Mainstreaming Gender - A synthesis of good practice

This paper synthesizes the results of an in-depth review of reports and other documentation from International NGOs, local NGOs, donors and women’s rights organizations on mainstreaming gender. Its primary purpose is to serve as a benchmark for CARE as we define the global gender function.

It is well established in the literature that the success of gender mainstreaming requires change in four organizational dimensions: political will, technical capacity, accountability and organizational culture. Political will is at the foundation of all change. It is essential to promote and make gender mainstreaming possible. The other three dimensions will grow from the consistent demonstration of political will.

The following paper is structured to reflect the centrality of these dimensions as well as other key themes highlighted in the literature.

Gender Mainstreaming

**What success looks like:**

Gender equality and the empowerment of women is most effectively pursued through a dual strategy of both stand-alone initiatives and integrating gender as a cross-cutting issue across all streams of work, both organizationally and programmatically.

A dual strategy is most effective because it mitigates the risks associated with both gender specific and gender integrated programming while reaping the benefits of both. Key advantages and disadvantages of each approach include:

- Efforts directed towards gender mainstreaming often come at the expense of stand-alone work.
- When gender is seen as a stand-alone issue, it can become ‘away streamed’ and effectively ignored by the broader organization.
- Having a gender specific program can help to increase resourcing for the gender equality work.
- Integrating gender into wider development programs mitigates the risk of backlash against participants in contexts where gender equality is seen to challenge existing (and preferred) systems and norms. For example, it may be less confronting to engage women through less sensitive issues like maternal health, education and employment.

Success factors include having gender objectives in strategic documents, organisational policies and communications material. Converting policy into practice has been a major challenge for I/NGOs. It is essential that the gender rhetoric in strategic documents and policies is accompanied by monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure compliance.

Equally, it is important that gender mainstreaming is perceived as a priority and the responsibility of all staff. This can be achieved by making gender integration mandatory across the work of all employees. Actively involving men in gender work can assist in reaffirming that gender is everyone’s responsibility. A related theme in the literature is the need to translate strategic level commitments into the daily systems and practice of organizations.

Allow for and resource experimentation that model new ways of being that are gender equitable, as these accumulate, women’s perspectives can gain currency in an organization and organizations can become more amenable to change.
Gender is most effective when seen as **both a means and an end**. The literature suggests that there is an increasing trend for I/NGOs to emphasize gender equality and women’s empowerment as a tool for ending poverty and as a means of enhancing organisational performance. An emphasis on the efficiency and economic arguments for gender mainstreaming can depoliticize gender equality and disconnect it from its rights-based, social change ethos.\(^{15}\) This in turn can undermine credibility and partnerships with organizations working for social change. Much of the literature points to the importance of engaging at a political level as well as a technical one.\(^ {16}\)

**Political Will and Accountability**

Political will is evident when top-level leadership publically supports gender integration, commits staff, time and resources, institutes needed policies and procedures and keeps staff accountable.\(^ {17}\)

**What success looks like:**

Perceived commitment to gender equality is critical to the success of gender mainstreaming.\(^ {18}\) Gender balance on the Board and in senior management is seen as an important indicator of commitment.\(^ {19}\) **To be most effective, leaders must transcend passive, rhetorical engagement and demonstrate their commitment to staff and stakeholders by being actively and visibly involved\(^ {20}\).**

Prioritize\(^ {21}\); a proliferation of priorities can undermine the gender equality work.\(^ {22}\)

Seek the advice and input of feminist organizations\(^ {23}\); set up advisory bodies\(^ {24}\). The literature points to the potential INGOs have to enhance accountability by seeking an independent view on own systems and practices.

Stand-alone gender strategies and gender mainstreaming complement each other as a dual strategy. In order to succeed, it is import that the gender unit is able to report directly to the top executive and that this line of communication is not impeded by organisational bureaucracy.\(^ {25}\)

Tie the importance of the work on gender equality to other organizational outcomes.\(^ {26}\) Identify principles associated with gender equality to promote its integration.\(^ {27}\)

Ensure that regular reporting takes place to the Board and senior management (Oxfam Canada use the Gender Justice Scorecard).\(^ {28}\)

I/NGOs should carry out **gender audits in order to develop a baseline and track progress on gender equality capacity and results**\(^ {29}\).

I/NGOs should **create and track a gender budget** to ensure that resources are allocated in line with organizational policy and priorities.

Financial resources should be redistributed across gender, class and race within and outside the organization.

Overall, **robust performance and accountability mechanisms for measuring the implementation of gender policies organizationally and programmatically** are required,\(^ {30}\) including the definition of concrete targets and qualitative aspects of empowering women and gender equality. **The approach**
should enhance learning and be reflective and flexible. The literature points to the need to contextualise measurement of change and be aware that there is not a single blue-print.

The literature shows that these are generally under-developed. Further, the monitoring instruments most commonly used are quantitative and are not capturing the full picture; in fact they can undermine accountability for institutional change. Instead, I/NGOs should employ monitoring instruments that encourage analysis and discussion of why targets are not being met and innovative thinking for how to reach the targets. There is a need for the development of indicators for social change.

There is a need to reframe accountability from centring on accountability to donors to accountability to the beneficiaries.

Organizational Culture

What success looks like:

Beyond stating commitment to gender equality in the mission there is a need to address internal culture and deep structure as well as model the way. This also includes ending oppressive hierarchy to include marginalized voices in decision making.

In order to make a significant impact on gender inequality, I/NGOs must address institutionalized gender bias within their organizations. This is because I/NGOs are gendered institutions; they both reflect societal gender relations and reproduce them in their programs.

This includes the need to examine and change implicit rules and social structures that operate below the surface and are woven into hierarchies, work practices, organizational beliefs in order to challenge gender bias. Such norms might include: expectations to work nights/weekends, symbols of men and supervisors and decision makers, sexual harassment policy, norms that reinforce the position of women as subordinate. There is a need to foster a culture of participation and consultation across the organization.

Change can be fostered through creating space within the organization where people feel safe to debate, ask question and express different viewpoints on issues of power and inequality. Organizations should also utilize their networks to learn from the experience of other I/NGOs and viewpoints of stakeholders and beneficiaries. The literature highlights the need for expert facilitators to moderate these discussions to ensure that they are not dominated by men.

Mainstreaming gender is more than simply addressing women's needs and interests in programs and policies. Good practice in gender mainstreaming begins with acknowledging that the unequal power relations that cause gender inequality permeate all aspects of society, including I/NGOs.

Power should be considered across all spheres including: organizational process and procedures; positional power; agenda-setting power to ensure women's and men's priorities make it on the organizational agenda; hidden power that can be used to convey certain ideas as 'normal'; power of dialogue to open discussion on power issues; and power of conflict and confrontation to shift balance of power. It is also important for organizations to be aware of the link between the power mechanisms that perpetuate gender inequality and the oppression of other marginalized groups including sexual and gender minorities, and
actively work to address all inequities simultaneously. Gender mainstreaming efforts are most effective when they are owned by all staff - including male staff.

One important step towards gender equality is for I/NGOs to develop HR policies that counteract institutionalized gender bias.

It is important to develop policies that recognize and provide for women's reproductive role in order to retain women in the workplace, ensure equal representation in leadership and decision making roles, and eliminate discrimination against women and marginalized sexual and gender minority groups.

Technical Capacity and Resources

What success looks like:
Sustained investment in contextualized internal capacity development is a fundamental component of gender mainstreaming.

This is most effective when a whole-of-agency approach is used that includes regular tailored training which is practical to the people on the ground. This includes training for management and the Board.

Ensure that internal capacity development covers personal, organizational and programmatic themes and link them. The tools are different for programmatic work (e.g. equipping staff to do gender analysis, planning, monitoring and evaluation).

The following dimensions of change are a useful guide for sustained and lasting change in women’s practical and strategic interests: beliefs, attitudes and values; access to and control over resources; cultural norms and practices; laws, policies and resource allocations (these are relevant to organizational change and programmatic change).

All work should build from the broader context and make the connection between gender and broader issues since this enables staff to link issues in both the organization and the program; the linkage between organizational change and policy work as well as work in communities is important.

The literature points to the need for separate specialist capacity for strategic women’s rights programming along with capacity for ‘mainstreaming’ and capacity building.

The ILO have a ‘gender helpdesk’ which responds to queries to help strengthen the capacity of staff and constituents who can surface questions that are relevant to their practical work.

The ‘On Track with Gender’ initiative recommends creating and supporting gender focal points and gender expertise centers within I/NGOs.

There is also merit in keeping gender positions in policy teams as this can ensure the integration of women’s rights in policy. It is a common strategy for I/NGOs to designate gender focal points or champions. This effectiveness of this strategy is minimized when gender responsibilities are added on top of an already busy work load which can lead to burnout and frustration. Further, assigning gender responsibilities to key individuals or groups can impede the process of enculturating gender across the organization and making sure that gender is everybody’s concern. However, in partner countries, research by ACFID indicates that establishing gender focal points or champions in partner countries of INGOs has a positive effect in terms of gender outcomes.
Specific capacities associated with working on gender equality from across the literature include facilitation (particularly to enable open dialogue), engaging power and politics; partnership (with a variety of stakeholders including rights groups and with a view to networking, convening and coordinating), analysis and (co-created\(^{63}\)) learning (enquiry oriented culture)\(^{64}\), gender based violence (which is highlighted as a highly technical area of work), fundraising particularly with non-traditional donors, (greater courage in) advocacy\(^{65}\), recalibration of calculus for risk\(^{66}\), flexibility and responsiveness to context, conflict management, engaging men and boys for gender equality\(^{67}\).

**Thought Leadership and Collaboration**

**What success looks like:**

**Working with others to sustain the push for gender equality.** This includes men, peers, networks, governmental authorities, the private sector, think tanks, religious leaders, donors, board of directors as well as local organizations to push for accountability.\(^{68}\)

"Dialogue and exchange between practitioners, policy makers, academics and activists are indispensable to improve the level of gender analysis and the formulation and implementation of gender (mainstreaming) policies."\(^{69}\)

It is also recognized that engaging feminist organizations takes time because they are often mistrustful of INGOs who may be perceived as donors, bureaucracies and taking the space (and voice) of southern organizations on issues of gender equality and rights.\(^{70}\) Equally, there is a need to avoid the ‘NGO-ization’ of local movements.\(^{71}\)

Build gender infrastructure in a support network that provides people (women) space to organize and develop their leadership and focused attention on power and inequality.

There is a need for a transformative or agenda setting approach enabling people (women) to organize and have voice for gender equality; this is both internally and externally in order to advocate for change on public policies.\(^{72}\) Change involves identifying women’s strategic interests in ways that challenge the basis of disempowerment, that involve women intended to benefit in shaping and defining the work, and builds access to resources, alliances and mobilizing around priorities to challenge resistance.\(^{73}\)

Foster agreeable and receptive behaviors in order to avoid being pigeonholed as having ‘negative attitudes’.\(^{74}\)

Invest in and publish studies\(^{75}\) to develop and expand thematic gender knowledge and expertise, particularly exploring links between gender equality priorities and other development issues and use these to promote harmonization, alignment and integration of gender in poverty reduction plans through advocacy.\(^{76}\)

Innovate and harness technology for promoting well being of both men and women. Build a learning community to share best practices on gender integration and results that reduce gender gaps/empower women and girls\(^{77}\).

Provide space to take stock, share experiences and exchange strategies.\(^{78}\)

Take a public stance on gender equality; the importance of external public\(^{79}\) advocacy is highlighted as critical for change, it also enhances credibility\(^{80}\). Working with others is not only
more effective it has the added value of enhancing the confidence of internal advocates to demand change.  

Defining a niche area or strategic gender program can enhance credibility and reputation externally.  

References

6. CARE MENA (n.d.) Women’s participation in the uprisings in MENA.
7. CARE MENA (n.d.) Women’s participation in the uprisings in MENA.
10. Women’s participation in the uprisings in MENA.
28. Margaret Cape Lazo (n.d.) Results of Gender Audits at Other NGOs.
32. Women’s participation in the uprisings in MENA.
36. CARE MENA (n.d) CARE International and the MENA region: MENA review final report.
37. CARE MENA (n.d) CARE International and the MENA region: MENA review final report.
38. CARE MENA (n.d) CARE International and the MENA region: MENA review final report.
39. Gender at Work (n.d.) What is Gender at Work’s approach to gender equality and institutional change?
42. Margaret Cape Lazo (n.d.) Results of Gender Audits at Other NGOs
Mainstreaming Gender - A Synthesis of Good Practice

Gender at Work (2002) Unravelling Institutionalized Gender Inequality
Konsnet (n.d.) Gender and organizational change: Lessons learned from NGOs in developing countries.
InterAgency Working Group (2010) Synchronizing Gender Strategies, a cooperative model for improving reproductive health and transforming gender relations.
Kilby, P. & Crawford, J. (2011) Closing the gender gap: Gender and Australian NGOs in ACFID Research in Development
Series Report no. 2. ACFID.
Konsnet (n.d.) Gender and organizational change: Lessons learned from NGOs in developing countries.
InterAgency Working Group (2010) Synchronizing Gender Strategies, a cooperative model for improving reproductive health and transforming gender relations.
Royal Tropical Institute KONSNET Gender and Organizational Change: Lessons Learned from NGOs in Developing Countries.
AWID (2012) Changing their world. Concepts and Practices of Women’s Movements. Findings from 14 case studies from different regions of the world that had mobilized women into strong movements that had made a difference.
CARE MENA (n.d.) CARE International and the MENA region: MENA review final report.
Creative Research and Evaluation Centre (CARE 2013) Africa Contextual Analysis: looking ahead and reflecting on the context for International NGOs, especially CARE, in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2025.
CARE MENA (n.d.) CARE International and the MENA region: MENA review final report.
Gender At Work (n.d.) What is Gender at Work’s Approach to Gender Equality and Institutional Change?
CARE MENA (n.d.) CARE International and the MENA region: MENA review final report.
Konsnet (n.d.) Gender and organizational change: Lessons learned from NGOs in developing countries.
Shawna Wakefield Oxfam International (2012) Better than the sum of our parts.
Maitreyee Mukhopadhyay, Gerard Steenhouver and Franz Wong NOVIB () The politics of the possible, Gender Mainstreaming and Organizational Change: experiences from the field.
82 FHI 360 (n.d.) Gender Integration Framework, how to integrate gender in every aspect of our work.