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Revisiting gender mainstreaming in international development: Goodbye to an illusionary strategy

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Abstract

In contrast to the concrete problems women face worldwide, of discrimination in family and society, of violence and disrespect, of poverty and lack of rights, the policy of international development organisations to defeat these impediments has been abstract. Wrapped in the mystifying language of 'gender mainstreaming', development agencies pursue a strategy which itself has consumed all attention at the cost of tangible action to solve real problems. By going back to the time that the policy became solidly rooted, the mid 1990s, I document and compare evaluation studies and reviews of bilateral and multilateral donors, in particular those conducted since the turn of the century. Not one study reports positively about the gender mainstreaming policy. The essentials of the discourse of gender and development are not reflected in practice, the policy has not moved beyond the stage of a theory. Evaluation studies have been pre-occupied with the strategy of mainstreaming itself, failing to address the results thereof for women and gender equality. This paper aims to support the discretely emerging voices to move away from the illusion of gender mainstreaming and to develop a policy that is oriented towards concrete issues and contains direct efforts to make gender equality happen.

Keywords

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
AfDB	African Development Bank
AusAid	Australian Agency for International Development
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CAS	Country Assistance Strategy
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CRS	Creditor Reporting System
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
Danida	Danish International Development Assistance
DfID	Department for International Development (UK)
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
UNICEF	United Nations Children's
GAD	Gender And Development
GE	Gender Equality
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme Fund
Unifem	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Program
WID	Women in Development

Revisiting gender mainstreaming in international development
Goodbye to an illusionary strategy

1   Introduction

Early 2000s I co-authored the OECD/DAC *Review of Gender and Evaluation*[1], a study to find out how the gender perspective and results for women are addressed in evaluations of development policy and practice. A main conclusion is that "overall progress in incorporating gender perspectives into general evaluations of development assistance has been slow and uneven" (2003:10). The 2003 review is the third of its kind initiated by the OECD/DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation in collaboration with the Working Party on Gender. The earlier studies from 1994 and 1999 looked at the gender integration in general evaluations, the 2003 review also investigates thematic gender evaluations, i.c. evaluations of gender equality policy and practice.

Major findings of the thematic type evaluations in the 2003 DAC Review are that: i) gender mainstreaming is treated as a goal rather than as a means to the long-term objective of gender equality, ii) the assumption that gender mainstreaming leads to gender equality outcomes prevails but is untested, iii) the word "gender" is generally applied as a synonym for "women", with little or no focus on gender relations or on the impact of development activities on gender equality, and iv) most of the gender benefits identified deal with women's practical needs, not their strategic interests.

The quality of both types of evaluations is disappointing. Lack of sex-disaggregated baseline data, limited monitoring information, and lack of gender-sensitive indicators have hindered the task of proper research. Many evaluations are conducted with little attention to and involvement of stakeholders in the programs and projects. Compared to the studies of 1994 and 1999, the depth and relevance of discussions on gender issues in evaluation reports has not progressed much, while the recommendation of these studies and of the DAC advice to its members to include specific questions and issues in ToRs to provide guidance to evaluators is still rarely followed in the general evaluations reviewed in the 2003 study. The absence of a Terms of Reference to explain the evaluation approach and a poor analysis characterizes many evaluation reports. As a result it is impossible to obtain a good picture of the differences in benefits for women and men and of the significance of these benefits for overall development outcomes. (2003:11/12)

A decade has passed since the DAC review was published. In these ten years, bilateral and multilateral agencies continued to conduct thematic gender

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[1] Hunt, J. and Brouwers, R (2003). *Review of Gender and Evaluation: Final Report to DAC Network on Development Evaluation*, OECD, Paris.

evaluations, while Norad and the African Development Bank have undertaken two more meta-analyses of these evaluations, in 2005 and 2011 respectively. Most of the evaluation studies concentrate on gender mainstreaming, which is the pivot of the gender policy in international, governmental, non-governmental agencies since the mid-1990s. The studies form the core of my research, complemented with academic writings on gender mainstreaming. My main interest is to discover if and how knowledge on gender equality in development has accumulated, how the evaluations are conducted and what they have contributed, what have been the results of the strategy of mainstreaming for gender equality, and how the academic debate on gender mainstreaming in development is unfolding.

2   Gender and gender mainstreaming

2.1   Some history

The history of gender mainstreaming starts way before the term was coined. Some forty years ago, with the international aid activities well on its way, the first writings about the negative effects of development cooperation on women are published and gradually donor agencies make efforts to counteract the undesirable 'side-effects' as they are seen at the time. My first research on the policy for women's equality in development is in 1983[2]. It aims to find out how the policy on women in development cooperation, presented by the Netherlands Minister for Development Cooperation a few years earlier, is working out in practice. In the light of later debates it is interesting to recall how the Dutch policy, among the first of its kind worldwide, is worded.[3] The objectives of the policy are: i) the promotion of economic independence of women, ii) the integration of women in the development policy, since programs should not aim for women to change in isolation but should focus on achieving social changes so that the traditional ideas, attitudes and actions of both women and men may change, and iii) the strengthening women's organisations and women's groups which focus on changing traditional relations between women and men, promote women's economic independence, and give voice and influence to women in change processes. At the start of the research, insiders warn me not to go by the files of the ministry, because due to the novelty of the policy little might be documented yet. So, equipped with a little tape recorder I went from door to door in the ministry talking to staff about their views and efforts to implement the policy, learning what has been put into operation three years after the adoption of the policy.

What I found then still sounds familiar some thirty years later. The main conclusions regarding the implementation are: i) the number of projects with a

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[2] Ria Brouwers (1983), *Een tip van de sluier, Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en vrouwenemancipatie*, Nijmegen, Instituut voor Politicologie, Doctoraalscriptie.
[3] *Notitie Vrouwen in Ontwikkelingssamenwerking*, Tweede Kamer, zitting 1980-1981, 16400, hoofdstuk V, nr 9.

women's component is much larger than the official Project list suggests – out of 548 projects 45 take women's participation into account, far more than the 7 mentioned in the Project list, ii) the attention for women in the projects is usually implicit, meaning that women are not as vanguard as staff make belief, iii) projects which involve women are of the same kind: broad projects with a focused social component, mainly rural development programs and health programs. Conclusions about the institutionalisation of the policy are that: i) more than half of the respondents do not know the Checklist on Women and Development, ii) Terms of reference for evaluations seldom include questions on the effects for women, and iii) expertise on women's issues is underused, both at the ministry and in the field.

2.2   WID and GAD

With the introduction of the first policies on women and development in the 1970s and 1980s, the debate about the theory on women's equality in development comes under steam. The concepts of Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) serve to capture the main distinction between approaches to promote the equality between men and women in international development. [4] The title "From WID to GAD" of papers[5] or of paragraphs in reports[6], points to a chronological order between the two. First there is Women in Development (WID), the basic idea being that measures are required to integrate the needs and interests of women who are left out of the development process so far, so that they can benefit as well. WID ideas have their roots in the women's movement in northern countries in the 1970s, which advocates for equal rights, employment and citizenship for women, but also in research highlighting the importance of women's role in agricultural development in southern countries by economists like Ester Boserup (1970).[7] WID becomes known for its call to pay attention to women's active role in the development process, which has often been overlooked by development experts who perceived women only as mothers and housewives.

However exciting the WID approach is as a new angle in development cooperation, it soon comes under critique, not only by those who oppose a policy for women, but also from within by advocates for women's rights. The criticism is that WID's exclusive focus on women's productive role and on

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[4] There have been variations to WID and GAD, sometimes nuances like women *and* (instead of in) development, gender *equity* (instead of equality), evoked big debates. In the Netherlands the term 'autonomy for women' was introduced as the basic objective of the policy, with its four dimensions: physical, political, economic and socio-cultural autonomy. It gave expression to the idea that women need space to establish their own conditions and priorities to gain control over their social and private life. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1998), pp 15, 93/4, 228).

5 Sharashoub Razavi & Carol Miller (1995) *From WID to GAD, Conceptual shifts in the Women and Development Discourse*, UNRISD paper, Geneva 1995.

[6] Sida (2010), *Gender equality in Swedish Development Cooperation,* Sida Evaluation 2010:1

[7] Razavi&Miller 1995:2-6.

equal employment opportunities has the controversial implication that it "prioritized what development needs from women over what women need from development".[8] As a concept WID is considered inadequate since it encourages the integration of women into the existing structures of development without questioning the biases built into these structures.[9]

GAD becomes the catchword, gender and development. The theory behind GAD articulates the urgency to take women's subordination beyond the sphere of production and to understand the relational nature of the discrimination of women. Only by understanding of and by dealing with gender power relations can development programs generate sustainable changes, is the argument. A central element of the GAD concept is the notion of transformation, pointing to the need for a change in structures and systems. Transformation has two angles: it should not only be the result of the proper policy and interventions, but it is also a prerequisite to attain true gender equality. The GAD discourse stresses the essentiality of a gender analysis to bring out the differences between women and men in life circumstances and opportunities, as a basis to redress inequalities in the future.

It may have been for the sake of stating the point clearly that the paradigm of 'gender' is contrasted strongly to the WID approach.[10] WID is blamed for a narrow view – "it tended to isolate women as a separate and often homogeneous category, it was 'predominantly descriptive', as well as being 'equivocal in its identification and analysis of women's subordination' (Pearson, et al. 1981:x)"[11] The approach itself was held responsible for the lack of progress made in promoting equality for women. As part of the WID approach, support to special women's projects also came under attack, in particular income generating and female-focused production programmes. These failed to improve women's economic position and were often found to add to women's workloads.[12] From the beginning GAD has been presented as superior to WID. GAD advocates are not averse to a self-congratulatory tone, considering the gender discourse of a higher order than WID, both intellectually and morally. In retrospect, the theory of gender and development has not always been so diametrically different from the women and development approach. The first policy document of the Netherlands (see above) already emphasized that programs should not aim for women to change in isolation but should focus on achieving social changes so that the traditional ideas, attitudes and actions of both women and men may change. No less than an objective of transformation.

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[8] Ibid p. 1.

[9] Hilary Charlesworth (2005), 'Not Waving but Drowning: Gender Mainstreaming and Human Rights in the United Nations', in: *Harvard Human Rights Journal,* Vol. 18:2

[10] See for a summary of the differences between the two approaches 'Table 1: WID versus GAD', in: African Development Bank Group 2012, *Mainstreaming Gender Equality: A Road to Results or A Road to Nowhere?, An evaluation synthesis*, p. 28.

[11] Op cit. Razavi&Miller, 1995:13.

[12] Mayra Buvinic (1986), "Projects for women in the Third World: Explaining their misbehaviour", in: *World Development*, 14(5); Razavi & Miller, ibid.

2.3   Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is introduced as the best method to transform gender relations. Walby (2005) points to an important feature of the strategy: it is transnational from the start and not rooted within a national or country framework. The term originates in development policy, and aims to advance gender equality by "revising all mainstream policy arenas"[13]. The advocacy for gender mainstreaming is very successful and the ideas gain ground during the decade between the UN World Conferences on Women in Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995. It is an era of optimism in world development especially among the western industrialized countries that have seen the victory of their system over that of the Soviet Union. The irony is that GAD, with its vision to change the practice of development and to transform the foundations of the system, emerges as a critique at the time that the very system itself triumphed over any other system in the world. The Beijing Platform for Action[14] has embraced the term gender mainstreaming as a strategy to redress women's unequal position in twelve critical areas of concern, including education, health, armed conflict, as victims of violence, economy, decision making and human rights. In every context the technique of gender mainstreaming is proposed in a uniform way: "Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs, so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects for women and men, respectively."[15]

After Beijing, gender mainstreaming has been adopted and applied by nearly every multilateral and bilateral donor agency, by governments and NGOs. Many of their policy documents on gender equality quote or reflect the definition of gender mainstreaming adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) high-level panel discussion in 1997:

"Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality."[16]

Gender mainstreaming begins in an optimistic mood: not only women stand to gain, but the notion of transformation promises a fundamental change in human relations, beneficial for women but ultimately also for men. While

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[13] Sylvia Walby (2005): Introduction: Comparative gender mainstreaming in a global era, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(4): 453/4.

[14] *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, in Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 september 1995, UN Doc. A/CONF.177/20/REV.1, pp 79-229.

[15] Op cit. Charlesworth 2005:3.

[16] *Report of the Economic and Social Council for the Year 1997*, UN Doc. 1997 A/52/3.18).

the ink of the resolutions and agreements is drying and gender mainstreaming as a policy intention becomes solidly rooted at the end of the 1990s, the obstacles become manifest. The victory of Beijing - the worldwide embracement of gender mainstreaming - turns out to be a Pyrrhic victory as this paper will show.

3   Characteristics of the evaluation studies

3.1   Nature of the studies

The twenty one studies identified for this assessment are conducted between 2005 and 2012[17]. All are thematic evaluations, designed to evaluate gender equality, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment efforts.[18] Ten studies deal with the gender policy of bilateral agencies (Norad 3 studies, DfiD, BMZ, CIDA, SDC, Irish Aid, Sida, ADC) six with the gender policy of multilateral agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, ADB 2 studies, WorldBank), two are on gender funds (Unifem, Danida), there is one monitoring report of gender performance (AusAid), and two meta studies of gender evaluations (Norad, AfDB). See Table 1.

The reports disclose conformity in the gender policy of all agencies. Following the agreements made at the Beijing Conference in 1995, all adhere to a policy of 'gender mainstreaming' or 'integration' or 'incorporation'. The 'twin-track' approach is most common, which is a combination of gender mainstreaming with support to women directly by stand-alone projects. Mainstreaming is explained as an orientation towards gender equality in all aspects of the organisation: themes, sectors, activities, institution, with explicit or implicit reference to the ECOSOC definition of 1997.

Two of the evaluations in the sample are meta-studies, conducted with an interval of five years by Norad (2006) and the African Development Bank (2011) respectively. Norad's review of donor evaluations, often referred to as "the Norad report", compiles the experiences to promote gender equality in international development in eight agencies. The idea for the meta-study was born when the evaluation of Norad's gender policy in 2005, found indications that all donors may have experiences similar to those of Norad. Confirming the presumption and concluding that "the mainstreaming strategy has been unsuccessful" the Norad report serves as a wake-up call for other donors. In

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[17] For the identification of evaluations I consulted the websites of the OECD/DAC and of the donor agencies, and compared my list of studies with the list of the 2011 meta-analysis of gender evaluations by the African Development Bank. While I may have missed one or two evaluations, I'm confident to have found the most important ones.

[18] The OECD/DAC Review of 2003 distinguishes between i) *thematic evaluations*, specifically designed to evaluate gender equality, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment efforts and ii) *general evaluations* that include some gender analysis or references to gender issues but are not specifically designed to evaluate gender equality policy or initiatives.

TABLE 1: Gender evaluation studies 2005-2012

Year	Agency Bilateral	Agency Multilateral	Title
2005	Norad a)		*Evaluation of 'The Strategy for women and gender equality in development cooperation (1997-2005)*
2005	Norad b)		*Gender and Development – a review of evaluation reports 1997-2004*
2006	Norad		*Lessons from Evaluations of Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation*
2006		UNDP	*Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in UNDP*
2006	DfID a)		*Evaluation of DfID's Policy and Practice in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*
2006	DfID b)		*Evaluation of DfID's Policy and Practice in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Country Case Studies Volume II, India, Nigeria, Western Balkan*
2006	BMZ		*Taking account of gender issues in German development cooperation: Promoting gender equality and empowering women*
2008	CIDA		*Evaluation of CIDA's Implementation of its Policy on Gender Equality*
2008		Unicef	*Evaluation of gender policy implementation in Unicef*
2008		WFP	*Report of the End-of-Term Evaluation of WFP's Gender Policy (2003-2007): Enhanced Commitments to Women to Ensure Food Security*
2009	SDC		*Evaluation of SDC's Performance in Mainstreaming Gender Equality*
2009		Unifem	Evaluation Report *United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women*
2009	Norad		*Mid-Term Review of the Norwegian Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (2007-2009)*
2009		Asian DevBank Phase I	*The Asian Development Bank's support to gender and development, Phase 1: relevance, responsiveness and results to date*
2010		ADB Phase II	*The Asian Development Bank's support to gender and development, Phase II: Results from country case studies*
2010	Irish Aid		*Gender Equality Policy Review Report*
2010		IEG World Bank	*Gender and Development, An Evaluation of World Bank support 2002-08*
2010	Sida		*Gender equality in Swedish Development Cooperation*
2011		African Dev Bank	*Mainstreaming Gender Equality, A road to results or a road to nowhere?*
2011	AusAid		*Annual Thematic Performance Report Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2009-10*
2011	Danida		*Evaluation of Danida's 'Women in Africa' regional support initiative*
2012	Austrian Dev Coop		*Evaluation of the Austrian Development Cooperation Gender Policy between 2004-2011*

2008, Unicef's evaluation "seeks evidence to confirm or refute (-) the Norad study", while WFP's response is to "highlight perspectives at the operational level" in their evaluation. Norad itself follows up with another evaluation in 2009. The "evaluation synthesis" of the AfDB in 2011 is triggered by the alarming message forthcoming from the Norad report and builds on it.

3.2 Evaluation approach

Notwithstanding recent debates about the need for more rigorous evaluations and the call for more quantitative research, the main methodology in the studies is the traditional approach of documentary study and interviews. All studies have been conducted by or under auspices of the agency's official evaluation department. Policy and strategy have been the explicit topics of most evaluations and, given the conformity of the gender policy among donors, the majority of the evaluations have put gender mainstreaming centre-stage. Major attention goes to the relevance of the policy, the commitment towards it by the agency's management and staff, and the implementation of the strategy. The evaluation of the implementation is mainly an assessment of the extent to which gender has become part and parcel of the general policy, programmes, procedures and institutional arrangements. And while almost all evaluations include country case studies[19], these also assess primarily if gender issues are taken into account in the country strategies and in project design. The few evaluations that have made efforts to address the results for gender equality and women's empowerment do so by verifying the findings of previous evaluation reports or of desk studies on selected interventions. Yet, those evaluations offer a richer methodology menu as the following paragraphs explain.

The DfID 2006 evaluation makes a distinction between an assessment of DfID's functioning as an organization, called its internal effectiveness, and an assessment of DfID's approach, role and contribution for attaining results on gender equality in the interventions, indicated as the external effectiveness. In dealing with the latter, the evaluation examines 36 interventions in Nigeria, India and the Western Balkans. The selection of interventions includes three thematic areas in each of the three countries, representing both sides of the twin-track gender strategy of *targeted* and *mainstreamed* interventions. Impact is measured by assessing people's perceptions of change. There is no straightforward account of the results itself, which is explained by the difficulty to detect these or because they were not yet forthcoming.

The Asian Development Bank has split its evaluation in two, with phase one (2009) studying the effectiveness of ADB's implementation of the Policy on Gender and Development and phase two (2010) evaluating 55 projects in six countries. The projects have been selected purposefully[20], with a view to

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[19] The exceptions are BMZ, Norad 2009 and Irish Aid.
[20] The purposeful selection implied that there are 25 projects in Category I (gender equity as theme), 20 in Category II (effective gender mainstreaming), 9 in Category III (some gender benefits), and 1 in Category IV (no gender elements). This means that categories I and II comprise just over 80%. Categories III and IV make up the remaining 20%.

maximizing the potential for obtaining insights into gender results; they are not intended to be representative of the overall country portfolio. The studies have been conducted through desk reviews, interviews, consultations with key stakeholders, site visits to some of the sample projects. Most interesting is the systematic reporting about the projects, which goes beyond the projects' findings per se. It includes 'what else to look at when assessing results in terms of gender equality outcomes'. These suggestions are instructive with regard to the kind of gender issues in the project under review and helpful for future programming. It notes, for example, that an infrastructure project is relevant for gender equality in terms of employment and equal wages for women and men in the project, access to services, transport costs, women friendly working conditions, and availability of facilities, such as toilets in markets and other public areas. The case studies have been published in separate country reports.

The IEG evaluation (2010) of the World Bank's gender policy has a broad set-up. The selection of all client countries with a population over one million that have implemented at least two Bank-supported investment projects during the period 2002 to 2008, yields a sample of 93 countries, where a desk review is conducted, thus covering 90% of the WB investment lending commitments. Of the 93 countries, 12 are randomly selected for further study of all activities that closed after fiscal year 2003. There is a separate review of Bank support for gender in Afghanistan. An initial review of the 164 projects in the 12 focus countries shows that 138 can plausibly have influenced gender equality outcomes. These are further investigated. In absence of a results framework in the Bank's Gender strategy, the evaluation team has constructed such a framework for outcomes in the three domains that the Gender strategy of 2001 indicates as important for achieving gender equality: enhanced human capital, equal access to economic assets and opportunities, and enhanced voice of men and women in development.[21] Country studies are conducted through desk reviews supplemented with rapid field assessments of a few projects each in Benin, Ghana, Peru, Tajikistan, Yemen, and Zambia. The evaluation relies on qualitative data in most areas, since quantitative data to help understand results are available only for outcomes in health, education, and labor force participation.

Sida (2010) has also conducted its evaluation in several phases, from developing a conceptual framework and case country surveys in phase 1, to a review of institutional issues in phase 2 and a study of best practices in two countries in phase 3. The choice to focus on best practices is made because so few evaluations since 2000 have been collecting the results of gender mainstreaming. The ambition of the evaluation "goes beyond assessing the process of mainstreaming gender into Sida's work and includes an investigation of development outcomes. When gender is successfully mainstreamed, what are the results in terms of gender equality for girls and boys, men and women living in poverty?" (2010:5) The study looks for results in four larger projects in Kenya and Ethiopia.

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[21] IEG World Bank 2010, tables 6.1 and 6.2, pp 42/43.

A special methodological feature is used in the ADC study (2012), which compares the performance of the Austrian development cooperation on gender mainstreaming with that of the Swiss and the Norwegians, perhaps in response to criticism that "broader comparative assessment of findings across organisations" have lacked (AfDB 2011:7).

An overall omission in the methodology of the studies under review concerns the twin-track approach. This dual strategy of gender mainstreaming in combination with direct support to women's empowerment and gender equality prevails among the donors, as all reports mention. Yet, no differentiation is made in any of the studies between results in projects of those two categories. The findings of the two evaluations of the funds supporting gender equality (Unifem 2009, Danida 2011) also provide no clues on specific benefits or limitations of focused projects.

In their methodology paragraphs all the evaluations speak of problems that have hindered their work. They range from lack of gender sensitive indicators, shortage of sex disaggregated statistical data, absence of regular monitoring, non-functioning M&E systems, absence of a results framework, to resistance from field offices towards the evaluation. For many of the evaluations these complaints serve as arguments for not addressing the outcomes and impact of the gender policy, for others as an explanation of their methodology, e.g. of developing their own assessment framework, or selecting a specific set of interventions to learn from.

4   Findings of the studies

The good news about this set of evaluation studies is that the quality is better than what we found at the time of the OECD/DAC review. This is at least partly due to the kind of studies and the expertise included then and now. The 2003 study contains both thematic evaluations designed to evaluate gender equality, and general policy or programme evaluations. Two-thirds of the latter group lack the required gender expertise on the evaluation team. This kind of evaluations is not included in the current sample. Another factor may be that a large number of the evaluations reviewed in 2003 are project evaluations, the current sample includes only policy-wide studies conducted by or under auspices of the donor's evaluation departments.

The bad news can be summarized by a quote from the most recent evaluation in the sample: "The concept of gender mainstreaming may not require lobbying anymore, walking the talk does" (ADC 2012:4). The major message of every report is the gap between policy and implementation. The policy is called inconsistent (DfID), ambiguous and confusing (WFP), invisible and unclear (Irish aid), not implemented systematically (Unicef). Disappointment resonates in conclusions like Norway is not "at the forefront of mainstreaming gender" (2005:55) and "UNDP has not met the standards expected of a leader in development practice" (2006:vii). Hope is kept alive in passages like "The Bank has demonstrated that it is possible to support gender

equality outcomes in client countries" (2010:53), and "policy is effective and is reflected in country programmes, although not necessarily in *all* projects / programmes" (Sida 2010:12).

The key element in the ECOSOC definition of gender mainstreaming in "all policies and programmes, all areas and levels" has not been adhered to by any of the agencies. The gender performance is best in areas like education, health, nutrition, water supply and sanitation, population, agriculture and rural development[22]. Some mainstreaming is found in decision making (CIDA) and land administration and management (WB), but sectors like infra-structure, transport, energy, programme loans and private sector development lack demonstrable gender mainstreaming and benefits (ADB).

Weak points in the translation from policy to practice prevail at all levels in and outside the organisations. There are no accountability mechanisms, there is lack of authority behind the policy, staff has little appreciation for the policy, do not know it, or do not know how to apply it.[23] As a result, the policy is not treated very seriously, and gender is "conspicuously absent" in the partner dialogue (Norad 2005a:55). The emergence of the new concept and its broad acceptance at the Beijing conference appears to have offered the perfect excuse for doing away with the carefully set-up special implementation features. In the mainstreaming philosophy 'gender' is everybody's responsibility, so procedures and practices developed over the previous two decades become redundant, like the system of project screening and the network of gender advisers and gender focal points in the embassies and at headquarters. Gender training is downsized[24], and there is a major decline in financial resources[25] due to a drop in earmarked resources for women (Norad 2005:7) and because mainstreaming served to justify the reduction of resources for specialized women's units (Charlesworth 2005:13).

Gender analysis needed for an informed practice has increased in country strategies, but the quality is low (BMZ, CIDA, WFP, WB), lacks focus (SDC) or the analysis and mainstreaming may be strong at the front end of the project cycle but gets lost on the way and is weak in monitoring and evaluation (Sida). The significance of gender analysis is viewed differently in the evaluations, but the common thread is that gender analysis at the country level informs

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[22] reported by DfID, CIDA, ADB, World Bank, Sida.

[23] reported by Norad, UNDP, DfID, Unicef, WFP, SDC, ADB, ADC.

[24] Norad 2006:6, + own observation The Netherlands.

[25] UNDP 2006; IEG WB reports a peak in 2003 after which a decline takes place(2010:xii); bilateral expenditures of The Netherlands' support to equal rights for women reached an absolute dip in 2006, *Resultaten in ontwikkeling 2009-2010*, *Bijdrage van de Nederlandse hulp aan international ontwikkelingsdoelen*, p 8.

planning, but has no influence on programmatic choices.[26,27,28] An analysis and integration of gender issues at the project level seems to make a difference since two-thirds of the gender-integrated projects of the World Bank delivered substantial or high outcomes, against 22% of the non-integrated projects.[29] A correlation between gender sensitive design of projects and impact is no automatism, but it is present when a strong gender-focused intervention strategy is combined with good leadership (DfID).

Occasionally, the evaluations come to different findings, or voice different opinions. On gender expertise, for example. Some find the number of experts deficient or their position within the organisational structures too low (BMZ, Unicef, ADC), or they emphasize the importance of advisers at headquarters and the country level (Irish Aid). In contrast, the WFP evaluation team argues that the gender focal point structure undermines gender mainstreaming, since the system suggests that gender mainstreaming is to be "someone else's work". (WFP 2008:59)

All reports emphasize the weakness of documentation, monitoring and evaluation. There are no baseline or sex-disaggregated data, monitoring forms may be filled out but not used (Irish aid), or used for counting only (WFP), the quality of the files is low (CIDA), less than half of the completion reports deal meaningfully with gender outcomes (IEG WB) and there is no quality control (BMZ). Consequently, the benefits of all endeavours remain largely unknown. There is no information about what works or how, while many of the good gender results encountered are at an anecdotal level and invisible.[30] There are major gaps in the information forthcoming from the studies.

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[26] Sida 2010:12.

[27] ADB Independent Evaluation, *Learning Curves*, March 2011.ADB 2010:iii, ADB finds weak evidence on the influence of country gender assessments to ADB's country partnership strategies. The evaluation also concludes that in practice not *perse* the GAD project categories are the best performers; good performance is equally found in categories or sectors not focusing on gender equity. In fact, the only highly successful project in the sample of 55 is found in the category expecting only some gender benefits, not in the thematic or gender mainstreaming categories. No explanation given.

[28] With a decline in the frequency of meaningful gender analysis in the country assistance strategies, IEG found no evidence for a positive link between gender in the CAS and in the subsequent operations (2010:23-26).

[29] IEG World Bank 2010: 23-26,43. "Forty-seven percent of the 138 projects integrated gender considerations during project design, and about 63 percent of these projects delivered substantial or high outcomes. Of the 53 percent that did not integrate gender considerations at appraisal, 22 percent of these (in the Philippines, and some in Colombia) appear to have benefited women nonetheless." (IEG 2010:43) In the Philippines the results are due to "highly gender aware and effective domestic systems. (p43).

[30] Statements about 'invisible' results are made in CIDA 2008,Norad 2009 and Sida 2010 implying that more is attained than has been documented.

5   The big unknown's: money and results

5.1   Money 'plays no role'

Money is mainly mentioned in terms of "lack of", "decreased" or "woefully inadequate." The few evaluations that deal properly with finances, do so in terms of percentages of total ODA that can be attributed to gender equality programmes, noting at the same time that the figures are not very reliable. Examples to illustrate this point are from the evaluations of CIDA and DfID.

In the period 1998-1999 to 2005-2006, $792.8 million of the total Canadian ODA being $16.95 billion dollars has been designated for *GE-specific programming* (i.e. initiatives which had gender equality as the principal objective and result) and *GE-integrated programming* (i.e. initiatives with gender equality as one of the objectives). The $ 792.8 represents an average of 4.68% of Canadian ODA per year. This is not the full story, because an unknown proportion of CIDA's investments with significant gender components are not captured through the coding system that informs CIDA's corporate database. This makes the figures rather arbitrary. Hence, the evaluation concludes that "the reported value of GE-designated funding must be considered an underestimate of the true size of CIDA's investment in GE since 1998-1999" (CIDA 2008:4).

The evaluation of DfID has looked at trends in DfIDs funding. With a separate annex on gender in DfID's aid portfolio it is the most elaborate on finances of all evaluations in the sample. The report warns that data should be treated with caution for a good number of reasons: i) a gender equality score is given at the design stage for the whole project in which gender is assumed to be mainstreamed, ii) it is not separated out how much of the budget is actually devoted to or spent for the promotion of gender equality, iii) the reporting is inconsistent throughout the organization, and iv) the data may underestimate the level of gender equality activities actually undertaken because smaller projects are not included. With that in mind, the report concludes that overall spending increased "consistently over the period from 5% in 1995/1996 to 32% in 2004/2005.[31]

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[31] DfID (2006) pp 32-34, Annex 4 Gender Analysis of DFID's Aid Portfolio (1995-2005), pp 71-88. The analysis is based on information provided by DFID's Statistical Reporting and Support Group. The analysis comprises all projects that have been scored in the Project Information Marker System (PIMS). DFID uses the PIMS to track the targeting of bilateral commitments and expenditure against specific policy objectives, it contains 14 markers. The marker applied for the tracking of projects that promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment is referred to as the GE marker.

A gender coding or gender marker system is increasingly used. As part of their annual reporting to the OECD/DAC[32], members indicate for each individual aid activity whether it targets gender equality as one of its policy objectives. An activity can either target gender equality as its "principal objective" or as a "significant objective". A "principal" score (2) is assigned if gender equality was an explicit objective of the activity and fundamental to its design - i.e. the activity would not have been undertaken without this objective. A "significant" score (1) is assigned if gender equality was an important, but secondary, objective of the activity - i.e. it was not the principal reason for undertaking the activity. A "not targeted" score (0) is assigned if an activity is not found to target gender equality.[33] The system relies on proper reporting by the responsible units. If they fail to do so, or if their reporting is inconsistent, the ultimate report from a country is unreliable.

In reference to the gender marker, the evaluation of the Austrian Development Cooperation reports that "the average percentage of commitments to gender marker 1 and 2 projects over the years is at 63.5%" (AusAid 2011:3, 38). This being so far off the 32% from DfID, which in turn is hugely different from the 4.68% of CIDA, must be another sign of inconsistency in reporting. The IEG evaluation of the World Bank investment lending commitments abstains from a specification of money for gender equality, since "the lack of a gender code in the Bank's budget system means that budget for gender integration is not systematically tracked" (2010:37). Unicef comments that it is not possible to track spending in gender equality initiatives within the existing financial tracking systems. (2008:41/42) The Norad report points out that the score on the gender marker depends greatly on the composition of aid (2009:4, 26/7, 44). Governance and human development generally score high on the gender marker, while other sectors such as infrastructure, energy, etc. score low.

AusAid has the most consistent accountability system.[34] Its annual gender performance report over 2009-10 shows that 48% of all expenditures is on activities with primary or secondary objectives for gender equality, and that these are growing in line with the AusAid's aid program (2011:1). If the trend continues, gender-related expenditures from the Australian aid program may reach $4 billion a year in 2015, according to the report. It adds: "… simply saying we mainstream gender well is not sufficient. We need to be able to show that this has contributed to making significant changes in gender equality and women's empowerment at a country level." (2011:2)

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[32] "The Creditor Reporting System (CRS) has been used to collect data on aid in support of gender equality through a "policy marker" since 1991. The original "Women in Development" marker was revised and renamed the "gender equality" policy marker in 1997, then further refined in 2006.

[33] OECD/DAC (2012), Aid in Support of gender equality and women's empowerment, statistical overview, to be found on www.oecd.org/dac/stats/gender

[34] This is recognized by other donors, see for example AfDB 2012:77.

5.2   What about results?

What difference has been made, what has changed, have women and girls benefited, have gender relations become more equal? Such questions remain largely unanswered, since the evaluation studies have little to say about the benefits. Reports may announce to focus on program results, but often convey not more than how the gender dimensions are included in programs at the country level, in project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Various studies acknowledge this shortcoming and explain the nature of the problems encountered. First, there is the problem that standard data collection is done for only a limited number of themes, in line with the requirements on performance management reporting at headquarters level. Hence, the DfID evaluation in India has found information about basic education and maternal health, but outside of these two targets gender equality results are invisible in the reporting systems (DfID 2006:10). The second problem is that only raw data exist: monitoring forms may be diligently filled out by program assistants and partners, but are not followed by any analysis or action to address them (WFP 2008:21). Such material is difficult to use at the evaluation stage, as is the information to which the Sida evaluation refers, reflecting a third problem: data that are meaningless for practical research on what works from a user's perspective.[35]

The most informative studies about project achievements are the evaluations of DfID, the World Bank, ADB and Sida. Even these studies leave the progress towards gender equality largely untouched, as the following examples show. The results of DfID's approach to gender equality in 36 projects in three countries are difficult to detect and/or have not yet been forthcoming, so that the actual reporting about gender equality achievements remains at the level of general statements about process, inputs and occasionally outputs. Two examples: in India the evaluation finds that the education sector interventions are by far the most successful, since they have clear gender equality aims, strategies and indicators. In micro-finance and urban services, the lack of a systematic approach to gender equality weakens the projects' ability to maximize impact and to document achievements. A limited impact may also be due to the narrow scope of a project, not being part of a wider programmatic approach (2006b:55/56). The Nigeria country study mentions that the most significant change in the thematic area of 'good governance / access to justice' is the creation of women's networks and women's political fora through workshops and round tables, while one of the most significant activities has been an NGO workshop resulting in a report that reviews the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing+10) for the past decade." (2006b:128)

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[35] For instance, the only programmatic result on gender equality reported in relation to the roads program in the 2006 Mid-Term Review of the Sida Country Strategy (Kenya) was the fact that quota for women's participation had been mainstreamed and incorporated into the program's Logical Framework." (Sida 2010:33)

The shortage of meaningful data about gender outcomes in the World Bank's reporting system, stimulated the IEG team to develop a framework for measuring such outcomes in the three selected domains: enhanced human capital, equal access to economic assets and opportunities, institutional strengthening (see above). The accompanying rating system goes from 'substantial' contribution of Bank support for gender equality (if there are sustainable results in at least two of the three domains), to 'modest' (results in only one domain), to 'low' (no results) (table 6.2, p 43). The evaluation finds that 42% of the 138 relevant projects make a substantial contribution to one or more domains. The good results at the project level have influenced country-level results only in four of the twelve countries: Bangladesh, Ghana, Peru and the Philippines. In these countries Bank support may have plausibly contributed to systemic changes in gender outcomes. In another six countries the Bank's contribution is modest, it has been unable to improve the environment for gender equality significantly. In two other countries the results are low. Overall, the IEG concludes that in countries with strong institutions and rules for gender equality results are better. The Philippines is the strongest example, followed by Colombia and to some extent Vietnam and Poland. (2010:54)

In the concrete domains, the effects are mixed. While the enrolment of girls in primary and secondary education has increased, the improvement in the quality of education has not been equally successful. Moreover, gender disparity in completion rates is becoming a real challenge as the closure of the gap may be more the result of decreasing numbers of boys finishing schools. Now it is less expensive to send girls to school, boys are kept at home to support their family. In the areas of reducing maternal mortality rates and increasing women's labour force participation the Bank has not been very effective. Some results have been generated in enhancing productive skills, but lack of resources and support to establish productive livelihoods prevent women from converting training lessons into further benefits. Increased access to land sometimes leads to permanent changes for women, but customary laws stand in the way of equal results. More opportunities to get involved in political or economic activities do not necessarily translate into effective participation or control over resources.

To bring country perspectives and information on gender issues and results the Asian Development Bank Phase II evaluation (2010) has studied a total of 55 projects in six countries, purposely selected because they can deliver insight into gender results. About 51% of the sample projects are *successful* or higher in their gender performance.[36] In terms of sector spread, the sample projects in water supply and sanitation, education, and multi-sector had higher success rates in gender mainstreaming, when compared to transport and energy. A meticulous rating system in the synthesis report suggests that the analysis is done with care and precision, but it cannot hide the fact that the

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[36] The main findings are summarized in the *Learning curves*, March 2011, ADB Support for Gender and Development: Results from Country Case Studies, see www.adb.org

results are restricted to inputs and outputs, or to unqualified findings which say nothing about the scope and size of the results. Statements like "respondents are happy with increased income", women have become more knowledgeable" and "positive change in gender relations" are meaningless without an indication of how many respondents and how much increase, etc. The SIDA evaluation (2010) comments on the challenge of such evaluation findings: "It is very difficult to triangulate subjective views expressed in interviews with reliable project generated data. While the program appears to be having impressive gender results, there is not enough documented evidence to show that these conclusions can be generalized throughout the program." (2010:63)

A key finding of the Sida evaluation of best practice projects[37] is that gender issues can be best addressed in the context of integrated projects, by combining interventions targeted at women with mainstreaming efforts. E.g. in a rural development program the economic empowerment of women is furthered by a range of activities: equal share in land titles, measures to reduce women's domestic workloads, access to credit, training and education, and training to change the behavior of men and boys. By contrast, addressing women's income and access to employment, in isolation from the main project's focus, has less sustainable impact, and possibly negative effects. (2010:12)

6   The gender mainstreaming failure

The portrayal in the evaluation reports of gender mainstreaming as being inconsistent, ambiguous and confusing, not adhered to by any of the agencies reveals the failure of the strategy. There is not one example of success, hardly one where mainstreaming is on the way towards success.[38] Consequently, gender mainstreaming exists only in theory. "Too much theory to practice", notes the AfDB: gender mainstreaming has been and continues to be "in large part a theory about how development assistance can be more effective, efficient, inclusive, and equitable in its delivery and results." (AfDB 2011:62, 2012:72). The evaluations, and academic writings alike, often put the blame for the failure on the lack of leadership in the agencies, on resistance among staff, and on technicalities like too little money, no incentives, staff being too busy and getting not enough training. Most recommendations are oriented towards improvements in these areas: if only leadership would stand up, money would come around and staff become enlightened… The span of twenty plus years that this has been repeated leaves little hope that change may come. The prudent question mark of the AfDB behind the subtitle of its study may well

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[37] The four projects selected are an integrated rural development project and a productive safety net programme in Ethiopia, a road improvement and maintenance programme and a rich and poor project in Kenya. One has been supported by Sida for 12 years since 1997, the others received Sida money since 2004/05 and 2007.
[38] AusAid seems to be the only donor that makes efforts of regular and systematic reporting of expenditures and results.

be changed into an exclamation mark. Mainstreaming is a road to nowhere! Such a conclusion requires an analysis of the more substantial factors that lead to the failure of the strategy, factors in the external environment, but equally factors inherent to the strategy itself.

6.1   Obstacles in the external environment

In evaluations conducted around 2005, the change in aid architecture is seen as an important obstacle. Replacing individual projects by sector-wide support or by support to the partner government's overall budget since 1998, decreases the donor's ability to pursue and monitor the implementation of its gender policy. The Paris Declaration for aid effectiveness of 2005[39] with principles of ownership and alignment, has put donors at a further distance and diminishes their ability to control the process. Ownership of the controversial issue of gender equality, so is said, has always resided more with the donors than with the partner country. To quote the Sida evaluation' "Even where governments have signed and ratified all of the international agreements, and promote gender equality in national legislation, ownership may still be weak due to factors such as a low priority on gender in the face of a range of demands, lack of capacity or experience, or a general feeling – not unusual in male run governments – that it is just a women's problem." (Sida 2010:55). This exposes a basic obstacle for gender mainstreaming: if the environment is not receptive there is no way to mainstream gender.

In theory, the more inclusive, policy-oriented forms of sector and budget support, are *par excellence* the modalities in which gender mainstreaming could flourish. An aid structure that is changing from micro donor involvement to more general assistance has the potential to make gender issues part of that overall approach. Some evaluations note that the aid effectiveness agenda offers opportunities for a dialogue about gender mainstreaming at the highest policy level of the partner government, of scaling up the resources and of more strategic programming. [40] Here and there, the introduction of the new aid

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[39] The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) has one reference to gender equality. In paragraph 42, following two paragraphs on 'Promoting a harmonised approach to environmental assessments', it is noted that: "Similar harmonisation efforts are also needed on other cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality and other thematic issues including those financed by dedicated funds." The Accra Agenda for Action, accepted on 4 September 2008 to accelerate and deepen implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, has two references to gender equality, in paragraphs 3 and 13c.
http://www.oecd.org/development/aideffectiveness/34428351.pdf
[40] The evaluation of DfID (2006) finds a decrease in DfID's ability to pursue and monitor the implementation of its gender policy due to a shift from project support to sector support, while more country ownership and a greater reliance on partner country institutions also lead to diminishing DfID's ability to control the process (2006:48). The CIDA evaluation (2008) observes both opportunities and challenges of the new aid modalities. Opportunities include a dialogue at the highest level of the

modalities has been accompanied by new initiatives for dialogue between donors and partner governments about the integration of gender issues.[41] Yet, in practice difficulties dominate. The technical problem of becoming more dependent on the weak statistical and data systems of the partner countries is the least severe. After all, donors have a bad record in this regard as well. More serious may be the fact that the Paris principle of managing for results, combined with the overall push for measurable outcomes, puts such pressure on donors and countries to show results that they become reluctant to promote changes that are difficult to measure, like changes in gender equality[42] (see paragraph 7.1).

6.2   Inherent weaknesses

Apart from the obstacles in the environment, weaknesses in the paradigms of gender and gender mainstreaming itself have hindered its implementation. There is first of all the linguistic problem that the terms 'gender' and 'mainstreaming' do not translate properly into languages other than English. They are alien terms for many of the users, leading to a vague understanding of the problems and goals behind them, and promoting the misuse of gender as synonym for women. Moreover, being so utterly English, the concept faces "uncontrollable currents of resistance unrelated to gender"[43], in the sense that opposition includes resentment to the domination of the institutional agenda by English speaking nations.

A second weakness resides in the strong contrasts played out between the WID and the GAD approach. By emphasising the notion of power relations between men and women, presenting gender as a relationship of separation, the GAD paradigm neglects the 'social connectedness', or the 'togetherness' of the two sexes, as several authors[44] have argued. Therefore, "…treating women and men as if their interests are always in sharp confrontation offers an impoverished account of relations between the sexes" (Charlesworth, 2005:13). The evaluations show that in the practice of aid the idea of addressing unequal gender relations has not been realized, a women's focus prevails rather than a focus on gender power structures. "Many projects still focus on women's practical needs" and "the WiD reading of gender (is) predominating"[45] are conclusions of various more recent evaluations in the sample.

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partner country, scaling up and leveraging resources, and more strategic programming (2008:21).
[41] An OECD/DAC consultative workshop on 'Gender equality in Sector–wide approaches was held in February 2001, hosted by The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See DCD/DAC/GEN(2001)3 Working Party on Gender Equality, *Proceedings and main findings of the Consultative workshop on Gender equality in Sector-wide approaches.*
[42] See also AfDB 2012:72.
[43] Elisabeth Harrison 1997, op cit. in Charlesworth 2005:12.
[44] Kabeer 1992, Razavi&Miller 1995, Woodford-Berger 2004, Charlesworth 2005.
[45] Sida 2010:13, 35, ADC 2012:61, see also WFP 2008.

The encompassing definition of gender mainstreaming as "a process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels" aims more than can realistically be done and claims more than can be achieved by development cooperation. Without exception the evaluations show that mainstreaming has led to evaporation, described by Moser as "when good policy intentions fail to be followed through in practice"[46] The idea of gender mainstreaming to include 'any planned action' in 'all areas and at all levels' has not been able to meet its own ambitions. The lessons from the evaluations that have looked at benefits in some depth show that the type of aid matters. The best results are booked in the education sector (IEG/WB, DfID, ADB), while gender benefits are not forthcoming in sectors like transport, energy, infrastructure, program loans, private sector.

Notions of societal transformation, of required changes in power structures in the organizational culture and in society, have brought messianistic overtones in the debate. Support to women without an explicitly transformation-focused approach tends to be heavily criticized by gender advocates. The ensuing discussion put people who need to cooperate into different camps. Gender advocates frequently blame the failure of gender mainstreaming to government staff and to national and international femocrats, who are criticized for having turned the strategy into a bureaucratic exercise. On their part, many staff of agencies consider gender mainstreaming to be a concept that is driven by intellectuals and feminists, too difficult to put into practice.

A final inherent flaw is the strong inclination of the gender mainstreaming concept to become an issue of technicalities: making sure that the policies are in place, developing guidelines and checklists for mainstreaming, tools and technicalities like gender scans and targets, promoting procedures instead of a substantive agenda.[47] The assumptions in the gender mainstreaming concept about the rationality of the policy process, "gives rise to policies that focus on procedural features, according to Meier and Celis (2011), thereby losing sight of their substantive policy aim, gender equality."[48] The evaluations reviewed are all testimony to this weakness.

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[46] Caroline Moser (2005), Has gender mainstreaming failed?, in: *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7:4:584.
[47] See Van Eerdewijk and Dubel (2012:492) analysing the way gender mainstreaming is practised in Dutch development NGOs, Madsen (2012) writing about Ghana and Mannell (2012:425) about South Africa.
[48] Meier, Petra & Karin Celis (2011) 'Sowing the Seeds of Its Own Failure: Implementing the Concept of Gender Mainstreaming', in *Social Politics* 2011, 18(4):470.

7   The evaluation failure

Not only the finding that there is little progress to report on gender mainstreaming is astonishing, also the fact that the evaluations saying so carry on. For two decades, international development agencies have conducted the same kind of evaluations, resulting in the same kind of conclusions that gender mainstreaming is not a useful strategy and leading to the same mantra of recommendations that institutions should do better in the future. This was already the outcome of the reviews of 2003 and of 2006. Addressing the problematic nature of the evaluation studies the AfDB speaks of an evaluation failure[49], which it connects to a management failure: a lack of genuine engagement of the agency's leadership with gender issues. That is one side of the coin, but there is a deficit in the practice of evaluation as well. I observe an evaluation gap with four components: i) failure to evaluate, ii) failure to capture the real world, iii) failure to come up with meaningful information, and iv) failure to learn.

7.1   The failure to evaluate

Gender is not a priority evaluation issue for development agencies. Only very few (Norad, World Bank) have conducted more than one gender-focused evaluation over a period of a decade, other bilateral and multilateral donors have performed one at best. This failure is not compensated by a frequent and systematic integration of gender into other evaluative work. On the contrary, as a review of 63 evaluation reports produced by Norad in the period 1997-2004 demonstrates (Norad 2005b). The inclusion of the gender perspective in both the design and the findings is not impressive, but, says the report, one could hardly expect it to be a prominent feature in the evaluations, since gender mainstreaming was not a focal issue in the projects and programmes when these were originally designed.[50]

That, indeed, points to a management failure. For long, donor agencies know the importance of installing proper measures for evaluation in the projects from the very beginning. Yet, without exception the evaluations in the sample report a lack of data and of systematic monitoring on gender equality and several studies blame these factors as the main reason for the impossibility to learn from good or failing approaches.[51] True as the argument about the data gap may be, it is not new and it is not restricted to gender issues. Generations of evaluators have had to deal with the problem of lack of

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[49] The evaluation failure identified by AfDB consists of i) the failure to evaluate and ii) the failure to respond to evaluation findings (2012:76).
[50] A preliminary review of evaluation studies of the Netherlands development cooperation, also shows that a proper assessment of gender equality is exceptional. IOB 2012, unpublished paper.
[51] DfID, 2006 India:56, Sida 2010:31.

baseline data and absence of proper documentation, and generations to come will continue to face this difficulty. There may be a gradual difference in the case of gender data, but all evaluators have to creatively find their way around these problems. The rare occasions this has happened in the sample of studies above points to a failure of evaluations as well.

In the same era that gender mainstreaming became the preferred strategy, the preference regarding evaluation has gone to results-reporting, a fact that makes the current set of evaluation studies even more vulnerable. The preference in the new evaluation approaches for quantitative and comparative figures, reduces the anecdotal results and the qualitative reporting to an ever more low status. Qualitative data are often perceived as lacking rigor, as powerless and unhelpful, and are subsequently side-lined. The majority of the evaluations in the sample have little to make up for this criticism.

7.2   Failure to capture the real world

The second component of the evaluation gap is the failure to capture the real world. All evaluations have put the input-cum-process orientation up front, as if mainstreaming gender in policy and administrative processes is the final goal rather than a strategy to attain gender equality. The last sentence of the ECOSOC definition of gender mainstreaming: "The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality" seems to be forgotten. Even the country studies conducted as part of the evaluations seldom go beyond assessing the performance of policy

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Metaphor of a car

The narrowness of an evaluation focusing on the strategy only can be illustrated with the metaphor of a car. The equipment of an automobile includes an engine, steering wheel, proper chairs, meters for fuel level, speed, engine temperature etc., so that is able to work well. Working well means that the car can drive and take us from A to B. When measuring its functionality and performance most of us would like to know if we reach our destination, comfortably and in time. Only mechanics or technical freaks will just be interested in the engine and the meters, and usually only in certain circumstances. The reason for having the car is that it helps us to get somewhere. Not so with the gender policy. In spite of all the evaluations, we still don't know whether the policy reaches its destination, or whether it perhaps is making a lot of accidents on the way. It may have become a dangerous instrument, since there is little attention for the environment in which it operates, for the suitability of the roads, for the people in the streets, for the passengers. We don't know, since the evaluations have made no effort to find out and tell us, and the agencies have not put these points upfront.

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makers and programme staff in the partner countries. The assumption that gender equality will follow once institutional features are in place, goes unproven. It is even contradicted by an IEG finding that there is no clear link between priority gender-related sectors identified in the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategies and gender integration at project level, and by the observation in Sida that gender analysis carried out at the national level may inform planning and implementation, but has less influence on programme choices. The focus on bureaucracy and administration in the evaluations may be partly caused by the lack of substantial data to work with, but it also exhibits a false idea in contemporary development cooperation: the linear idea that the world can be changed by procedures, efficiency, counting and measuring.

7.3   Failure to produce meaningful information

Closely related to the failure to focus on the real issues, is the failure to come up with meaningful information. The examples above show that if results are reported at all, it is about the efforts to address gender issues and about overall outputs. Throughout its report the evaluation of the World Bank, which is the most detailed in this regard, refers to the 'failure' to know about lasting changes: "…interventions were focused on outputs rather than on outcomes" (2010:54) and "…there is need to strengthen the outcome-based support in this domain" (i.e. economic assets and opportunities, 2010:47). Outputs also dominate the evaluation of the activities targeted at women/ gender equality through the Unifem Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence against Women. Outcomes and changes in the scope and size of violence against women are not touched upon. (Unifem 2009).

   Most of the results mentioned by the evaluation studies are at the individual project level, not unimportant in itself, but lasting changes in gender relations require effects that surpass the project level. The reports seldom articulate the meaning of the achievements in the particular context, they largely fail to analyze the struggles and contradictions, the unexpected results, the surprises, the initiatives and innovations from stakeholders and beneficiaries who may have seized new opportunities. Neither do they analyze the consistencies, or inconsistencies for that matter, with the partner country's policies and the interventions of other donor agencies. The limited significance of projects is manifest in the evaluation of the World Bank, which finds that "good results at the project level (-) have influenced country level results only in 4 of the 12 countries" (IEG, 2010:41).

   Framing of the information is another problem. All reports have a negative message and most are straightforward in the conclusions, as shown by the critical quotes above. It is not hard to find words like 'failure', 'lack of', 'inadequate', 'under-resourced' and 'no accountability mechanisms'. However, it is neutralized by soft language and quasi-positive statements, padding the organisation on the shoulder for its "favourable climate for ensuring that women and men achieve equality" (SCD 2009:34), for the strategy papers being so "progressive compared with other international bodies" (BMZ,

2006:4) or policy comparing "so well with those of peer organisations" (WFP, 2008:ii), and of gender equality being "increasingly visible in policies, strategies and guidelines" (Irish Aid, 2010:4, 38).

7.4   Failure to use evaluations

The limited use of the evaluations and the lack of accumulation of knowledge is evident from the mere repetition of the same kind of evaluations carried out over the past ten to fifteen years, with the same findings and the same recommendations. This was already concluded in "The Norad report" in 2006[52]. Failing to report results has repercussions for the attainment of the goals itself, as Sida's study observes. In any human interaction, success and progress, however small, serve as a stimulus to continue the efforts. An omission of demonstrating effects and the obscurity of clear results take away the impetus to go for (better) results (2010:42). The study also observes missed opportunities to learn from practice, because the one-directional way of operating, from policy and theory to practice, leaves little space for recording and learning from innovative locally adapted use. This contributes to sentiments found among interviewees (both locally and at Sida) that cross-cutting issues like gender equality, are being primarily "expert-driven" and/or "pushed from above," rather than inspiring local innovation and adaptation. Thus, use of the evaluations – if at all – will be limited to the donor agencies.

8   Gender mainstreaming: utopia and utopian

Comparing the findings of the current study with the main findings of the OECD/DAC study in 2003, as summarized in paragraph 1 above, discloses that: gender mainstreaming is still treated as a goal rather than as a means to the long-term objective of gender equality, the assumption that gender mainstreaming leads to gender equality outcomes still prevails and is still unproven, the word "gender" continues to be applied as a synonym for "women", there is little or no focus on gender relations or on the impact of development activities on gender equality, and most of the gender benefits identified deal with women's practical needs, not their strategic interests.

   In view of the failure to deliver, it is somewhat puzzling that the policy of gender mainstreaming has been able to remain on the agenda for so long. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that the idea of mainstreaming serves both the opponents and the advocates of the strategy. Under the cover of mainstreaming, opponents can pretend to adhere to the promotion of gender equality, because as a mainstream topic, so is the reasoning, gender needs no special measures and sources, and being everybody's responsibility makes nobody particularly accountable. The advocates seem to hold on to the strategy because of its promises. Gender mainstreaming is utopia: it gives hope to lead

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[52] "The findings in the evaluations all point in the same direction. (-) The recommendations from the evaluations all point in the same direction."

to an "imaginary political and social system in which relationships between individuals and the State are perfectly adjusted" [53]. But it is also utopian: "ideal but impractical". The absence of proper evaluations of results is in the interest of opponents and advocates alike, it hides the true nature of the strategy and keeps the dream of a better future alive.

Critical writings about the content of the policy have been few. Charlesworth (2005) is probably the most outspoken in denouncing the strategy itself. Gender mainstreaming is too broad and too narrow at the same time and thus meaningless, says Charlesworth. It is so wide that it is difficult to see how it can work, yet narrowly assumes symmetry in position between women and men, as if they face similar obstacles (Charlesworth 2005:13). Other authors may have criticized parts of the concept and its implementation, but have remained faithful to the idea. Meera & Gupta (2006), for example, writing about the disillusionment with the way the strategy has worked, argue that it is too soon to pass judgment.[54] Recently, the debate is enriched by the 'Beyond Gender Mainstreaming Project', a platform of feminists working in development policy and practice. The articles resulting from their discussions about the progress of gender mainstreaming are published in a special issue of *Gender & Development*.[55] Although the majority of the contributions continue to adhere to the approach of mainstreaming or are partly taking distance from it, Sandler & Rao recommend to move away from the ongoing debates about gender mainstreaming, towards re-framing strategies for ending gender discrimination. "We need to rid ourselves of (-) the rather triumphalist discourse of gender mainstreaming that presents gender transformation as a do-able, 'technical' problem that can be overcome with sufficient determination and commitment." They advocate for new strategies in multiple locations, naming and challenging "the elephants in the room", including the deeply held cultural norms, attitudes, and behaviors that perpetuate gender discrimination.[56]

The evaluations have also been prudent in their comments on the strategy. The Norad (2009) and Sida (2010) evaluations express some doubts. On Norad's side it is wondered if gender should be included in ALL sectors, as ECOSOC definition says, or if sectors should be selected for its relevance for

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[53] Definition of utopia and utopian according to Webster's Dictionary.

[54] Rekha Meera & Geeta Rao Gupta, 2006, Gender mainstreaming, making it happen, International Centre for Research on Women, 30th Anniversary.

[55] *Gender & Development* 20(3), November 2012, Oxfam GB. The project ran from September 2011 to November 2012 and included consultations with women's organisations and researchers on gender issues, including a forum in Libanon, a two-day international electronic discussion, a face-to-face learning event, and the publication of contributions by participants to the special issue of Gender & Development.

[56] Joanne Sandler and Aruna Rao (2012), The elephant in the room and the dragons at the gate: strategising for gender equality in the 21st century, *Gender & Development,* 20(3):559.

gender equality. The Sida report airs some hesitation about mainstreaming, when discussing gender training for engineers, calling it "unrealistic to expect them to champion the issue since their primary concern is the quality of roads" (2010:37). The IEG World Bank (2010) and the African Development Bank (2011) go a step further. IEG remarks that "Given the reality that virtually no development agency has successfully implemented a gender mainstreaming strategy a more selective approach may be worth considering" (2010:60). The report suggests to make a differentiation between countries with stronger gender-aware institutions and policies and countries with lower levels of gender inequalities. It may be more realistic and practical, according to the IEG, to allow for a selective gender integration strategy according to local circumstances. Given the evaluation evidence that gender mainstreaming is not operating effectively, the African Development Bank also suggests to adopt a different approach. It offers two options: i) WID Plus, an approach building on those elements of the WID-discourse that have delivered results, but incorporating a more fundamental analysis of gender power structures, and ii) gender focusing, an approach focusing on areas where gender equality appears to be sufficiently embedded and has made some progress, such as health and education through project or SWAp-based interventions. Sectors could be added, at different times in different countries. (2011:78/79)

9   Goodbye to gender mainstreaming

"Too much theory to practice" says the African Development Bank, gender mainstreaming is mainly a theory of how gender discrimination can be put to an end. If it works in practice cannot be verified because the strategy is never properly applied, as all the evaluations show. Over the years, the support to women by international development programs has remained much the same, focused on women not on gender relations, addressing their practical needs not their strategic interests, and provided through project aid mainly. The core goals of the mainstreaming strategy of changing power structures and transforming institutions and society have not been pursued explicitly, the extent to which programs may contribute to such changes is not examined by the evaluations. The review does indicate that the recognition of women's discrimination vis-à-vis men is growing and that the need for special attention to women's issue in development policy and programs is no longer debated as it was thirty years ago; there is progress in the amount of support provided. However, the overwhelming attention to the theory, as exposed by the evaluations being fixated on the strategy, limits knowledge generation on what is really happening and thus blocks the way forward. Time to say goodbye to gender mainstreaming.

The search for alternatives is on its way, witnessed by recent academic debates and suggestions in the evaluations by the IEG and the AfDB. They deserve serious attention and elaboration. A major step will be to depart from the prevailing utopian discourse, which has turned into a belief in social transformation as a do-able technical fix, and to search for new strategies to

fight gender discrimination. Whatever the umbrella term for the new approach may be ('WiD Plus' or 'gender-focusing' as the AfDB suggests, or something else), the new terminology is no longer mystifying the problems and the goals, but naming them explicitly. Terms like 'anti-discrimination policy' or the 'promotion of equal rights for women' are less difficult to translate in other languages than gender mainstreaming and better understood worldwide. Clarity in terminology does not necessarily mean that a gender equality policy in international development is to be uniformly defined. On the contrary, context matters greatly, involvement of and ownership by partner countries are crucial and locally formulated priorities indispensible. The evidence in the review that the best progress is made in countries with strong institutions and rules for gender equality and that the "type of aid matters" with best results in the sectors like education and no progress in the field of transport and energy should make donors selective in the choice of countries and sectors for the gender equality policy.

Selectivity will enhance the chance of success, and success in one sector can be stimulating to move on to another gradually, instead of continuing the desperate efforts to include gender in all sectors of development at the same time. The new strategy needs to be focused on issues that 1) are key for women's empowerment like education, income, voice, and 2) that affect women specifically, such as reproductive health and rights, violence against women, women in conflict areas. The fields of sub 1) are widely supported already and experience is building up. Regarding sub 2) the recognition of the gravity of the problems for women and for their environment is growing, as is the public debate around it, testified by recent cases of violation of respect for women's integrity in India and in Egypt. Various donors have already started programs to address these problems, e.g. as an outcome of UN Security Council Resolution 1325[57]. The lessons of the past that interventions need to be embedded in larger programs, not focused on women in isolation, can also be useful in these cases.

The search for effective approaches towards gender equality requires results-oriented evaluations. In this age it becomes less likely that donors and governments will continue a strategy that brings no visible results, so the challenge is out to find appropriate methods that go beyond the measurements of efforts, activities and outputs, and that are substantiating what is working and what is not. It requires innovation in evaluation: finding evidence of change for women and in gender relations, searching for locally adapted practice, identifying how successful approaches may be brought to scale. The well-known importance of early and regular documenting and monitoring

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[57] The United Nations Security Council has adopted Resolution 1325 on October 31, 2000. It is the first resolution to link the peace and security agenda, it underlines the need for women to be present and have leverage in peace and reconstruction processes. It addresses the role of women and men living with the daily reality of conflict and calls upon the international community to operate in gender-sensitive and gender-just ways.

should be taken at heart, so that future evaluation teams do not fail to trace results due to the absence of information. Donors and governments can join hands to develop functional evaluation systems by which knowledge is accumulated, instead of repeating the same kind of evaluation studies over and again. Just imagine what a review, ten years from now, may look like then! Or is that introducing a new illusion?

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