

Gender Mainstreaming: A Study of Efforts
by the UNDP, the World Bank and the ILO
to Institutionalize Gender Issues

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Preface

The Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in September 1995, provides an opportunity for the world community to focus attention on areas of critical concern for women worldwide — concerns that stem from social problems embracing both men and women, and that require solutions affecting both genders. One of the main objectives of the Conference is to adopt a platform for action, concentrating on some of the key areas identified as obstacles to the advancement of women. UNRISD's work in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women focuses on two of the themes highlighted by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women:

- inequality in women's access to and participation in the definition of economic structures and policies and the productive process itself; and
- insufficient institutional mechanisms to promote the advancement of women.

The Institute's Occasional Paper series for Beijing reflects work carried out under the UNRISD/UNDP project, **Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives: Integrating Gender into Development Policy**. The activities of the project include an assessment of efforts by a selected number of donor agencies and governments to integrate gender issues into their activities; the action-oriented part of the project involves pilot studies in Bangladesh, Jamaica, Morocco, Uganda and Viet Nam, the goal of which is to initiate a policy dialogue between gender researchers, policy makers and activists aimed at making economic policies and productive processes more accountable to women.

This paper takes up the first activity mentioned above by providing an account of efforts to mainstream gender in the UNDP, the World Bank and the ILO. It identifies some of the obstacles that have been encountered in the different institutional settings and highlights the opportunities for further progress.

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August 1995

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Executive Summary

Section I Institutionalizing WID/Gender Concerns

Public institutions continue to be of significant interest to feminists given that they reproduce and contribute to women's subordination through their assumptions, working procedures and activities. There are divergent views, however, on whether public institutions can be made more accountable to women; the two main positions taken by feminist critics of public administration are: (i) the "disengagement" strategy, which is sceptical of the ability of development institutions to promote women's concerns; and (ii) the incremental approach, which sees development institutions as too important a force to be ignored, and thus promotes change within them, even if it is piecemeal. The second approach is reflected in the types of changes that have been introduced in the three agencies analysed in this paper — the UNDP, the World Bank and the ILO — and in the United Nations system more generally.

The international women's movement, punctuated by the United Nations World Conferences on Women, has since the 1970s called upon international development agencies and governments to "integrate" women into the development process. An early institutional response was the setting up of women in development (WID) bureaux which funded and/or executed a variety of women's projects. By the mid-1980s, due to the slow pace of progress in improvements to women's status and well-being, and the continued marginalization of women-specific projects, the need for new strategies became apparent. In this context, "mainstreaming" gained currency amongst international agencies and governments as a new strategy aimed at bringing women's concerns into the centre stage of development.

A distinction has been made between an "agenda-setting" and an "integrationist" approach to mainstreaming; the former attempts to transform the thrust of development policy as it brings women's concerns into the mainstream, while the latter attempts to integrate those concerns within the existing development activities without necessarily altering the agenda. The changes that have been introduced in the three multilateral institutions, documented in this paper, fall within the confines of the incremental approach. In this context, mainstreaming involves two main components: (i) integrating gender issues into the entire spectrum of activities that are funded and/or executed by an organization (i.e. projects, programmes, policies); (ii) diffusing responsibility for gender integration beyond the WID/gender units — through mechanisms such as gender training and gender guidelines — making it a routine concern of all bureaucratic units and all staff members.

The extent to which an institution responds to outside pressures for change hinges on a number of factors, the three most significant being: (I) the organization's degree of independence from external pressures;

(ii) the organizational mandate, ideology and procedures; and (iii) the existence and capacity of internal policy advocates and entrepreneurs. This paper documents how the three multilateral agencies have responded to the demands of the WID movement, with reference to these three categories.

Section II Methodology

The paper draws on three main sources of information: (i) primary material produced by the three agencies (published documents, unpublished reports, internal memoranda); (ii) analyses of agencies by external researchers; and (iii) UNRISD reports on interviews carried out with staff members at the three agencies.

Section III The United Nations Development Programme

External pressures and influences

The governance structure and funding arrangements are the main mechanisms through which different pressures are brought to bear on the UNDP. The organization is funded directly through voluntary contributions, with the Nordic countries providing a significant proportion of these resources, which gives them greater “voice” in decisions over how funds are used. These donors have been amongst the active “promoters” of the WID/gender mandate. At the same time, the UNDP is accountable to an executive board that functions on a one member-one vote basis in which developing countries have a greater representation than developed countries; on the whole, developing countries have been less enthusiastic about WID/gender issues. Moreover, as UNDP’s value system emphasizes self-determination of “recipient” governments, it is reluctant to impose external definitions of development, such as WID/gender, on them. Another factor that limits UNDP’s “independence” is its decentralized decision-making structure: the country programming exercise (undertaken jointly by the recipient government, the UNDP and the multilateral and bilateral agencies, which sets out the goals and priorities of a given country) gives voice to recipient governments and executive agencies that may not necessarily prioritize gender issues in the national development structure. As part of its mandate to build “national capacity” the UNDP has committed itself to strengthening gender analytical skills and women’s political constituencies at the national level; these efforts are meant to strengthen the voice of national constituencies which prioritize WID/gender issues.

Organizational mandate and ideology

UNDP was established to co-ordinate and administer United Nations resources for technical co-operation. The lack of a more substantive mandate has in the past served as an obstacle to effective internal policy advocacy on behalf of WID/gender. UNDP’s sustainable human development mandate is, however, providing greater opportunities for the overall strengthening of its WID/gender mandate. Although UNDP’s in-house WID/gender unit — the Gender in Development Programme (GIDP) — is being called upon to play a more proactive role, it has not

been accorded the necessary resources and WID/gender expertise to fully exploit the new opportunities.

Organizational procedures — mainstreaming

In line with its co-ordination mandate and its managerial culture, UNDP has gone a long way in strengthening its internal procedures and staff skill levels to mainstream gender throughout the programming process. The main procedural tools being promoted at both the headquarters and the field level are: gender training, gender guidelines, WID task forces at the country-level, and new monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. While significant steps have been taken in putting new procedures in place, UNDP's highly decentralized structure presents a formidable challenge to the implementation of WID/gender policy given the difficulties in ensuring that headquarters' directives are followed at the field level.

Section IV
The World Bank

External pressures and influences

In contrast with the one country-one vote system of other specialized agencies, voting power in the World Bank's governance structure is determined by the capital contributions that support non-concessional lending. While weighted voting is rarely exercised, most observers are of the opinion that the G-7 countries exercise more voice than developing country members within the Board of Executive Directors that meets on a regular basis at the Bank's headquarters. Although one of the more powerful member countries, the United States, has lobbied the World Bank on environmental issues, it has been less willing to do so on WID/gender. The Nordic governments, however, despite their weak voting power, have been active promoters of WID/gender — both politically and financially. As the World Bank opens up to a more diverse set of pressures, the advocacy work carried out by NGOs provides a critical entry point for WID/gender advocates; the available evidence, though sparse, seems to suggest a failure on the part of some NGOs to prioritize gender issues in their advocacy work. Despite these diverse sources of pressure, the Bank's management maintains a significant degree of control over policy directions and lending decisions, which makes it imperative that WID/gender entrepreneurs promote the subject with management.

Organizational mandate and ideology

The lack of an obvious organizational fit between the Bank's mandate and ideology, on the one hand, and gender concerns, on the other, has not been a major obstacle to gender mainstreaming. For a start, there have been changes in the Bank's definition of its core mandate; in recent years poverty alleviation and human development have gained ascendancy, which are more in tune with WID/gender concerns. Equally important, however, WID/gender entrepreneurs have been able to mould gender issues into a shape that is acceptable to the Bank economists. The Bank's in-house WID/gender unit has drawn on research carried out in the Bank and outside to highlight the positive synergies between

“investing in women” and the Bank’s main objectives — poverty reduction, increased productivity, more efficient use of resources and social returns. One of the main problems with this approach, however, is that it limits interventions for women to those cases where the economic argument is strong (where gender equity and economic efficiency overlap).

Organizational procedures — mainstreaming

Since 1984, guidelines have been put in place to mainstream gender issues within the Bank’s operations. The 1993 reorganization, which was meant to strengthen the operational relevance of the work carried out by the policy/research departments (where the WID/gender unit is located), gave further impetus to mainstreaming gender issues across the Bank’s operational departments. A significant part of the mandate of the new in-house WID/gender unit — the Gender Analysis and Policy (GAP) team — is to mainstream WID within operations through staff gender training, the preparation of “best practice tool kits” and demonstrations of how gender concerns can be integrated into up-stream policy documents. A very encouraging move in recent years is that WID/gender staff have extended the scope of their scrutiny into project implementation, highlighting the gap between objectives set out in appraisal reports and actual implementation of WID/gender components; the preconditions for successful implementation of WID/gender action include country commitment, the involvement of a gender specialist from the Bank and good supervision of the gender component during implementation. The Bank’s attempts to enhance the role of its in-house evaluation department provides an opportunity for further reinforcing the application of existing WID/gender guidelines and directives.

Section V

The International Labour Organization

External pressures and influences

Of the three organizations considered in this paper, ILO’s governance structure is the most “permeable”: its tripartite structure enables employers’ organizations and trade unions to be officially represented in its governing bodies and to share power with governments. Nevertheless, while many of the items on the agenda of trade unions have also been of interest to women workers, questions have periodically been raised by feminist advocates about the capacity of mainstream trade unions to represent the specific interests of women workers. The fact that tripartism does not embrace the growing ranks of the “unorganized”, a significant proportion of whom are women, is increasingly seen as a serious shortcoming. As far as governments are concerned, as in the other two agencies reviewed here, a small number of them have been active promoters of WID/gender: the Nordic countries, Australia, Canada and the Netherlands. They have also supported WID/gender by directly funding projects of their choice (a practice known as multi-bi funding); their financial support has been particularly valuable given that the ILO has been on zero-growth budget since 1984. As the ILO decentralizes its operations through radical administrative and personnel changes (already under way), it becomes

imperative that active women's constituencies exist at the national level to pursue WID/gender activities.

Organizational mandate and ideology

The ILO's mandate — promoting social justice through the framing of international labour standards — has provided a fertile ground for addressing women's concerns (equity arguments). In fact, as far back 1919 women's issues have been included in the ILO's standard setting work. In promoting attention to women's issues in some of the technical departments which include a significant number of development and labour economists, WID/gender entrepreneurs have found social justice arguments to be insufficient on their own, and more effective when backed by solid social and economic analyses and research findings. The willingness to engage in an economic discourse is not limited to the ILO's WID/gender policy documents though; it is also visible in some of the agency's other policy documents, indicative of what some observers have termed the ILO's new "market realism". On the substantive side, ILO has done innovative research on women's labour participation over the past two decades — some of this work has been path-breaking and is a backbone to feminist labour economics.

Organizational procedures — mainstreaming

Since the mid-1980s, a number of steps have been taken to strengthen institutional procedures in line with the mainstreaming strategy: creating new posts to integrate gender issues in ILO's technical co-operation programmes; issuing gender guidelines; and gender training. While the mainstreaming strategy is the driving force behind these new institutional innovations, at the operational level there appears to be a continued emphasis on projects targeted specifically at women. It may be a matter of time before the mainstreaming strategy bears fruit in terms of operations, but the predominance of women-specific projects may also indicate a reluctance to whole-heartedly endorse the new mainstreaming strategy. Even if WID-integrated mainstream activities become the norm, the ILO will face the more general problem encountered in the UNDP and the World Bank — ensuring that gender issues are adequately budgeted for and not lost during the implementation phase.

Section VI

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