).

Thege highlights the fact that within the European Union (EU), Denmark, Sweden and Finland have developed a more advanced commitment to gender mainstreaming; the most successful being Sweden. These countries, together with Italy, France, Luxembourg and Portugal, have clearly defined National Action Plans (NAPs) for implementing gender mainstreaming (Thege 2002., 3-22). However, some countries, such as Germany, Belgium, Ireland and Greece have identified weaknesses in their gender mainstreaming strategies. The Netherlands and the UK have failed to incorporate gender mainstreaming into NAPs. However, the Netherlands has registered a number of policies that have direct relevance to gender mainstreaming.

An audit undertaken in 2005 by Gender Links on behalf of the SADC Gender Unit and the SADC Parliamentary Forum indicated that within the region, only two countries, namely Mozambique and South Africa, achieved a 30% target for the representation of women. Apart from disparities in relation to representativity, the audit also revealed the increasing feminisation of poverty, as well as contradictions between customary law and codified law. On a positive note, it is important to note that some countries, such as Namibia, have more women representatives at local government level, even though the numbers become less at Cabinet level (SADC. 2006., Government of Namibia, 2007, SADC 2005.)

In Zimbabwe, The Ministry of Community Development and Women’s Affairs was established as the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women in 1981. Although the Ministry has over the years been dissolved, the National Machinery continues and the ministry has been rechristened the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and was amended in

1997 to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on gender and other legal instruments, including the Sex Discrimination Removal Act, also prohibit discrimination based on sex. The new constitution also prohibits gender based discrimination and is supported by a number of policies and legal instruments including among others; The National Gender Policy, The Domestic Violence Act; and The Legal Age of Majority Act.

CHALLENGES TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING

It is important to recognise some of the challenges related to gender mainstreaming as any studies on gender mainstreaming should be done with an understanding of these in mind.

Firstly, there are conceptual challenges that relate to the use of gender mainstreaming. In this regard, this aspect is illustrated by Moi (1999) and Kasic (2004). Moi states that the use of gender as a feminist theory should be abandoned, while Kasic laments the “over-genderisation of policies at an academic, policy and activist level, while ignoring women’s needs” (Moi & Kasic, as quoted in Eveline & Bachi, 2005, 496). In concurrence with this, Johnson-Latham lists a number of issues that have generally been identified as problems. They are as follows:

The concept of gender mainstreaming is unclear and misunderstood; due to a lack of commitment, funding and human resources, gender mainstreaming has been reduced to a technique rather than an important integral process; gender is mainstreamed to invisibility, as agencies use gender mainstreaming as a pretext for saving resources and that gender mainstreaming has not been transformative. In effect, this means that gender mainstreaming is applied from a status-quo point of view, where the existing and sometimes patriarchal systems are not questioned (Johnsson-Latham 2004).

Additionally, Alston states that there is some evidence that gender mainstreaming is little understood by many in positions of power at national level (Alston 2006, 123). As a result, women, particularly at grassroots level, do not always benefit from gender mainstreaming.

Pietilä supports Alston’s statement and points out that the most ineffectual aspect of implementing strategies dealing with women’s issues is at national level (Pietilä 2007, 120-121). She attributes this weakness to the fact that women around the globe are often unaware of the resolutions adopted by their governments. Hence, they do not realise the power and potential of using the tools availed to them by multilateral institutions in changing their lives for the better. Hannan states that since 1995, a number of serious misconceptions around

gender mainstreaming have developed, hampering the effective implementation of the strategy (Hannan 2000, 1-14). These are sometimes linked to the lack of understanding of basic concepts such as “gender” and “gender equality”.

There are key issues that influence the functioning of gender machineries in general. They are often under-resourced, with complex budget lines that impact on their functioning, and their location has been a matter of debate (Gasa 2003.). The point raised by Gasa is important because the location of gender machineries sometimes makes a difference on whether they are given the leverage and resources to fully discharge their mandates.

Leyenaar raises an issue that relates to the attitude adopted towards engendering policies when highlighting that the political will to achieve greater equality by incorporating a gender perspective in policies is not a matter of routine (Leyenaar 2004, 210). She further states that it remains difficult to get men interested in gender issues, and that one of the shortcomings with this approach is that gender mainstreaming is always viewed as a women’s affair. These observations are echoed by Wendoh and Wallace who cite research conducted on gender mainstreaming, where government officials dealing with gender mainstreaming in African countries reported a resistance at implementation level where senior officials give higher priority to other activities and grade gender issues at a lower level (Wendoh and Wallace, 2005, 70-73). Wendoh and Wallace also cite experiences related to an understanding of culture in Africa. This is particularly true in the African context, as it sometimes explains the reason why different officials approach the importance and implementation of gender mainstreaming differently.

A 2005 SADC update indicates that in the South African context one of the challenges that has been raised is the link between women in high-level positions in politics with the improvement of the quality of life of ordinary women (SARDC 2005). The lack of policy intervention and monitoring by gender experts across government also poses a challenge to gender mainstreaming, as there are no tangible means of measuring the success of gender mainstreaming policies. Furthermore, the lack of capacity to mainstream gender at national, provincial and local government levels further hampers the ability of gender experts in government to monitor the implementation of gender mainstreaming (SARDC, 2005).

Veitch states that in the United Kingdom, the government made attempts to identify key initiatives where gender mainstreaming would have the most impact. (Veitch 2005, 601) These initiatives were implemented by the Women's Unit (WU), which ensured that Regional Development Agencies (RDA) included gender mainstreaming in their policies. Due to this development, gender focal points were created in departments. However, it was soon discovered that the responsibility for gender mainstreaming was an add-on to existing responsibilities; none of the staff had expertise, and as such, required training. In addition, staff members felt that the work was considered marginal in status and did not have high-level backing. Some staff members confused gender mainstreaming with the equal opportunities work conducted by Human Resources units.

A presentation by the TGNP in 2006 during the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) Policy Dialogue Seminar recognises the fact that one of the biggest challenges to gender mainstreaming is that the approach is not adopted when policies are drafted, meaning it is often added as an afterthought to policy processes (Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) 2006) Furthermore, gender mainstreaming at national and sectoral level is often uncoordinated; it is difficult to develop gender mainstreaming indications, as they are qualitative; the lack of conceptual clarity on gender mainstreaming also hampers its implementation and monitoring processes.

Another interesting aspect on the challenges of implementing gender mainstreaming is mentioned by Lyons, who argues that gender as a cultural construct, differs from culture to culture (Lyons 2004, 64). In effect, this means that those whose responsibility it is to mainstream gender must be cautious of using a one-size fits all approach, as every situation has its unique opportunities and challenges.

A National Implementation Strategy and Action Plan 2006 – 2010 on Mainstreaming Gender into Water Services Sector, from the South African Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF), lists thirteen challenges in implementing gender mainstreaming as it relates to the Water Services Sector (WSS).

They are defined as follows:

- Marginalisation of gender – gender mainstreaming is not seen as a core function for government departments. As a result, officials working on gender mainstreaming struggle to make sure that issues related to gender mainstreaming are taken seriously.
- Transformation – this refers to the number of women occupying significant positions.
- Policy formulation – there is need to have conceptual clarification of all role-players as to what gender mainstreaming entails.
- Gender management systems – due to the lack of attention on recommendations relating to gender mainstreaming, collaboration amongst stakeholders becomes fragmented.
- Programme management – this aspect refers to the marginalisation of gender. As such, gender issues are not given the proper priority they deserve.
- Gender in performance management – gender mainstreaming is not included in the performance agreements of senior officials, thereby leading to a lack of accountability.
- Resource mobilisation and business planning – gender issues are not included in normal business planning processes.
- Institutional support – gender issues only come to the fore when individuals undertake a personal commitment to gender mainstreaming (South African Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) Forestry. 2006).

In terms of evaluating the practice of gender mainstreaming, Moser posits that the ultimate test of whether gender mainstreaming has either succeeded or failed lies in the rigorous monitoring and evaluation tools (Moser 2007, 576-590). She further states that although the evaluation of gender has evolved with the gender and development debate, there is no reliable and systematic evaluation of gender mainstreaming outcomes and impacts.

For Moser, the biggest challenge lies in identifying correct indicators, which would require four interrelated indicators measuring inputs, outputs, effects and impacts (Moser 2007). In order to counter the challenge of only evaluating the impact of indicators, international development agencies such as the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and InterAction introduced participatory gender audits, whose main focus is the central role of organisational structure and culture in the design and delivery of gender-sensitive programmes and projects. In conclusion, Moser asserts that the BPFA was ambitious, mostly due to the lack of clarity with regard to the operationalisation of gender mainstreaming.

National Gender Machineries face financial challenges as they are often under-resourced and unable to operate on the inadequate budget allocated to them. As Clisby points out, much more work still needs to be done to ensure that gender mainstreaming is translated into tangible results on the ground (Clisby 2005, 23). She cautions that unless this is done, gender mainstreaming will turn into nothing more than fashionable semantics co-opted by politicians and policy makers.

Riley also states that experience in organisations has indicated that changing from gender mainstreaming as a policy to implementing or practising gender mainstreaming has been challenging (Riley 2004, 111). She provides the ILO, World Bank (WB), UN institutions, as well as other international NGOs as examples. She identifies the following key issues as particularly challenging: Partial implementation makes it difficult to determine whether the problem lies in gender mainstreaming as a strategy or in the inadequacy of its implementation. Since gender mainstreaming has a large scope, there are challenges in terms of integrating mainstreaming into existing workloads.

Conclusion

This paper presented an overview of what gender mainstreaming entails. It traced the history of gender mainstreaming, the evolution of national gender mainstreaming machineries and the principles underlying the implementation of gender mainstreaming, as well as the challenges related to the implementation of gender mainstreaming. It rounded off by providing some suggestions.

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