7
Gender mainstreaming
PATHWAY TO DEMOCRATISATION?

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7.1 The concept of gender mainstreaming

Ever since gender mainstreaming travelled from the 1995 Fourth International Women’s Conference held in Beijing to find accommodation in the European Treaty of Amsterdam signed in 1998, it spread all over the continent. With surprising speed it consolidated in a wide range of legal stipulations, standing orders, guidelines, checklists, monitoring, evaluations, quality control devices and the like (von Braunmühl 2001). In its communication on gender mainstreaming the European Community defines gender mainstreaming in the following way:

Gender mainstreaming involves not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account at the planning stage their possible effects on the respective situation of men and women (gender perspective). This means systematically examining measures and policies and taking into account such possible effects when defining and implementing them... Action to promote equality requires an ambitious approach which presupposes the recognition of male and female identities and the willingness to establish a balanced distribution of responsibilities between women and men...

The promotion of equality must not be confused with the simple objective of balancing the statistics: it is a question of promoting long-lasting changes in parental roles, family structures, institutional practices, the organisation of work and time, their personal development and independence, but also concerns men and the whole of society, in which it can encourage progress and be a token of democracy and pluralism...

The systematic consideration of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all Community policies and actions: this is the basic feature of the principle of ‘mainstreaming’, which the Commission has adopted (European Community 1996).

The very title of the communication, Incorporating Equal Opportunities for Women and Men into all Community Policies and Activities, speaks to the origins of its attention to gender asymmetries as being situated in the world of work and employment and, some
fear, contained therein. Indeed, when the European Commission embarked on adopting the strategy in 1996, reference to the labour market could not be avoided as the legal foundation of the Treaty of Amsterdam was not yet available at the time. However, the European Commission made it quite clear that “gender mainstreaming must go beyond the spheres of employment and structural policies, it should be extended to all policies that affect in one way or the other the lives of European citizens—women and men” (Gradin 1999). Some will justifiably point to the fact that equal opportunities is a far cry from gender democracy and the gender-just policy results demanded in the Beijing Platform of Action.

Yet, looking more closely, the definition of gender mainstreaming spelled out in the communication can easily be read as an institutionalisation of the perspectives and the objectives of the international women’s movements. This, in fact, is the reading guiding the present-day understanding of gender mainstreaming strategies on the part of many feminists and women’s organisations:

Gender mainstreaming aims to offer an answer to the problem of enabling the machinery of the state to deliver gender sensitive policy. It is an expression of the institutional establishment of a world wide women’s movement which intends to fundamentally transform the definition of the situation (Woodward 2001: 1).

What are the reasons forwarded for this understanding?

- Men and women experience different life situations and as a consequence have different needs. It is an issue of human rights as well as of equality in citizenship status that these differences do not result in differentials and asymmetries irreconcilable with gender justice and gender democracy. Gender mainstreaming is based on this perspective and therefore holds transformative potential.

- Gender mainstreaming requires the integration of the aims and objectives of equality and of gender-sensitive institutional action into the organisational mandate, thereby binding hierarchically structured institutions and bureaucracies to act accordingly. The top-down approach can be an extremely powerful complement to the bottom-up approach of the women’s movements

- With gender mainstreaming forming part of the institutional mandate and mission, institutionally marginalised and under-resourced women’s or gender desks may be liberated from the role of policy ghettos with exclusive responsibility for gender-relevant action. By the same token the pervasive tendency of agencies to keep abreast of attention to gender issues by shifting the job to these units can be rightfully challenged. Conceptually, ownership is relocated from the margins to the centre (Jahan 1999).

- Gender mainstreaming acknowledges that the myth of gender neutrality systematically privileges men and works to the disadvantage of women. It exposes the hidden mechanisms of asymmetrical, power-structured gender regimes and requires gender-differentiated analyses of policies (content), policies (organisational structures) and politics (processes). By implication it calls for a gender-sensitive reconceptualisation of citizenship as a prerequisite for gender democracy.

- Gender mainstreaming is an innovative strategy. In fact, when adopted in Europe no adequate instruments for implementation were readily available. However, this must not necessarily be considered a handicap. On the contrary, the very process of developing the instruments required may very well reinforce the strategy. The elaboration of gender-differentiated data and methods to generate them, indicators for identifying and measuring gender imbalances, instruments for impact monitoring of action taken and the like has to engage the entire organisation in the effort. This process is likely to have a potentially powerful effect on sensitisation and gender awareness.

The international debate to a great extent focused on the capacity of gender mainstreaming to impact favourably on gender-just results. In Europe greater emphasis was placed on its potential to enhance democracy. Two factors contribute to this perspective. The ongoing debate about the fate of democracy in the process of the deepening and broadening of the European Union provided a natural environment for such concern. In later years the women’s movement and particularly the Green parties entertained a vivid discussion on gender democracy. Gender mainstreaming had to position itself within these debates.

The following reflections will retrace the evolution of gender mainstreaming within the United Nations and within development co-operation, the domains in which it was originally conceived, analyse its adoption in Europe, and explore its democratisation and transformation potential.

7.2 The evolution of gender mainstreaming

When in the early 1970s in the US and in Europe the newly emerging women’s movements turned to the field of development co-operation, they confronted development agencies with serious charges:

- Women do not have equitable access to the resources and benefits of development and aid (equity).

- Development projects and programmes overlook women to the detriment of the effective impact they desire (efficiency).

- Aid agencies have to recognise and overcome the inbuilt mechanisms constituting gender blindness.

The ‘Women’s Decade’ 1975–1985 declared by the United Nations generated an enormous amount of information on women and their sociopolitical conditions of life. Women began to claim their share in the promises of modernisation—unquestioned as such—by seeking integration into development. Aid agencies were lobbied into the creation of special units, WID (women in development) desks and elaborated WID policies and methodologies.
aim for agenda setting and for impact on projects and programmes, but also on macro-economic decision-making levels.

On an epistemological level, the category gender is to inform any analysis and decision leading to relevant development action. At the same time it has to retain the aspect of agenda setting and therewith its transformative capacity and mission. In implementation terms gender mainstreaming is defined as a dual two-pronged strategy. Gender issues are to be identified and taken into account on all levels of development action at the same time that women-specific projects should continue to overcome the barriers and constraints pertaining particularly to women and which have been brought to the fore through gender analysis. At the same time the category gender is not to be reduced to identifying given gender regimes, but to expose inherent repressive mechanisms with the transformative policy intention of dismantling them.

While the aims and objectives of what was now referred to as the gender approach were systematically woven into the rhetoric of aid agencies, the numerous evaluations and academic reflections on institutional experiences produced on the way to the Beijing Conference brought to the fore two major constraints (Jahan 1995; Kaber 1994; MacDonald 1994; Staudt 1997; Goetz 1995, 1997; Longwe 1997).

7.2.1 The direction of the mainstream

The social effects of neoliberal structural adjustment and corporate-led globalisation have proven to be of devastating impact on women and on gender relations. In line with the neoliberal creed of lean government and the benign effects of a private sector largely unencumbered by social or environmental considerations, governments withdraw dramatically from the provision of basic services and shift them into private hands. Where prevalent gender arrangements heap them on the shoulders of women. The phenomenon has been dubbed ‘feminisation of poverty’ or ‘feminisation of responsibility’; its systematic critique formed the basis for the rise of feminist economics (Elson 1991; Palmer 1994; Bakker 1994; Sassen 1998; Wichterich 2001). Under these circumstances an opportunity structure for the unfolding of meaningful empowerment strategies does not exist. Empowerment is married to poverty alleviation and redefined as the capacity to survive under most inclement conditions.

7.2.2 The patriarchal structure of bureaucracy

Gender mainstreaming demands organisational ownership of the gender mandate and integration of gender justice into the objectives, mechanisms, procedures and professional ethics of agencies. Using the insights of organisation sociology, administration theory and state theory and its feminist critique, the process has been closely observed and analysed by feminist academics and has been diagnosed as a case of ‘continuing indifference, ambivalence and active resistance’ (Moser 1993: 180). The dynamics of decision-making within institutions and their operating mode is deeply entrenched with and shaped by the patriarchal gender order. Hidden, at times however quite outspoken, gender hierarchies mould prevalent norms, criteria for bestowing legitimacy, procedural requirements, career patterns, achievement criteria, expectations and informal cultural mores. The African sociologist Sara Longwe sarcastically speaks of
the evaporation of gender in the patriarchal cooking pot' (Longwe 1997). In short, mainstreaming of the gender approach in terms of its institutionalisation in structures and procedures as well as the professional self-image and standards of organisations appears to be a near to unattainable target (Jahan 1995; Goetz 1995, 1997; Raza and Miller 1995a, b; Staudt 1997, 1998; von Braunmüll 1997, 1998).

These sobering findings were very well known when in Beijing gender mainstreaming was woven firmly into the Action Platform. There were solid reasons for this apparent disregard. It was all too clear that the 4th UN Women's Conference would constitute a climax of attention to gender matters on an international level. Therefore, it was crucial to secure achievements with whatever serious limitations remaining in order to have them as a legitimising point of reference when continuing the transformative struggle for gender justice and equality on regional and national levels.

As development debates moved on to the global debates transported by the UN Conference series of the 1990s, the needs-based debate entailed in the development community on basic needs and gender needs evolved into a rights-based debate. The international women's movements in turn engaged in a discourse on women's rights as an integral part of human rights. Over many years and many stages—critique of the concept and the articulation of universal human rights as eurocentric, androcentric, biased towards middle-class women—the human rights discourse established itself as the frame of reference serving the struggle of women from local to global levels and by the same token serving as a frame of reference for coalition building on all levels (von Braunmüll 2001b).

### 7.3 The Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam

When in 1994 the Treaty of Maastricht was up for revision, it took the untiring lobbying of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) to bring about the results achieved. In Article 2 and 3 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, signed in October 1997 and ratified in May 1999, 'equality between men and women' (art. 2) is elevated to the level of a core objective of the Community, and gender mainstreaming is the binding strategy to reach this aim. At the end of a long list of Community activities, Article 3 states: 'In all the activities referred to in this article, the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality between men and women.'

Starting even earlier, in January 1996 action had been taken to commit Union policies and strategic instruments such as structural funds and framework programmes to gender mainstreaming. Action programmes were formulated with a view to redressing gender imbalances within the Commission and expert groups, gender-differentiated reporting was made mandatory, sectoral programmes adjusted accordingly, and the like. At the end of the decade, evaluations, impact assessment and parliamentary hearings documented the first results of the new strategy.

All evaluations concur in underlining the potential of gender mainstreaming to produce gender-just results and to contribute to substantial equality. Emphasis is also placed on the importance of tools development for gender mainstreaming as a power-

### 7.4 Constraints to the implementation of gender mainstreaming

At this point it may be opportune to recall the different historical settings of gender mainstreaming within the system of the United Nations and North–South politics and in Europe.

When in 1995 gender mainstreaming became the defining feature of the Action Platform, it happened at the end of a quarter of a century of debate and interaction of the international women's movements with multilateral and bilateral actors who are active in the field of development and command vital resources. Women demanded that these resources—finances as well as decision-making and implementing power—be guided by concerns of social justice and be managed more equitably, with enhanced gender sensitivity and substantive gender-just outcomes. Gender mainstreaming never ceased to be embedded in development discourse. In fact, with the critique of the social impact of neoliberal adjustment programmes consolidating into feminist economics, women's organisations became a major voice in critical development discourse.

When in 1995/1996 gender mainstreaming reached Europe, it was introduced at a time at which—with the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam and their prevailing interpretation—neoliberal policies had firmly settled in all OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries. Furthermore, gender mainstreaming encountered a long since institutionalised, equality-oriented infrastructure the struggles and arguments for which lay way back in the past and do not form part of the life experience of present-day office holders. The women's movement had left the streets and turned to professionalised lobby politics. The stress put on the top-down
character of gender mainstreaming in the European debate is an immediate reflection of these circumstances. The strategy is gauged on the mode of operation of hierarchical structures with the traces of an emancipatory struggle on the part of a social movement illegible to current actors. With the integration of gender mainstreaming into their institutional mandate, the political directorate and the management of institutions is expected to act in line with equality objectives and may be held accountable for gender-just results. As ownership is to shift from the marginal women’s machinery centre stage to the top brass, the top-down approach can indeed be perceived as potentially powerful. However, in bureaucratic settings more often than not gender mainstreaming comes across merely as a new instrument of equality politics rather than a strategy of social transformation. Finally, the fact that the new strategy—or for that: matter instrument—comes in the form of a foreign word in most of Europe does little to endear it to either women or men.

All of these sobering experiences and restrictions notwithstanding, a growing number of women and women’s organisations engaged in emancipatory gender politics consider gender mainstreaming to hold considerable potential for democratisation, much more so than previous equality politics with their absence of transformative aspirations (e.g. Feminist Politics 2002). The final section of this chapter will now discuss this position.

7.5 Democratising potential of gender mainstreaming

If pursued with sincerity and vigour, so the argument runs, gender mainstreaming may secure access to resources previously barely attainable for women. It may contribute to the re-balancing of differentials in the life situations of men and women in the private as well as in the public domain. In that way it may be a factor in achieving more equitable gender results as well as a more inclusive democracy, one that embraces gender democracy, that is. The very process of pursuing gender mainstreaming strategies by way of identifying and elaborating adequate instruments of implementation may already transport elements of sensitisation, democratisation and transformation.

For this vision to materialise, I contend, at least three prerequisites regarding the type of discourse accompanying gender mainstreaming are critical: these are participation, hybridity of women’s organisations, and interaction with the public sphere.

7.5.1 Discourse and participation

With gender mainstreaming as the institutionalisation of the perspectives and objectives of the women’s movements, discourses that form an essential part of these movements find themselves relocated into institutions where they encounter—in fact, clash with—entirely different dynamics and rationales. To list but a few: present-day policies are firmly framed in a neoliberal paradigm which severely infringes on social betterment. The social contract moving within that paradigm presupposes a sexual contract that puts a premium on patriarchal rights (Pateman 1988). The state as well as admin-

7.5.2 Discourse and hybridity

The issue of interaction and participation raises the question of the shape the women’s movement is in today. The debate on adequate forms of organisation—traditional group-based, collective movement politics versus networks of professional women individually committed to redressing gender imbalances—carries a generational bias with younger women preferring the latter. But whether action is based on organised collectives with a certain amount of continuity or on looser networks mobilised in ad hoc fashion, with gender mainstreaming, advocates of gender justice and gender democracy have to be able to master both rationales, that of administrations as well as that of social movements.

In her analysis of the Latin American experience with ‘engendering democracy’, Sonia Alvarez (1990, 1997, 1999), taking it from the field of cultural studies, introduced the concept of hybridity and uses it as an analytical yardstick. She conceptualises hybridity as the condition that allows women’s organisations to balance bureaucratic demands and neoliberal rationale with the dynamics and perspectives of social movements in search of political, economic and social gender justice. ‘De-hybridisation’—that is, the loss of that balancing grasp—will compromise the agency of women’s organisations. Therefore, Alvarez insists on the need to explore the interaction between an administratively mediated system rationale and the dynamics and aspirations of the women’s movements.

Such a self-monitoring strategy would be equally relevant in Europe. Much could be gained from an interface analysis that conceptualises gender mainstreaming as negotiation space between actors of different social character. Such analysis could help women’s organisation and feminist professionals to identify the conditions and circumstances most conducive to the introduction of strategic gender policy aspects, at the same time as to closely monitor their own capacity to retain that difficult and delicate balance of hybridity required for gender mainstreaming. Monitoring and analysing the ‘encounters at the interface’ (Long 1989), to use a phrase coined in the field of development, could also contribute to more democratic interaction between citizens and public and private executive administrations.
7.5.3 Discourse and the public sphere

Institution politics is arcane politics. Experience with gender mainstreaming in development agencies has shown the many forms and fashion institutional resistance and sabotage can take and the extent to which these reactions carry personal, frequently quite intimate meanings and connotations. In fact, in concurrence with the official introduction of gender mainstreaming, unofficial, but quite consensual and highly efficient modes of resistance are being elaborated. Yet it is virtually impossible to expose carefully crafted inner-institutional blockages and to interfere with their formation at an early stage. While mobbing is by now considered a breach of law and of inner-agency peace, building counter-alliances to gender mainstreaming is not. Obligations of confidentiality will not permit recourse to the public sphere.

As a consequence, evaluations may very well reflect results, but are unable to capture the process. The decisive questions—does the top-down approach of gender mainstreaming induce a trickle-down process and, if so, what exactly is trickling down to whom, how is it received and how is it implemented?—are still awaiting answers. We know precious little about the 'filters' that may block, divert, dilute or reduce gender mainstreaming to a minor innovation that documents 'modernity' and embellishes the annual report or website. Or, rather, what we do know remains anecdotal and subject to discretion. On the one hand, this is a major impediment to meaningful participation and interaction with institutions. Any demand or recommendation originating outside of the organisation may all too easily be discarded as being out of tune with the operative modes and constraints of the agency. On the other hand, relevant experiences made within institutions are silenced and cut off from public debate. By the same token the public continues to be fed with the rhetorics of gender mainstreaming while remaining uninformed about implementation barriers, bottlenecks, the impact of informal mechanisms of resistance and the like. As a consequence, core elements of democracy—transparency and deliberation—are missing, or at least find it very difficult to be acted out. Therefore, for gender mainstreaming to unfold its democratising potential, institutional knowledge and experience have to develop modes of accountability and have to open themselves to discourse in the public sphere. In turn, this could be a substantial stepping-stone towards a more democratic society.

7.6 Conclusion

By its very nature gender mainstreaming as an institutional strategy holds a certain potential to enrich the formal structures of democracy by making institutions more inclusive in terms of equal opportunity and equal access for women, by complementing them with the formal elements of gender democracy. However, past experience shows for this democratising process to happen the implementation of gender mainstreaming has to leave the confines of discrete institutional walls and has to engage in public discourse, thus broadening the space of the political. The continued restrictions imposed on women in social, public and political life can be overcome only by embarking on a debate in the public sphere that encompasses a review and revision of the fundamental objectives and values of the given societal order. That kind of debate would indeed carry transformative dynamics.

Women's organisations in the global South actually are more concrete and more demanding in their analysis. They point to decades of experience with development models not delivering on their promises, even severely damaging the lives of women. As a consequence, they see gender mainstreaming, which aims at the realisation of at least equal opportunity if not equality of results, inextricably linked with the need for profound changes in the prevailing macro-economic and macro-political order. Because neoliberal structural adjustment and corporate-driven globalisation constantly erode social development and systematically produce gender-unjust results, gender mainstreaming of necessity will have to be embedded in a transformative critique of prevailing growth strategies.

This as it were dialectical vision contrasts somewhat with the additive approach implicitly or explicitly at work in many studies of the functioning of gender mainstreaming in Europe. Institutionised gender mainstreaming, so the argument runs, may very well work, but will at best produce integration of women into a highly unsatisfactory status quo of social and political life. Therefore a transformative aspect, such as sustainable development, has to be added. It may, however, be appropriate to give more attention and more credence to the experience of women in those parts of the world that look on a much longer history of gender mainstreaming. According to that experience gender mainstreaming can unfold its meaning only to the extent that the integration and instrumentalisation of repressive gender regimes in the prevailing mode of economic and social reproduction is challenged.

References


8 Governance and participatory approaches in Europe

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Participation is a fundamental, and sometimes controversial, aspect of the European debate and experience of governance. Since governance is not an exclusive domain of governments and other public actors, the question of who participates in governance processes and institutions is a truly crucial one. Is direct participation of civil society in policy development a threat or a complement to democratic representative institutions? What is, actually, ‘civil society’? Does participation increase the intelligence of democracy (Lindblom 1965), or lead to privatisation of government by economic and other non-state actors? Does participation enhance both ‘input and output legitimacy’ (Schumpf 1996), that is, both policy process and policy outcomes, or does it expand the first at the expenses of the other? Can participation help early identification and resolution of conflicts? These questions are at the core of debate on governance and participation. Some of them were tackled during the formulation of, and responses to, the European Commission’s White Paper on Governance (EC 2001a); participation also emerged as important during the debate on the EU constitutional treaty.

Recent developments seem to point to some shifting from informal to formal approaches to participation. For example, the setting of minimum standards of consultation (EC, COM[2002]704final) is an explicit attempt to respond to the quest for more transparency over who participates, when and how in EU policy-making. At the same time, informal venues of pressure and lobbying remain an important feature of multi level (from local, to national, European and global) policy formulation. Are we witnessing a new ‘co-existence’ between formal and informal approaches to consultations, and what are the implications?

Participation has been a founding feature of discourses and practices of sustainable development, from the focus on communities’ participation in the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987) to the experience of Local Agendas 21 (Lafferty 2001). At the same time, governance—and the role of participation—remains an often ‘implicit pillar’ in policy statements that acknowledge the ecological, economic and social dimension of sustainable development (EC 2000c). Such an ‘implicit pillar’ is, however, at the core of