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Mainstreaming: A Strategy for Achieving Equality between Women & Men

A Think Piece

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Sida

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Preface

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in China in August-September 1995, resulted in a Beijing Declaration and a platform for Action Which provide an internationally agreed upon strategy for gender equality. The Platform for action clearly involves a moving forward of positions with respect to several important aspects. One important gain is the clear recognition of the responsibility of governments to work actively to achieve gender equality; another is establishment of the overriding importance of human rights; and a third is the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights, in particular the needs and rights of adolescents - to name but a few.

In terms of methodologies important gains were made in the recognition (even if not always as strongly expressed as could be desired) of the need to see gender equality as an important issue for the whole society rather than as a "women's issue" - which of necessity requires increased attention to the roles, responsibilities, attitudes, behaviour and needs of men as well as women as well as new and active roles for men in relation to promoting gender equality. In addition, the attention given to the important goal of "mainstreaming" - the recognition of the need to influence all methodologies, analyses, policies and planning from a gender perspective - involves an important step forward. Sex-disaggregation of statistics is also clearly established as an important instrument.

However a considerable amount of work has to be undertaken to consolidate the gains made through the Beijing process. There still remain, for many, important questions regarding the meaning and implication of basic concepts such as "gender analysis", "gender planning" and "mainstreaming". It will be extremely important to support the development of awareness and capacity in order to transform the rhetoric in the Platform for Action on these important issues into reality.

To contribute to this process Sida has commissioned a series of short "think pieces" or discussion papers which will present the state-of-the-art on some of the most important issues. This "think piece", the second in the series, discusses the important issue of mainstreaming. The previously published "think piece" covered the development of gender equality plans. The third and final "think piece" will discuss the concept of gender, gender analysis and gender planning.

We hope that these reports will be of use to you in your important work and can contribute in some way to ensuring active and constructive follow-up to Beijing.

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

(Platform for Action Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995, paragraphs 79, 105, 123, 141, 164, 189, 202, 229, 238, 252, 273.)

1.0 Introduction

Context

The Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995) calls for the promotion of a "policy of mainstreaming." Despite the general agreement on the importance of mainstreaming strategies reflected in the Platform for Action, there is still considerable confusion about what these strategies involve and how best to pursue them. This paper aims to assist in clarifying the concept and its implications.

The paper was commissioned by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).¹ Although it is written primarily for people with an interest in promoting gender equality through development cooperation programmes, most of the concepts and concerns will be relevant to others working for gender equality. The paper itself has two main sections: an exploration of mainstreaming as a concept and a series of frequently asked questions about mainstreaming strategies. Final thoughts are summarized in the concluding section.

¹ This paper was written by Johanna Schalkwyk, Helen Thomas (Helen Trevor Thomas Consulting Ltd.) and Beth Woroniuk (Goss Gilroy Inc.).

1.2 Evolution of strategies toward mainstreaming

Mainstreaming is not a radically new concept or approach, but one that highlights the lessons learned from previous efforts to improve the position of women through development cooperation. These efforts have sought to increase women's participation in the development process and the benefits they receive from development. Development cooperation agencies and national authorities have endeavoured to integrate women into various activities and programmes and to integrate gender perspectives into planning. Two types of lessons from this experience have provided the impetus for adopting a strategy of mainstreaming for gender equality.

The first general lesson derives from reviews of achievements to date. In practice, efforts to "integrate women" or to integrate gender perspectives often took the form of separate projects for women or women's components within larger projects. However, while some women-specific projects were innovative and catalytic, most were small in scale and had limited effect beyond the few women directly involved. Women's components in larger projects often had little relation to the main concerns of the project and a very small claim on overall project resources. In short, these initiatives did little to prevent women from being bypassed in the allocation of most development resources and opportunities.

Thus the need to address the issues at a higher or broader level became apparent with the realisation that women's projects and women's components were having a limited impact on the position of women and even less on the social and economic processes that structure gender equalities. Policies, institutional practices and planning processes have now been identified as important targets for the integration of a gender perspective because of the broad impact they have in setting the conditions under which communities, households and individuals function.

A second lesson was learned from women in the South who were the target of efforts to improve women's position. They have protested that the issue is not women's participation as such but the terms of their participation. They argued that women were already integrated into society and the economy, and that their work (including domestic and unpaid work) was critical to sustaining the economy. Increased participation in an unequal development process was therefore not an effective means of achieving real change in the position of women, particularly when women had so little influence on the development choices and directions being pursued at national and local levels. One response has been to develop strategies that seek to enable women to collectively assess their situation and express their priorities and concerns – that is, to strengthen the public voice of women and to increase their participation and influence in societal decision-making.

These two perspectives from past experience inform what is now called a mainstreaming strategy -- a strategy that situates gender equality issues at the centre of broad policy decisions, institutional structures and resource allocations, and includes women's views and priorities in decision-making about development goals and processes.

Framework

Three "arenas" or spheres in which mainstreaming strategies are relevant to development cooperation agencies are represented in Figure 1:

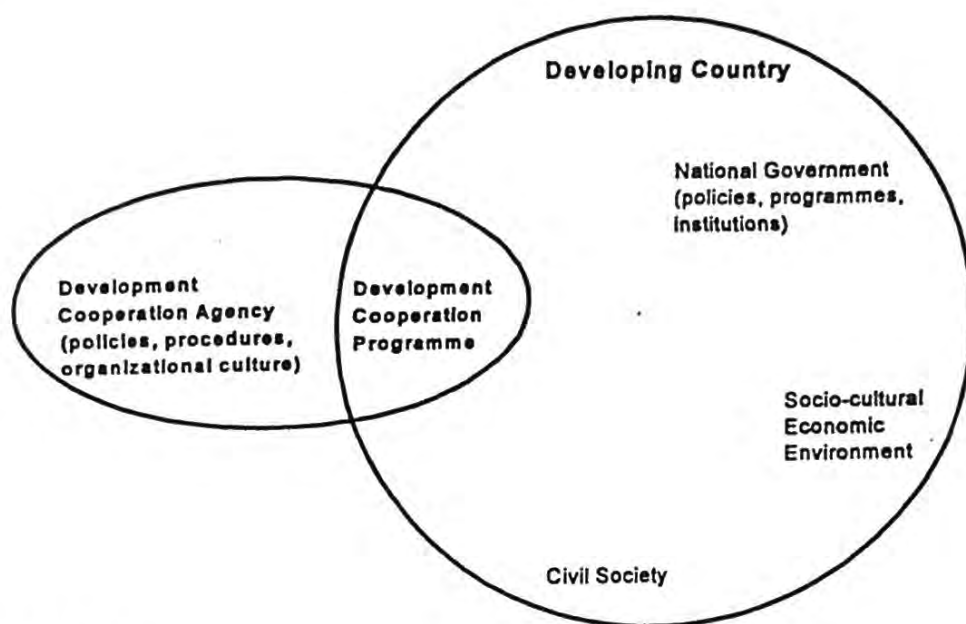


Figure 1

- ▶ the development cooperation agency: including the organisation's policies, procedures, staffing structures, organisational culture;
- ▶ the development programme: a joint initiative negotiated between the donor organisation and a national government (sometimes including NGOs); and
- ▶ the developing country itself: including (i) government policies, structures and programmes and (ii) the economy, culture and society of the country.

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 is the final goal. The efforts of many development cooperation agencies have focused on their own internal mechanisms and the integration of a gender perspective into their programmes. Although this is important, changes in an agency and its programmes are primarily means to support gender equality in developing countries and are not ends in themselves. The differences between the three arenas for action identified above, and the relationships among them, have not always been clearly identified and understood. It is important not to conflate these three arenas as different strategies and indicators of change apply to each.

Although the focus of this paper is on gender equality, a background theme of the analysis is that women are not a homogenous group. While women tend to share common gender-based interests, factors such as class, race, age, and religion also determine interests. Furthermore, when women's organisations identify priorities, they generally aim to eliminate subordination of all types, not just gender-based inequalities. When women set development agendas they raise a variety of issues such as poverty alleviation, the environment and conflict resolution. At the same time, steps taken to understand and address gender-based inequalities also provide a starting point to tackle other aspects of inequality. In the words of a "vision statement on gender-equitable and sustainable human development" prepared by an expert group convened by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 1995:

Inequality between women and men intersects with other forms of discrimination such as those based on class, race, caste and ethnicity. The pursuit of gender equality is therefore a powerful catalyst to transform relations of inequality and power in all aspects of life to achieve sustainable human development.

Women's lives, experiences, needs and interests are complex, and ending women's subordination is a multi-faceted, long-term political project that has both women and men at its centre. Change has many motors and development cooperation programmes should be humble about what they can achieve. Vital links in the achievement of gender equality will be truly democratic processes that include both women and men and an autonomous women's movement that will facilitate the articulation of women's interests and demand accountability of elected officials to ensure that mainstreaming strategies are implemented and effective.

→ A second background theme in the analysis is that mainstreaming has both a technical dimension and a political dimension. The importance of technical rigour cannot be overstated. In order to be successful, a mainstreaming approach requires reliable data, sound theoretical underpinnings and people with the ability to spot opportunities and

interpret gender equality requirements to varied groups. The political side of a mainstreaming strategy is harder to define. A mainstreaming strategy goes beyond the promotion of women as decision-makers to supporting women's collective efforts to redefine development agendas. It must be recognized that this is a political process, that change is complex and that resistance will come in many forms.

2.0 The Concept of Mainstreaming

2.1 What is the "mainstream"?

There are many possible definitions of the development mainstream. The definition used here is that the mainstream consists of an inter-related set of dominant ideas and development directions and the organisations that make decisions about resource allocations. This definition emphasises the inter-relationship between the ideological component (the key theories, paradigms and assumptions about "development") and the institutional component (the organisations and people making key decisions) – ideas and practices within the mainstream tend to reflect and reinforce each other. It is the ideas and practices in the mainstream that determine *who gets what* and that provide a rationale for the allocation of societal resources and opportunities.

As the initial framework points out, there are different "mainstreams." Women's organisations in many of the countries in which Sida is active are seeking to influence the mainstream in their own countries -- the development directions followed by their governments, the distribution of resources through social and economic programmes, the views about gender roles promulgated by religious and cultural institutions, the agendas of activist and political groups, hiring and pay practices in the private sector, etc. They have also focused attention on the way in which the national "mainstream" is influenced (both positively and negatively for gender equality) by the international "mainstream" including trade practices, approaches of the IMF and the World Bank, and activities of bilateral development cooperation agencies.

A major focus for a staff member of a development cooperation agency will be how to support and complement the efforts of activists in partner countries to change their national mainstream to reflect gender equality goals. But the staff member of a development cooperation agency has another mainstream to contend with – the theories, assumptions, policies, decision-making practices and resource allocations within her own agency. These are also influenced to some extent by the international mainstream, which affects her own government's policy on trade relations and on development assistance methods and priorities.

2.2 What is being "mainstreamed"?

What is being brought into the mainstream? One major concern is to strengthen the legitimacy of gender equality as a fundamental value that should be reflected in development choices and in institutional practices. When gender equality is recognised as a strategic objective of development, gender equality goals influence broad economic and social policies and the programmes that deliver major resources. Efforts to achieve gender equality are thus brought into mainstream decision-making criteria and processes and are pursued from the centre rather than the margins.

An important aspect of this process is the increased involvement of women in decision-making processes (formal and informal) about social values, development directions and resource allocations. This goes beyond the participation of women in equal numbers as beneficiaries of current initiatives to a form of participation that enables women as well as men to influence the entire agenda and basic priorities. This has been called "agenda-setting" (Jahan, 1995).

2.3 What does it mean to be part of the mainstream?

Being part of the mainstream means having equitable access to society's resources including socially valued goods, opportunities and rewards (for example, recognition and respect, secure and rewarding employment, education, health, leisure, and personal security). It also implies equal participation in influencing what is valued, in shaping development directions and choices, and in distributing opportunities.

2.4 What is the target of mainstreaming?

With a mainstreaming strategy, who or what are we trying to change? The overlapping spheres presented in Figure 1 suggest that there are three types of targets of a mainstreaming strategy:

- ▶ the developing country (government programmes and the general society);
- ▶ development cooperation programmes; and
- ▶ development cooperation agencies themselves.

For a development cooperation agency, the main result or primary goal of a mainstreaming strategy is progress toward gender equality in developing countries. Yet,

the situation of women in a specific country will be determined by many factors, most of which are outside the influence of a development cooperation organisation. There are, however, actions that development cooperation agencies can take to both support the movement toward gender equality in developing countries and ensure that all of their own programmes and initiatives promote broad gender equality objectives.

At the broadest level, these actions include decisions about the major sectors of investment that are negotiated with development country governments. With the decision to work in sectors dominated by hardware inputs (hydro-electric power, railroads, airport construction), an agency may eliminate the possibility of investing in sectors that offer more potential to influence gender equality issues, such as those with a more explicit human development focus. Development cooperation agencies can also seek opportunities within particular sectors and programmes to address gender disparities. A mainstreaming strategy can also ensure that gender equality objectives influence other policy areas (poverty alleviation, democratic development, etc.), the process for project review, and procedures such as training and staffing.

2.5 What is the goal of a mainstreaming strategy?

The goal of a mainstreaming strategy is gender equality. Mainstreaming is a process or strategy to work toward the goal of gender equality. It is not an end in itself.

Mainstreaming implies more than just ensuring equal numbers of women and men in current initiatives or structures. It involves changing policies and institutions so that they actively promote gender equality.

For example, a mainstreaming strategy involves more than an initiative to increase the number of girls attending primary school. It involves efforts to ensure that the education authorities are equipped to develop and implement initiatives that support equality of educational opportunities -- that they are equipped with analytical skills and a research base for appropriate policy and programme development, including the ability to develop initiatives to address existing disparities in access to education and to develop curricula that reflect and promote gender equality objectives.

3.0 Questions Often Raised About Mainstreaming

3.1 Is mainstreaming just a fancy new term for integration?

The difference between a strategy of mainstreaming and a strategy of integrating a gender perspective in policies and programmes is largely a matter of emphasis. The strategy of integrating a gender perspective had various meanings and applications. If integration was understood to mean bringing women into existing development institutions and paradigms, then mainstreaming brings a new dimension to the discussion. If integration was understood to involve rethinking development goals, institutions and processes to reflect the ideas and priorities of both women and men and to reduce gender disparities, then mainstreaming is not all that different. The shift in terminology to mainstreaming serves to highlight the need for a strategy that challenges the status quo. The implications of the shift have been well summarised as follows:

The establishment of "mainstreaming" as an important methodological principle in the Platform of Action should be seen as a considerable breakthrough. One of the major gains is the fact that the emphasis on mainstreaming shows clearly that gender equality, or equality between women and men, is not simply a "women's issue" that can be dealt with on the side with special inputs, but that gender equality is an important societal issue with implications for all of mainstream societal development. (Hannan-Andersson, 1996)

3.2 If we adopt a mainstreaming strategy, will women disappear?

Women would only disappear in a mainstreaming strategy that was poorly conceived and implemented. In fact, if there is a clear differentiation between goals and means (i.e., gender equality as the goal and mainstreaming as a strategy), then women's needs and interests remain front and centre.

The rationale for focusing on mainstream institutions and programmes is the broad influence these have. If successful, a mainstreaming strategy holds a greater potential to support gender equality objectives than under-funded, marginalised women's initiatives. Take, for example, a large irrigation infrastructure project. Such a project might include an "add-on" credit component to support women's micro-enterprise development that aims to contribute to the overall goal of increasing rural incomes. However, if agricultural land is the only resource from which to increase income and the project increases competition for access to land served by the new irrigation scheme, women may lose

existing land rights to more powerful male interests. This is the type of lesson from experience that has informed the evolution of a mainstreaming strategy. Unless women's concerns over continued access to land improved by irrigation are addressed within the mainstream project, that project may itself wipe out the benefits that might have been gained through the credit component.

3.3 How do women-specific initiatives fit into a mainstreaming strategy?

Although many women-specific strategies have been criticised for marginalizing women or relegating their participation to isolated activities, there is a role for a particular type of women-specific initiative:

Gender analysis and the emphasis on women's empowerment have served to highlight the role of women-specific projects in enabling women to articulate their interests and to build a foundation to influence social and economic decision-making. (OECD, 1994)

Women-specific initiatives are not inconsistent with a mainstreaming approach if they share the broad goals of this type of strategy. Examples include support for autonomous women's organisations working at strategic levels, research, strengthening lobbying and advocacy skills, capacity development, and south-south networking among women's organisations. Such initiatives have strengthened the women's organisations that have voiced women's interests in public debate and provided the major impetus for change at local and national levels. The type of women-specific initiatives that are inconsistent with a mainstreaming strategy are isolated women's projects or women's components within projects that are not part of a coherent strategy aimed at gender equality.

A second dimension to this question arises because women and men occupy relatively separate spheres in many societies (including western societies). For example, domestic work, the garment industry, and export-processing zones are dominated by women, while workers in the transport and construction sectors tend to be men. In agriculture women may gain their livelihood from different crops or livestock than men. That these patterns rest firmly on gender lines and are accompanied by differences in power and remuneration is itself an indicator of inequality. In many cases targeting a particular sector or activity has led to a gender-specific intervention; many of these have been implicitly men-specific. Many of the industries and activities associated with women have had lower priority and have not been targeted by governments or development cooperation agencies. Making up for neglect is a way of addressing the gender gap. However, taking efforts to target these sectors is not enough -- "separate but equal" is a

discredited strategy. These efforts must be accompanied by measures to ensure that women also have access to the much better resourced sectors that have been the focus of attention and investment to date.

3.4 What is the relation between a mainstreaming strategy and a gender analysis?

A mainstreaming strategy is concerned with achieving a more equal balance in the relative positions of women and men. The development of specific steps to take in pursuit of this strategy requires the collection and analysis of information -- in other words, a gender analysis. A gender analysis begins from a consideration of the ways in which men and women participate differently in the household, economy and society; secondly it seeks to identify the structures and processes -- legislation, social and political institutions, socialization practices, employment policies and practices -- that can act to perpetuate patterns of women's disadvantage. The purpose of undertaking gender analysis is to assess whether the needs and priorities of women as well as men are reflected in policy or programme initiatives contemplated, whether steps are needed to enable women to participate or benefit, and whether opportunities exist to reduce or prevent gender gaps.

Gender analysis is a methodology for understanding a situation that is a necessary part of mainstreaming -- a necessary part of determining what must be addressed and in assessing different options. Many institutions have used gender analysis to accommodate the different positions in which women and men find themselves in order to deliver benefits to both women and men. This is important but it is a minimalist approach. A mainstreaming strategy can go further to address the structures and processes that produce inequalities. A mainstreaming strategy is motivated by a broader concern than simply giving women access to a series of activities determined without consideration of gender: it is concerned with how to structure a policy, programme or project so that it will serve both women and men and contribute to achieving more equal gender relations.

Gender analysis does not imply any specific type of programming strategy as a result. For example, a gender analysis of a particular situation could result in recommendations for various policy or programme strategies:

- changes in the concept, terms and conditions, or delivery strategy of a mainstream programme,

Reference
Disparities
and
Disadvantage

- ▶ a women-focused component of a major programme that is designed to address particular concerns or the situation of women, or a pilot test of innovations that might lead to revisions in the overall programme to better serve the needs and priorities of both women and men,
- ▶ a women-specific intervention that addresses an aspect of women's exclusion from the mainstream, or
- ▶ a men-specific intervention that addresses men's concerns about gender equality or role in achieving it.

3.5 What is the relation between gender analysis and consultation with women?

As outlined above, a gender analysis requires specific theoretical and technical proficiency, as well as solid data. A gender perspective can provide insights on what information is important and how it can be organized in order to develop programming options.

Consultation and participation are often cited as cornerstones of good development practice. Yet it is not enough to say "women should be consulted" as this phrase raises numerous questions: Who will be consulted (individual women, women's organisations, rich women, poor women...)? What will they be consulted about? How will they be consulted (once, over a period of time, with support to develop their analytical skills...)? What options will they be asked to consider? What will be done with the information provided in the consultation? Does their involvement begin or end with consultation?

There is a strong potential for a complementary relationship between gender analysis and consultation. A gender analysis can help identify fruitful themes for consultation, and consultation can strengthen the validity of the gender analysis. Some of the key themes in a gender analysis that can guide consultation efforts include: *an emphasis on women's diversity* guards against over-generalization about women's needs and interests; *attention to intra-household relations and reproductive labour* brings important, yet often neglected, issues to the fore; and *recognition of the importance of women's collective capacity to analyse their situation and develop skills to bring about change* highlights the role of women's organisations.

3.6

What is the role of women-focused offices or institutions in a mainstreaming strategy?

This question is sometimes raised about development cooperation institutions (why have a gender office if we are mainstreaming?) and also about national governments (why is there a ministry of women's affairs and not one for men?).

For both institutions the answer is the same. Mainstreaming processes are not well-developed. Gender equality does not exist within these institutions or in the societies in which they act. Gender equality will not be achieved without effort, advocacy and expertise. Thus there is a need for a catalyst to support mainstreaming efforts.²

This rationale only makes sense, however, when these offices or institutions and the larger institutional environment conceive their role to be catalytic. A mainstreaming strategy is undermined when all questions and initiatives concerning women are seen as belonging to this office or department. Clearly, the gender equality office of a development cooperation agency cannot handle fifty percent of the development cooperation budget or assume the responsibility for ensuring that all programmes have integrated a gender perspective. Similarly it is absurd to act as if a Ministry of Women's Affairs is a separate government for women.

3.7

Isn't this overly ambitious, given cultural (and other) constraints in many countries?

Gender equality has been firmly established as an international priority. It is not just a goal of development cooperation agencies. For example:

² Paragraph 201 of the Platform for Action states:

A national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas. The necessary conditions for an effective functioning of such national machineries include:

- (a) Location at the highest possible level in the Government, falling under the responsibility of a Cabinet minister;
- (b) Institutional mechanisms or processes that facilitate, as appropriate, decentralized planning, implementation and monitoring with a view to involving non-governmental organizations and community organizations from the grass-roots upward;
- (c) Sufficient resources in terms of budget and professional capacity;
- (d) Opportunity to influence development of all government policies.

- ▶ many partner governments have made commitments to gender equality: they have adopted national policies on women, signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), approved the Beijing Platform for Action;
- ▶ there are many partners to work with inside governments: offices or ministries of women's affairs, women's units in various sectoral ministries and agencies, caucuses or committees of women legislators;
- ▶ there are many partners to work with outside governments who often struggle to gain legitimacy for gender equality initiatives and who could be assisted by recognition from development cooperation agencies: women's equality advocates (both individuals and organisations), women's studies centres, grass-roots women's organisations, regional networks...

All development interventions have cultural implications, whether they concern participatory development, income redistribution or agricultural productivity. It is all too easy to become "culturally cautious" when addressing women's position in society or gender equality. Why is it that "cultural interference" is cited around women's issues and not around human rights, environmental integrity and funding of non-governmental organisations?

"Culture" is not static but continually evolves in response to many influences, including development cooperation initiatives. In all development initiatives, including those concerned with gender equality, there is a need to identify cultural constraints and other sources of resistance. A realistic assessment of the room to manoeuvre facilitates the identification of appropriate strategies to deal with these obstacles.

3.8 What has this got to do with me - I'm managing an environmental programme, not a women's programme?

A strategy to mainstream gender equality objectives across development programmes does call on the staff of development cooperation agencies to accept gender equality as a cross-cutting theme and acknowledge that it is relevant to their specific area of programming.

This does not mean transforming all programmes into "women's programmes." Neither does it mean doing "something extra" in terms of establishing a "women's component." A mainstreaming strategy does require staff to understand the implications of a gender

analysis in their specific sector and to identify opportunities to support gender equality objectives within their programme.

3.9 **Why does the discussion generally focus on women (or "women's voices"/"women's views") when the policy is concerned with gender and gender equality?**

Organisations such as Sida, as well as most partner countries, have developed gender equality policies or goals precisely because equality does not exist. There is an imbalance in the relative positions of women and men that is reflected in a pattern of male dominance over social and economic resources. Since it is women who are now generally excluded or disadvantaged in relation to social and economic resources and decision-making, efforts to identify and redress imbalances have focused on women.

But it is also important to emphasise that the achievement of gender equality implies changes for both men and women. One of the challenges in moving forward will be to motivate more men to participate as partners in this process. The expert group convened by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 1995 emphasised this point in their "vision for gender and development":

Women have predominated in efforts to document and understand the gendered nature of social and economic processes and their costs to men as well as women. Efforts to achieve gender equality would be strengthened through broader participation by men in this process and in defining visions and strategies for a more gender-equal society.

3.10 **The mainstream is not always positive, so why embrace it?**

There are many critics of the dominant development paradigms with their focus on maximizing economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product. A mainstreaming strategy does not imply acceptance of the mainstream in its current form. Indeed, a mainstreaming strategy entails challenging the status quo -- it entails rethinking development priorities and mechanisms in light of the needs and perspectives of both women and men and in support of the goal of gender equality. A mainstreaming strategy is oriented toward opening or democratising decision-making processes so that the dominant development model can be changed.

In this way a mainstreaming strategy complements and reinforces efforts to reintroduce the human dimension to development thinking -- to see people as the means and ends

of development and human well-being and gender equality as well as economic growth as the goals and measures of development.

3.11 How is mainstreaming relevant to policy dialogue?

A mainstreaming strategy can be applied at various levels and in various types of interventions, including formal policy dialogue. Discussions between governments and donor agencies provide an important opportunity to raise gender equality issues. While gender equality can be a specific item on a formal agenda, it may be more effective to integrate gender equality issues into the discussions of other issues such as the determination of cooperation priorities, macro-economic policy and institutional strengthening initiatives. Donors can support national efforts to mainstream women's development by raising relevant issues in all major policy discussions, as well as in the decisions they make about areas of investment. It is inconsistent and ineffective for development cooperation agencies to request governments to "mainstream gender" at one point in a meeting and then fail to do so themselves.

→ Policy dialogue also offers opportunities to discuss constraints that have arisen in specific project situations that cannot be addressed with the scope of that project alone. For example, one donor working on an agricultural project in a South Asian country had planned to increase opportunities for women civil servants working in partner institutions to upgrade their education and therefore compete for more decision-making positions. The pool of potential women candidates that could be sponsored through the project turned out to be very small. The public service had a general policy to provide educational opportunities only to civil servants under 35 years of age. Most potential women candidates in the partner institutions in this project were over 35, mainly because they had entered the work force later than their male counterparts (after child rearing). The project staff requested support from the donor agency, which was in a position to raise at senior levels of policy dialogue the possibility of amending this education/HRD policy across the government to provide more opportunities for women to upgrade their skills. In this way policy dialogue can do more than support mainstreaming initiatives at the programme level -- Agency staff can build on specific project experiences to raise broader issues relevant to mainstreaming gender equality within partner institutions.

4.0 Concluding Comments

A strategy of mainstreaming in support of gender equality seeks dramatic changes in the conceptualization of "development," in the institutions that promote development and administer resources, and in personal relationships. These changes will not be achieved quickly or easily. There are four points that strategists might keep in mind.

First, realistic strategies are based on concrete, incremental steps that are selected in light of long-term goals. In considering strategies appropriate to particular situations, it is important to assess the most promising avenues for change, the extent and source of demand for change, and the room for manoeuvre that exists. Strategies can be revisited and revised to take account of what has been achieved and learned as well as new opportunities and changing circumstances.

Second, a strategy of mainstreaming to achieve gender equality demands technical skills and resources. There is a need for solid empirical research (to help convince sceptics, to use as a base in the development of policy alternatives and to ground theories in the realities of specific situations), strong skills (interpreting and demonstrating the relevance of gender equality issues in specific sectors or situations, the ability to converse with professionals from various disciplines -- economists, engineers...) and an understanding of how institutions work and evolve.

Third, it must be recognised that a strategy of mainstreaming for gender equality has a political or ideological aspect. Although gender equality has some commonalities with other "cross-cutting policy themes," it can be more complex:

The very fact that gender inequality is so pervasive makes it one of the most complex of issues to deal with through any one set of policies or institutions, while the fact that gender inequalities entail such deep-rooted and intimate forms of oppression makes it one of the most complex issues to win a broad based consensus around. (Kabeer, 1995)

Resistance to mainstreaming strategies takes many forms and it is important to understand this resistance and develop strategies to overcome it.

Fourth, gains made toward the long-term objective of gender equality cannot subsequently be taken for granted. Changes in political alignments or in economic circumstances can undermine commitments and achievements. Recognition of the fragility of gains and of the continuing need to reinforce gender equality goals in the policy and practice of all development institutions is an essential aspect of an effective mainstreaming strategy.

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