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Gender mainstreaming: recognising and building on progress. Views from the UK Gender and Development Network

Helen Derbyshire

This article is a contribution to the debate on whether to mainstream gender, and how to mainstream gender, from the UK Gender and Development Network (GADN) Gender Mainstreaming Working Group. It draws on nine case studies of gender mainstreaming in the UK-based offices of international non-government organisations, and finds a complex but generally positive picture of progress. It concludes that the case for gender mainstreaming remains valid. Women's projects on their own are limited in their ability to bring about fundamental change for women – complementary gender mainstreaming efforts are required to ensure that all development spending takes women's rights and gender equality into account. Success in gender mainstreaming depends on the skills, resources, and influence of internal gender advocates, in combination with the effect of external influences on the enabling environment of the organisation. Gender mainstreaming is a long-term process which requires time, resources, skill, and persistence – but there is clear evidence of positive change.

Cet article est une contribution au débat sur la question de savoir s'il faut intégrer le genre dans toutes les activités, et sur la manière de procéder, apportée par le Groupe de travail sur l'intégration du genre du GAD Network (GADN – Réseau du Royaume-Uni sur le genre et le développement). Il s'inspire de neuf études de cas sur l'intégration du genre dans les bureaux britanniques d'ONG internationales et découvre un tableau complexe mais généralement positif de progrès. Il conclut que les arguments en faveur de l'intégration du genre restent valables. Les projets de femmes menés isolément sont limités dans leur aptitude à entraîner des changements fondamentaux pour les femmes – des efforts complémentaires d'intégration du genre sont requis pour veiller à ce que toutes les dépenses dans le secteur du développement tiennent compte des droits des femmes et de l'égalité entre les sexes. Le succès de l'intégration du genre dépend des compétences, des ressources et de l'influence des défenseurs internes du genre, et dans le même temps de l'effet des influences externes sur l'environnement « habilitant » de l'organisation. L'intégration du genre est un processus à long terme qui demande du temps, des ressources, des compétences et de la persévérance – mais on constate des signes clairs de changements positifs.

Este artículo constituye una contribución al debate en cuanto a si debe integrarse la perspectiva de género y a cómo hacerlo. Fue realizado por el grupo de trabajo sobre la integración de género de la Red de Género y Desarrollo del RU (GADN por sus siglas en inglés), a partir de nueve estudios de caso relativos a la integración de género en varias ONG internacionales del RU. En el mismo, se concluye que, si bien la situación es compleja, en general, resulta positiva y que sigue siendo válido integrar la perspectiva de género. Asimismo, se reconoce que los proyectos de mujeres en sí mismos no pueden lograr cambios fundamentales para las mujeres y que, por tanto, se necesitan esfuerzos adicionales para integrar el género, a fin de asegurar que todo el financiamiento para el desarrollo incorpore los derechos de las mujeres y la equidad de género. El éxito que se obtenga en relación a ello depende de las habilidades, de los recursos y de la incidencia de las activistas de género al interior de las organizaciones, así como de los efectos de las influencias externas y de la existencia de un entorno propicio en las organizaciones. La integración de género es un proceso de largo plazo que requiere tiempo, recursos y persistencia, identificándose manifestaciones claras que demuestran que se han producido cambios positivos.

Key words: gender; gender mainstreaming; women; women's projects; NGOs

Introduction

In 1995, at the UN International Conference on Women held in Beijing, campaigning, lessons, and research from women's organisations, feminist academics, and development practitioners led to 'gender mainstreaming' being established as the internationally agreed strategy for governments and development organisations to promote gender equality. Since that time, almost all international development organisations and governments have adopted gender mainstreaming in some form.

In practice, gender mainstreaming has developed in different directions in different contexts, on the basis of very different conceptualisations, and with different levels of resourcing. Its meaning and value have become highly contested. It is now subject to such acute criticism that some members of the international women's movement that brought gender mainstreaming into being now reject it as an effective strategy.

This article is a contribution to the debate on whether to mainstream gender, and how to mainstream gender, from the UK Gender and Development Network (GADN) Gender Mainstreaming Working Group. It has been written on behalf of the working group by Helen Derbyshire.¹

GADN is a membership network of leading UK-based international (non-government organisation (NGO) staff, practitioners, consultants, and academics working on gender equality and women's rights in the context of international development.

The Gender Mainstreaming Working Group is made up of 'gender advocates', who are responsible for promoting gender equality and women's rights in the UK-based headquarters of these international NGOs.² Each organisation has its own term for this gender mainstreaming role (e.g. gender advisor; gender focal point; gender, power and exclusion adviser); here, we use 'gender advocate' as a generic term.

The article uses a definition of gender mainstreaming derived from our particular contexts and experiences. Central to this conceptualisation is that women's projects *alone* – that is, projects which target women as their 'beneficiaries', channelling resources and/or running activities with them – however effective they may be, are limited in their ability to bring about fundamental change for women and girls. These projects command a small proportion of overall spending on development, are not designed to bring about changes to the structure and functioning of the organisations that develop and implement them, and they leave 'mainstream' development spending (which far outweighs spending on women's projects, and affects women's lives far more), untouched. Part of the role of GADN gender advocates is to seek to change this development 'mainstream' by influencing their managers and colleagues to take gender equality and women's rights into consideration in *all* policy and spending decisions, as well as to *listen to and channel more resources to women and girls*.

Thus, in the experience of the group, gender mainstreaming as a term encompasses:

- an organisational influencing/capacity-building strategy (the role of GADN gender advocates);
- the impact of this influencing on mainstream policy, programmes, partnerships, and spending as well as on support to women's projects; and
- the impact of these on women's and girls' lives.

This article draws on the personal experiences and reflections of GADN gender advocates, and as such, focuses on the first of these three processes. The chain of influence from this role to impact on poor women's and girls' lives in the global South is complex and indirect – time-scales are long, stakeholders are many, and attribution diffuse. But of course this does not invalidate GADN gender advocates' contribution or observations. The work they are involved in plays a critical direct (as well as behind the scenes) role in shaping the development decisions that ultimately affect women's and girls' lives.

This article starts with an overview of the GADN gender mainstreaming group and GADN case studies, and then presents an analytical framework to elaborate the group's understanding of gender mainstreaming. It sets out the mainstreaming activities members are involved in, and outlines the successes we observe, as well as the challenges which continue. Reflecting on all the case studies, the article then goes on to discuss what we see as the challenges of evaluating gender mainstreaming, the stages in gender mainstreaming that can be distinguished, and the key factors which we think influence progress. The conclusion sets out ideas for ways forward.

GADN's Gender Mainstreaming Working Group and case studies

In 2011, the GADN set up its working group for members with responsibility for mainstreaming gender within their own organisations. It aimed to enable mutual learning and support, share strategies, challenges and resources, and build knowledge through collecting a body of evidence on good practice. Members presented case studies to the group, based on agreed terms of reference. These asked members to set out their personal experiences and reflections on gender mainstreaming. In particular, they were asked to talk about: their broad organisational context; its history of promoting gender equality and women's rights; their own role within the organisation; their support structures; their approaches, tools and ways of working; and their most significant challenges and opportunities.

This article synthesises findings from nine of these case studies. All quotations are taken from them: some from written case studies, and some from conversations.

Most of the international NGOs represented in the sample are large and well-established, with programmes in many countries, and most implement projects in partnership with local organisations. Alongside providing support to women's projects, five have been making efforts to mainstream gender since the mid- to late 1990s, and current GADN gender advocates' work is building on that of their predecessors. One organisation commenced mainstreaming activities in the mid-2000s, and in the other three, gender mainstreaming was initiated by the current GADN gender advocate in the last two years.

In this article, we refer to organisations embarking on gender mainstreaming for the first time as Stage 1 organisations, those with more than five years' experience as Stage 2, and with more than ten years' experience as Stage 3.

Analytical framework

To compare and analyse the nine case studies, we are using an adapted version of a Gender Equality Framework initially developed for the UK Government's Department for International Development (DfID) (see Figure 1).³ The outside circle of the framework sets out the processes involved in mainstreaming gender in *policies, programmes and projects* – iterative, context specific, processes of gender analysis, hearing women's views, and budgeted, monitored action to promote women's rights and gender equality. These processes form the basis of support to gender equality and women's rights *in any organisational context* – whether that be support to women's organisations and projects; the design, implementation and monitoring of 'mainstream' projects and programmes working with poor communities in the South; or UK-based international NGO programmes focused on issues including advocacy, communications, fundraising, and human resource management.

The centre of the circle focuses on the processes of *organisational influencing and capacity-building* required to bring the above actions about. It is with these behind-the-scenes processes of organisational influencing that GADN gender advocates are principally engaged. This role is defined differently in different organisations – but, in effect, in all organisations the role is to inspire, spearhead, support, challenge, and sustain organisational efforts to prioritise gender equality and women’s rights.

Case study findings

In all nine case study organisations, GADN gender advocates are engaged in similar kinds of activities:

- Internal influencing.
- Reviews, policies and strategies.
- Awareness-raising and skill development.
- Systems and incentives for planning and monitoring.
- Promoting equality at work.

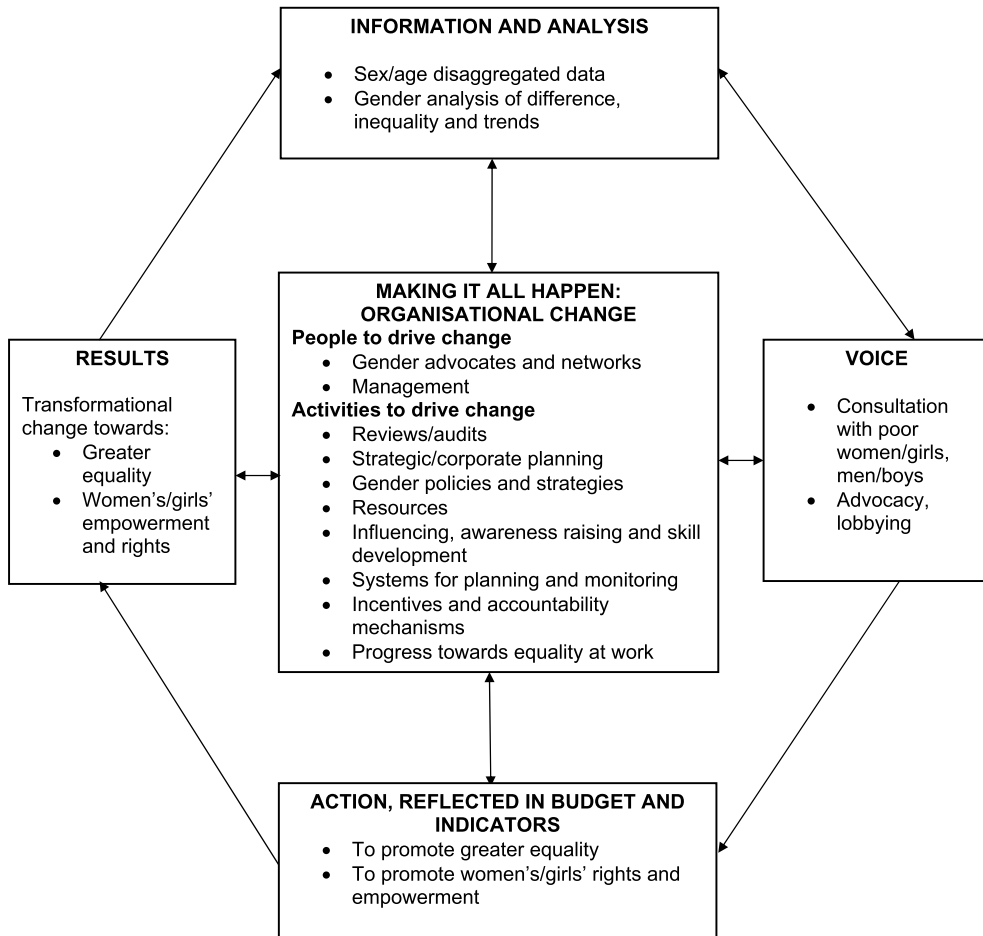
Internal influencing: gender advocates as catalysts for change

The ultimate aim is that gender mainstreaming should form part of the responsibility of all staff (activities in the outside circle of Figure 1). However, reviews are consistent in concluding that effective gender mainstreaming requires dedicated staff to act as *catalysts* – ‘the making it happen’ activities set out in the centre of the circle, and the role of GADN gender advocates.

GADN gender advocates come from a variety of professional backgrounds – project management, professional equalities work, local government, participation, work with women’s organisations, and academic work. Most identify themselves as feminists, and they include both women and men. In some Stage 1 and 2 organisations, gender champions are volunteers – taking on this responsibility in addition to their designated job. In others, a paid full-time or part-time role has been created. In first- and second-stage organisations, gender advocates tend to be operating from the margins, seeking ways to raise interest in women’s rights and gender equality, open up space for discussion, and promote buy-in from management and staff. This is a challenging, often isolated role, requiring skill and persistence in keeping gender on the agenda, framing arguments for women’s rights and gender equality in ways that resonate with the organisation, and which open rather than close doors.

In all of the Stage 3 organisations, gender equality and women’s rights are firmly established from the top of the organisations as corporate strategic priorities – and in most, this has happened in the last two years. In this context, gender advocates tend to have more of a technical support function than an influencing function, with far

Figure 1: Mainstreaming Gender Equality Framework for understanding the process in mainstream organisations.



greater room for manoeuvre – credibility, traction, resources (to an extent), and options to support staff in putting gender equality commitments into practice.

In all nine case study organisations, GADN gender advocates work with a network of staff from different departments. Again, each organisation has its own term for this particular role (e.g. Gender Working Group or Gender Champions Group). The generic term ‘gender network’ is used to refer to these in this article.

In two of the Stage 1 organisations, gender advocates started by setting up an informal gender network made up of interested individuals from different

departments – a learning opportunity for the staff involved, a source of allies, and way of increasing reach and impact.

Establishing gender champions has been a good strategy to try to increase impact internally although many are fairly junior and thus have limited decision-making power. We have struggled to gain Heads of Teams as champions.

In all five Stage 3 organisations, advocacy and network roles have moved up the organisational hierarchy, and become formally embedded in management structures. Headquarters gender champion posts are full-time and permanent, and departmental or country office representation on the gender network is required. Network member terms of reference are generally endorsed by senior management, and members are allocated time, resources, and support to take responsibility for championing gender equality and women's rights in their own country, programme, or departmental context.

One Stage 3 organisation has established a network of *senior* gender champions, comprising the Executive Director and 12 Departmental Champions with at least middle management responsibility, with a 'critical challenge and oversight' mandate. This group is responsible for ensuring that gender analysis is integrated into the work of all departments from the outset – a responsibility stipulated in their job profiles and assessed during performance appraisals.

Reviews, policies, and strategies

Gender reviews and action plan/strategy development play a critical role in all organisations. In Stage 1 organisations, gender reviews/audits were the first activity of gender advocates following formation of a gender network. External facilitators led staff through participatory, reflective review processes – enabling staff to understand their own organisational culture, explore the extent to which the organisation was already promoting gender equality across its work, assess gaps, and identify opportunities. These reviews were followed up with participatory action planning, involving staff in prioritising key areas of work for the coming year.

Each team is now developing its own set of actions – looking at team plans and thinking what else they could be doing. Each team is focusing on practical change – what's practical and do-able.

Stage 3 organisations have all had numerous gender audits/reviews over the years assessing the effectiveness of their gender mainstreaming activities – focused on the organisation as a whole, or commissioned by particular country programmes or departments – and approaches have been refined and developed on the basis of findings. In all five organisations, gender strategy development is now taking place centrally and at senior management levels. In the last two years, corporate Gender

Strategies have been timed and streamlined to feed into and complement corporate global strategic planning, with gender equality/inclusion/women's rights prioritised as a corporate objective. UK and country programme teams are each responsible for setting and reporting against their own gender/women's rights objectives and indicators.

Awareness-raising and skill development

All gender advocates undertake activities to raise staff awareness on gender equality and women's rights and develop staff skills in gender analysis and gender-sensitive planning. Whilst formal training courses dominated a decade ago, a far wider range of formal and informal learning methods are now being used, including on-line learning and networking, touring exhibitions, mentoring, guided reading, self-assessment, participatory workshops, gender stories in internal communications, and films and talks.

We found that creating spaces for staff to discuss the issues – what gender means for them, and for their particular area of work – is essential to engage them in the process and [to develop] their capacity to include it in their work.

Our gender lead quickly decided that a 'viral approach' was required which meant that equity and inclusion would infiltrate every part of the organisation, conversations and mindsets. She made it her personal mission to 'infect' everyone so that people were all talking about 'E[quity] and I[nclusion].

We try to make the whole topic less taboo, more open, less sensitive – so that people enjoy talking about it.

Systems for planning and monitoring

Linked both to strategy implementation and to skills training, all advocates have developed tools to give guidance to staff on how to mainstream gender equality and women's rights in their policies, programmes, and projects (the outside circle of the framework in Figure 1) – focusing on gender analysis, gender planning, and monitoring. Tools are deliberately designed to fit with the organisation's normal way of doing things – bringing a gender lens to existing planning tools – and a key message is the simpler the better.

There is really no point in inventing new tools, what works better is to ensure that gender becomes part of existing tools, tools staff are already familiar with.

Our most useful tool is a two-pager on minimum standards for all programmes. This replaced a 40-page document on how to do gender-sensitive programming which was wordy and repetitive and no-one used.

We have one page on Equalities Impact Assessment – anyone can understand and get it. It's practical and helpful and you get better and better at it.

Sometimes it is as simple as making sure people ask the right questions on gender (for example, who does what?; who owns what?; who decides what?, and so on). These simple questions help to gradually create a gendered lens.

Equality at work

Issues concerning gender equality at work have been raised in gender mainstreaming discussions with staff in all case study organisations. Staff in Stage 1 organisations are often exploring these issues for the first time.

There was also quite a lot of anger and upset from women feeling disadvantaged in an organisation which had a long working hours culture, wasn't mother and child friendly, and in which the numbers of women were not reflected in leadership.

In Stage 2 and 3 organisations, gender advocates have worked with human resources departments, taking steps to promote greater equality within the organisation's staffing and culture.

The organisational culture at the time was not seen as an enabling environment for female staff (work-life balance, women in traditional support roles, etc.). In 2007, the international women's rights team initiated a female leadership forum to discuss these internal issues, . . . mandated to address women's leadership, recruitment, and retention . . . [an] internal survey in 2010 across 25 country offices found that 85 per cent of respondents felt their offices respected family-friendly policies and work-life balance.

Successes and continuing challenges

Successes

The work reported on in the case studies is focused on making gender mainstreaming happen in the UK headquarters of large international NGOs. The impact of this work is judged in the short term against change in formal and informal aspects of organisational behaviour – from corporate policy commitments and spending on gender equality and women's rights, to the behaviour, attitudes, and understanding of individual staff. Gender advocates in all nine organisations record important achievements and breakthroughs – progress, albeit hard won, in a positive direction.

Achievement in Stage 1 organisations tends to be individual and incremental.

We have found that change has taken place amongst the most unexpected of our colleagues, which is very encouraging to see.

The head of programmes pushed for a key performance indicator around assessing new proposals on gender – 75 per cent of all new proposals have to be either gender sensitive or gender transformative. Needless to say, most struggle to get to the transformative mark.

Advocates in Stage 3 organisations all noted substantial progress. All now have strong corporate commitment to the promotion of gender equality and women's rights, have established or are establishing measurable indicators and mechanisms of accountability at senior management levels, are actively promoting systematic use of gender analysis and gender-sensitive planning across country-based and UK programmes and departments, and are funding women's rights organisations in many contexts.

The success of mainstreaming equity and inclusion cannot be underestimated – there is unprecedented focus on the most marginalized and discriminated against communities, groups, and individuals in our work.

Having gender so clearly integrated into the corporate strategic framework was a major turning point for the work on gender. As staff perceived gender as a corporate priority, they also had a stronger interest and a need to understand the issue and deliver on it.

There is evidence of country programmes integrating gender into programme frameworks, funding proposals, planning and reporting resulting in better policies, staff training, gender audits, and funding for innovative gender work.

The current level of corporate commitment and leadership in these organisations, whilst certainly not unproblematic and not complete, has built up over time, strongly influenced by the work of internal gender advocates, and is unprecedented in the last 15 years.

Continuing challenges

Significant constraints inevitably remain. In some Stage 1 organisations, champions continue to encounter some resistance from staff and management to the idea of promoting gender equality and women's rights:

Some members of staff felt strongly that gender was not relevant for their roles, and others that too much attention was being paid to gender rather than other equality areas such as race or disability. Some felt the audit was being done to please donors.

Some (senior managers) felt that the organisation had already undergone many changes and unprecedented growth, so staff were feeling overwhelmed and didn't have the energy to engage in large areas of new work. Others understood the importance of gender within programmes work but didn't see how it related to other areas of work such as fundraising.

There is no resistance – but there is soft support. Everyone says yes but they are not doing a right lot! That is more difficult to deal with. Disagreeing is like saying you don't like kittens or apple pie. The assumption is we are all good people. 'I wouldn't discriminate', but inadvertently they are maintaining the status quo.

Advocates in Stage 3 organisations reported experiencing *no resistance from staff* to the idea of promoting women's rights and gender equality – but found that the knowledge, skills, and opportunity to put that commitment into practice remained a constraint in some contexts.

While staff were passionate about [our] women's rights focus (with several saying this was why they had chosen to work for us), difficulties had arisen due to a lack of knowledge, understanding and, particularly in the policy/campaigns teams, the challenge in articulating a clear ask on women's rights.

Competing priorities/staff overload and limited resources were cited as major constraints by all.

One of the biggest challenges in moving beyond the rhetoric of policy commitments to women's rights to full implementation is dedicated and adequate budgets and ensuring that the women's rights team have the support they need to deliver.

Working with staff facing other priorities competing for their time can leave staff feeling overwhelmed. Some staff still see work on gender as an add on rather than core work.

Some third-stage international NGOs identify themselves as feminist organisations, and/or explicitly focus on championing and challenging unequal power relations – but even with management support, this radical approach can be hard to put into practice. One 'feminist' international NGO developed a stand-alone targeted women's rights programme to complement gender mainstreaming and ensure women's rights work remained deeply political. Whilst the stand-alone programme was very positively evaluated, this targeted work struggled to influence gender mainstreaming in the wider organisation:

The report concluded that there were some significant obstacles in how the rest of the organisation had integrated women's rights across the bulk of its work.

Some advocates promote attention to women's rights and gender equality through broader entry points such as human rights, equality, inclusion, or dignity, to facilitate buy-in. Reflecting on this, one gender advocate questioned whether this approach has diluted her organisation's focus on women's rights, and whether she and her colleagues are going far enough in seeking to be transformative – a review is currently exploring these strategic and critical questions.

The new high-level international NGO corporate commitment to women's rights and gender equality, as well as strong championing of women and girls by DFID, is bringing a new set of challenges. As championing and responsibility for gender equality and women's rights is moving up and across organisational hierarchies, new players are beginning to shape internal agendas as well as exercise influence from outside. Feminist gender champions in some organisations are concerned about a 'sanitisation of gender issues away from their feminist roots' (Smyth 2012, 25).

Observations from the case studies

Evaluating gender mainstreaming

Implicit in all our case studies is an assumption that organisational change in head office is an important prerequisite for systemic programme change, which will in turn impact positively on women's and girls' lives. The link between current high-level corporate commitment on the part of international NGOs to women's rights and gender equality, and positive impact on poor women's and girls' lives, is yet to be tracked and examined systematically. In some organisations, mechanisms are being developed to establish and assess this link – and we await findings with interest.

Gender mainstreaming has been subject to many audits and evaluations over the past 15 years – but evaluations tend not to produce the kind of nuanced information needed to make informed judgements on the value and impact of mainstreaming activities. External observers have tended to draw conclusions based on visible external expressions of gender mainstreaming – gender policies and funding for women's organisations. As the GADN case studies make clear, much of what is important, particularly in the early stages of mainstreaming, concerns internal organisational influencing, as gender advocates seek to promote buy-in and ownership. Taken out of context, conclusions drawn on the basis of visible aspects of gender mainstreaming alone can be highly misleading.

Internally commissioned audits or evaluations, however, have also been hampered by lack of clarity on reasonable, context-specific, time-bound expectations of success. They tend to produce predictable and similar findings, even in diverse contexts and highly contrasting organisations, by taking gender policy commitments (often themselves visionary) as the starting point, and examining shortfalls from this vision of change. This creates a situation where anything less than complete success can be regarded as failure, and development organisations appear to be expected to demonstrate a level of gender equality in their own structure, functioning, and activities which is wholly out of step with the wider country/cultural context within which the organisation operates – including, but not only, a developing country context. An example is an international NGO organising a comedy fundraiser in the UK, putting a huge amount of effort into getting an equal line up of high-quality female and male comedians, but struggling because the world of stand-up comedy is

so male-dominated – there are many more male comedians than female comedians. They knew from experience that if they failed, they would be harangued for failing to pay sufficient attention to gender equality.

Judging success against visionary policy commitments leads to the common diagnosis of ‘policy evaporation’ as a significant problem – meaning that gender equality policy commitments have failed to be translated consistently into impact on women’s lives. Further common findings are inconsistent senior management support; poor understanding amongst staff as a whole of the distinction between women’s projects and gender mainstreaming; a lack of systematic systems and procedures; and patchy performance dependent on committed individuals. Broad brush findings of this kind obscure considerable differences between organisations in their level of commitment to promoting gender equality and women’s rights, and fail to recognise and value progress which has been made.

It is more helpful and informative to analyse what has happened and what has changed – rather than what has not. A more sophisticated approach to monitoring and evaluating gender mainstreaming would be to enable organisations to measure and communicate context-specific progress from a baseline on a range of mainstreaming indicators. This would facilitate tracking progress over time and changes of personnel, allow comparison between organisations, and empower advocates internally and externally to challenge and hold organisations to account.

Stages in gender mainstreaming

Comparison across the nine GADN case studies suggests that gender mainstreaming is a long-term, dynamic process of change, with recognisable phases, and that organisations can regress as well as progress through these. Progress is dependent on three factors:

- The skill, resources, and influence of internal champions.
- The enabling environment of the organisation.
- External influences on the organisation.

Internal champions

Analysis of GADN case studies suggests that recognisable phases of progress are principally marked by *who is driving change internally*. Many organisations have an initial phase when change is driven by volunteer (or volunteered) gender focal points, who take on this responsibility in addition to their designated role – and some organisations do not progress beyond this. The time, skills, resources, and influence of volunteer champions tend to be highly constrained: they are in a position to exercise minimal impact on programmes and resource allocation, and even less on women’s

lives. A key objective at this stage is to make the case for securing funding and agreement for a paid gender advocate position(s).

With paid gender advocate(s) in place (indicating at least some level of wider organisational buy-in), gender mainstreaming enters a second extended phase where, depending on the time and resources available, significant progress can be made in developing policies and action plans, systems and procedures, and raising staff awareness and skills. This results in examples of impressive programme work, but implementation is inevitably patchy, and remains dependent on committed individuals.

Five of our organisations are currently experiencing a third phase where responsibility for delivering on women's rights and gender equality has been taken up by senior management. The appointment of new corporate managers (women and men) committed to women's rights has often been the key turning point in bringing about this situation. Management lead creates the conditions for organisation-wide implementation – staff are required to deliver, gender mainstreaming should be much more systematic, should influence most programmes and spending decisions, and should as a result engage with and benefit women and girls far more.

Enabling environment

The second key factor affecting progress on gender mainstreaming is the 'enabling environment' of the organisation. It is part of the role of gender advocates to influence their organisational culture – through raising the awareness of staff, influencing behaviour, and working with human resources teams on promoting equality at work. Stage 3 case studies are all taking place in highly conducive enabling environments – headquarters of independent NGOs where a focus on women's rights and gender equality fits well with the organisation mission, values, and culture, as well as with wider UK society. Gender advocacy activities over many years within the organisations and in wider society have influenced this. At the same time, the environment in different parts of the same organisations can be far more challenging, and much less enabling.

It has been hard to 'walk the talk' in our local offices and in our own lives. In some countries, female staff often feel the challenges of being on a male-dominated senior management team or in a very patriarchal society.

Stage 1 organisations tend to be more challenging organisational environments – and this partly explains why they are comparatively 'late adopters' in focusing on gender equality and women's rights in the UK international NGO context. They tend to be characterised by greater resistance from staff to being pro-active in support of women's rights and gender equality, have strong competing priorities, or hierarchies which prevent open discussion and initiative.

The hierarchical nature of the organisation prevented much debate and organisational learning. Staff tend to remain silent or worse still disengage on issues they feel won't get heard by senior staff.

External influences

Most advocates also identified significant external influences on their organisation. The main external influence cited is DFID. DFID, like the Stage 3 organisations in the GADN sample, currently has high-level corporate commitment to putting women and girls at the front and centre of everything they do. This has exercised significant influence on some of the Stage 1 and 2 organisations in our sample to 'up their game' on gender. If DFID's high-level focus on women and girls proves temporary, this is likely to have a knock-on effect in organisations where DFID's influence is a key motivating factor.

International NGOs additionally influence and support each other. Some advocates have been successful in improving performance in their own organisation by stimulating competition and comparison with more radical international NGOs.

In the GADN case studies, the experience of gender advocates was that women's rights organisations in the UK had not been a significant external influence on their organisations. Whilst gender advocates gain enormous and invaluable personal and professional support from their own involvement in women's organisations (including the GAD Network), women's organisations do not appear to have exercised a significant pressure on international NGOs corporately. It is part of the inspiration and role of internal gender advocates to open up spaces for their organisations to hear from and respond to women in the global South – but when this happens, it is more an impact of the work of internal gender champions than an external driver of organisational change.

Conclusion

The case for gender mainstreaming, which led to its adoption at the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995, remains valid. Women's projects *on their own* are limited in their ability to bring about fundamental change for women. *Complementary efforts* are needed to influence the structure and functioning of development organisations, and to seek to ensure that all development spending takes women's rights and gender equality into account. As one participant in the GADN project put it:

Gender mainstreaming is not about losing the political edge – but complementing the political edge.

The GADN case studies demonstrate that in some contexts gender mainstreaming efforts are making significant headway in doing this, and that gender mainstreaming can and does make a critical difference. Successful gender mainstreaming is

influencing development organisations to make gender equality and women's rights a corporate priority – leading to more investment in projects for women and girls, as well as to gender equality and women's rights being taken into consideration in mainstream programmes and spending decisions.

As feminists engage in discussions on the post-2015 development framework – considering what will replace the Millennium Development Goals – an important conclusion from GADN experience is that a 'twin-track approach' to promoting women's rights and gender equality – targeted initiatives for women and girls *and* gender mainstreaming – remains essential and needs to be articulated clearly. Even in the current context of unprecedented interest in UK international development agencies in directing resources to women and girls, gender mainstreaming remains critical. It is needed to ensure complementary investment in promoting gender equality in the educational, health, employment, business, and political opportunities open to women and girls, as well as in the longer term, to work within development organisations continuing to promote gender equality and women's rights, when women and girls are no longer 'flavour of the month'.

A lot has been learned about *how* to mainstream gender over the last 15 years. Gender mainstreaming takes time, resources, skill, and persistence. Success depends on the skills, resources, and influence of internal gender advocates, together with the effect of external influences, on the enabling environment of the organisation. Discussions with GADN members have highlighted the following three areas for building on progress to date.

Documenting, sharing, and communicating what is working

Since the mid-1990s, a considerable amount of experience has developed on practical and effective tools for gender mainstreaming including for awareness-raising and training, gender analysis and planning, monitoring and evaluation, development of terms of reference and performance appraisal indicators, and the development of gender strategies and action plans. Clearly documenting and sharing successful tools and techniques would benefit those embarking on gender mainstreaming now, short-cutting the lengthy evolutionary process of learning engaged in by their predecessors.

Work on developing quality standards/standard indicators

All development programmes are under increasing pressure to measure their impact. Whilst many women's rights advocates are suspicious of some of the motivation for this,⁴ at the same time evaluation is currently one of the weakest elements of gender mainstreaming practice. Developing indicators and techniques that can begin to capture context-specific, long-term, and qualitative aspects of organisational change

against a baseline would assist greatly in recognising, measuring, and valuing progress; learning from experience and improving practice; comparison across organisations and over time; and holding organisations to account.

Work on developing stronger links between internal and external gender advocates

GADN gender advocates see huge potential in a much closer working relationship between gender advocates seeking to mainstream gender within development organisations, and women's organisations campaigning for change. There is a critical role for women's organisations to play as external advocates for women's rights, providing an external influence on international NGOs, and holding them to account.

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Notes

- 1 Helen Derbyshire is a gender consultant with more than 25 years' experience of working on gender equality and women's rights, including support to processes of gender mainstreaming in governments, donors, and international NGOs; to women's organisations; and to women's and girls' projects. She is a member of the Board of Trustees and Advisory Group of the UK Gender and Development Network. This article has been written in close consultation with GADN members. Drafts were circulated for comment and discussed in meetings of the Gender Mainstreaming Working Group. Kanwal Ahluwalia and Nadja Dolata, co-chairs of the group, made substantial inputs as well as editorial comments.
- 2 Gender staff from the following organisations are represented in the group: ActionAid UK, Amnesty International UK, IDS Knowledge Services (BRIDGE), CAFOD, CARE International UK, Child Hope UK, Christian Aid, Every Child, Oxfam GB, PANOS, Plan UK, Save the Children UK, Water Aid, WWF-UK.
- 3 Adapted from Derbyshire (2008, 13).
- 4 Batliwala and Pittman (2010, 9) note the widespread feeling among aid recipients that measurement is used more as a tool of enforcement and accountability to the donor than as a means of understanding and learning what works, and changing strategy if necessary.

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