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**GENDER MAINSTREAMING:
PRACTICE AND PROSPECTS**

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A wider diffusion of gender mainstreaming

Since 1995, gender mainstreaming has been adopted more widely as a strategy for gender equality than before. In the process of increasing awareness of the importance of this strategy, a number of international actors have played a major role. It is quite evident that the role of the United Nations has been prominent, both as initiator and organiser of the World Conference on Women, and as a result also as distributor of the Platform for Action. The idea of gender mainstreaming, or as it is put most frequently in the Platform for Action “taking into account the impact on gender before decisions are taken” has been diffused widely.

Other important international actors in this field have been the European Union and the Council of Europe. The European Union has been quite active, both by starting a process of gender mainstreaming within the European Commission itself, and by diffusing information on a number of conferences and seminars (in Brussels, Bled, London). The Council of Europe took the important initiative in 1996 to form a Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming. The report of this group was delivered in 1998, and it has been widely distributed and discussed since, most recently at a conference organised by the Council of Europe in September 1999 in Athens, where more gender mainstreaming projects were presented.¹

For the present report, as much material has been gathered as possible, yet it would be over ambitious to pretend to cover each and every initiative. This report draws upon the experiences in various countries in Europe to highlight important opportunities and strengths, to point at some weaknesses and present some good practices. The experiences described serve as examples that can guide further work, not as judgements of what has been done. When it comes to gender mainstreaming, everyone can learn, and a critical assessment is one of the first prerequisites for a better understanding and further development.

Positive response to the call for gender mainstreaming

The overall opinion expressed at conferences and seminars is that gender mainstreaming is a good strategy. Almost all speakers at these conferences have expressed the opinion that it should be adopted, and several national governments have announced that gender mainstreaming will be adopted as part of their continuous efforts to achieve gender equality. Initiatives have been taken to start work on gender mainstreaming.

At the same time, however, there is still confusion about the exact meaning of gender mainstreaming. One can hear numerous times in discussions that gender mainstreaming is a very complicated concept, and the need for further clarification, discussion and explanation seems to be high. The main problem appears to be a lack of distinction between the goal of mainstreaming – gender equality, the general characteristics of the strategy – incorporating a

¹ Presentation of gender mainstreaming projects at the Council of Europe Conference GENDER MAINSTREAMING: A STEP INTO THE 21st CENTURY, Athens, 16-18 September 1999.

gender perspective in all policies as opposed to organising specific projects for women, and a definition of what gender mainstreaming itself is: *the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making.*¹

What gender mainstreaming is

The essential element in the definition of gender mainstreaming is its accent on policy processes. Gender mainstreaming is about organising procedures and routines, about organising responsibilities and capacities for the incorporation of a gender perspective. It is about organising the use of gender expertise in policy-making, organising the use of gender impact analyses in this process, organising consultation and participation of relevant groups and organisations in the process. If none of this is done, then clearly gender mainstreaming has not started.

Gender mainstreaming usually involves a *reorganisation* of policy processes, because all too often existing procedures and routines are gender-blind or gender-biased. In contrast to the standard assumption of policy makers and policy making organisations that their work is gender-neutral, it has been proven over and over again that gender differentials are not recognised, and that unreflected assumptions include biases in favour of the existing unequal gender relations. Gender mainstreaming as a strategy is meant to actively counteract this, and to use the normal mandate of policy makers to promote more equitable relations between women and men.²

Gender mainstreaming across Europe

The study on national machinery, action plans and gender mainstreaming of the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) gives some figures about the adoption of gender mainstreaming as a strategy in the various countries of Europe.³ All member countries of the European Union state that they have adopted the strategy of gender mainstreaming. Of the countries that are candidates to join the European Union, quite a number state that they have adopted the strategy of gender mainstreaming since the 4th World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), while explaining that this means that they have started working on the establishment of a gender mainstreaming infrastructure (such as an interministerial committee, or focal points for equality at ministries), and on training of relevant officials. International organisations such as UNDP, the Nordic Council of Ministers (for the Baltic states), and the European Union are mentioned as having provided help or stimulation with the introduction and development of gender mainstreaming in the candidate states.

For the candidate states, it is quite clear that potential European Union membership is highly stimulating when it comes to introducing, developing and implementing gender equality policies in general, and gender mainstreaming in particular. A typical example of the importance of the European Union for gender mainstreaming is Latvia, where the Action Plan

¹ Gender mainstreaming: conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practices. Council of Europe, Strasbourg May 1998, p.15.

² Sida Equality Prompt Sheet nr. 15: Organisational change & equality between women and men. Prepared for SIDA by B. Woroniuk and J. Schalkwyk. December 1998

³ Council of Europe study on national machinery, action plans and gender mainstreaming (EG (99) 12).

for gender equality issues is part of the National Programme for the Integration into Europe. In Central Europe, the “ensurance of equal opportunities is seen as one of the major social political issues at the accession negotiations”.¹ The Western European countries that are not members of the European Union do have gender mainstreaming initiatives, except for a few very small ones such as San Marino.

Of the other Central or East European countries, none have reported to be starting gender mainstreaming. It seems that the national report from Albania on the progress of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is giving a voice to these countries when it points out that “the central government is at present concentrating on managing the political situation (public order, criminality), and that gender issues are considered as low priority”.² This line of argument is reason for serious concern, because it is quite clear that a gender perspective is essential, and all the more so in troubled or conflicting political situations. When gender equality becomes an issue that can be dealt with “later”, there is a high probability that women’s needs and priorities will not be considered and their overall life situation will deteriorate even more. Although the attention for gender and conflict avoidance or rebuilding in post-conflict situations is quite recent, there is already some excellent material available in this field.³

Rhetoric not reality?

The overall conclusion can be that, even if some voices are silent, gender mainstreaming as a strategy is accepted, and put into practice in a growing number of countries. Although this positive attitude is of course a blessing, it also comes with a number of problems, notably a tendency for window dressing, for misunderstanding the concept and for a reduction in the attention and budget for specific or targeted equality policies. Equality continues to be referred to as ‘a general aspiration rather than a definite objective’.⁴ Gender equality unfortunately is not a magical word that becomes reality when pronounced.

The CDEG report gives numerous examples of a too positive presentation of the progress made with gender mainstreaming, such as a frequent mentioning that a gender perspective will be taken into account in all policies by everyone, without any mentioning of specific instruments, activities or procedures. Statements of this kind cannot be taken seriously. Gender mainstreaming aims at achieving the integration of a gender perspective, but it is still in the very beginning of its implementation as a strategy. In a situation where countries have just started to introduce and develop this strategy, attempts at gender mainstreaming by no means can be directed at “everything and everyone, everywhere”. A realistic account of gender mainstreaming initiatives, on the contrary, is characterised by more modest statements that gender mainstreaming is developed in a limited number of policy fields, and involves specific instruments and specific responsibilities for specific actors. The current rhetorical attention for gender mainstreaming can be an advantage when it leads to a more positive attitude and an understanding of gender equality altogether, yet it is quite clear that without ongoing alertness it risks never becoming a reality.

¹ Speech by Mr. Peter Harrach, Minister of Social and Family Affairs, Hungary, at the EU conference on equal Pay and Economic Independence - a basis for Gender equality, Stockholm, 3 November 1999.

² Council of Europe study on national machinery, action plans and gender mainstreaming (EG (99) 12).

³ Overview: Gender Equality and Emergency Assistance/Conflict Resolution. Prepared for Sida by B. Woroniuk, J. Schalkwyk and H. Thomas, January 1997.

⁴ Predicting the Impact of Policy: Gender-auditing as a means of assessing the probable impact of policy initiatives on women. Country report: Ireland. Mary Donnelly, Siobhan Mullally, Olivia Smith, University of Liverpool: Feminist Legal Research Unit, 1999, p.109.

Working on the prerequisites for gender mainstreaming

In the report of the CDEG, it becomes clear that gender mainstreaming can only start when some essential prerequisites are fulfilled, and that the introduction of gender mainstreaming involves the development of these prerequisites. Generally, the prerequisites referred to correspond to the prerequisites that were described in the 1998 report of the Council of Europe. The political will to start gender mainstreaming is the most basic prerequisite, and one of the hardest to influence. Numerous is the mentioning of attempts in finding more resources, developing gender segregated statistics, training of civil servants, introducing an infrastructure for gender mainstreaming. The development of tools and instruments is not so frequently mentioned. Unfortunately, there is not much information available on the details of such activities: which statistics are considered to need breaking down according to gender and why, what is the curriculum of the training that is organised?¹ As far as the development of a mainstreaming infrastructure is concerned, the information is only slightly more specific. And sometimes it seems as if developing these prerequisites is already seen as gender mainstreaming. Such a presentation of facts is misleading as it can obscure the amount of work needed to develop the strategy of gender mainstreaming itself.

The example of Norway and Sweden clearly shows that a high representation of women is a necessary prerequisite for gender mainstreaming, or at least that it is an important factor in its success. It has been expressed frequently that the high political representation of women in both countries has influenced not only the importance of gender equality on the political agenda, but also the support for attempts at gender mainstreaming. For Sweden, research on data from 1985, 1988 and 1994 shows that female parliamentarians are more likely to single out women as a social category they choose to represent, and that this pattern is stable over time. Also, they have more contact with women's NGOs than men, they are more positive towards the creation and enforcement of equality than men, and bring more of these issues onto the political agenda.² In other countries the continuing under-representation of women as 'partners' or 'agents' in the formation and implementation of public policy is reported to hinder gender mainstreaming progress.³

The example of Ireland points to a prerequisite for gender mainstreaming that has not been recognised in the 1998 report of the Council of Europe. This prerequisite concerns the 'openness' of the policy-making process. In Ireland, 'despite the recent heralding of a new era of openness and transparency, a culture of secrecy continues to surround many elements of the policy making process'.⁴ Gender impact statements are required for all policy proposals, but they are only available for circulation among ministers' offices. It is evident that such a

¹ It should be mentioned here that language is also a problem for the dissemination of information on gender mainstreaming. Sometimes there is more information, but only in national languages other than English or French.

² Wangnerud, L. (ed.) *Politikens andra sida. Om kvinnorepresentation i Sveriges riksdag. 1998* (Kungälv, Goeteborg Studies in Politics 53) p. 207.

Predicting the Impact of Policy: Gender-auditing as a means of assessing the probable impact of policy initiatives on women. Country report: Sweden. Minna Gillberg. University of Liverpool: Feminist Legal Research Unit, 1999.

³ Predicting the Impact of Policy: Gender-auditing as a means of assessing the probable impact of policy initiatives on women. Country report: Ireland. Mary Donnelly, Siobhan Mullally, Olivia Smith, University of Liverpool: Feminist Legal Research Unit, 1999, p.110

⁴ *id.* p.111

lack of openness and transparency hinders the further development, improvement and evaluation of attempts at gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming and targeted equality policies¹

Even if not only the report of the Council of Europe, but also almost all descriptions and documents on gender mainstreaming have stressed the need for a twin track strategy (meaning that gender mainstreaming is not replacing specific or targeted gender equality policies, but is a complementary strategy) there have been a number of reports where the growing attention for gender mainstreaming has led to the disappearance of targeted gender equality policies, or to the abolishment of gender equality machineries, as has been the case at the local level in the Netherlands. It seems necessary not only to stress the joint necessity of gender mainstreaming and targeted equality policies, but also to give some attention to the determinants of the choices involved in deciding which strategy will be followed, and how both strategies can be combined. In everyday practice, when working towards the goal of gender equality, organisations make an overall gender equality plan, and they often consider the distinction between gender mainstreaming and targeted gender equality policies a too analytical one.

Many national reports on the progress made since Beijing also mention gender mainstreaming, but generally, reference to gender mainstreaming can only be found under the heading of “institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women”. Frequently, these reports also mention that certain issues, dealt with in the context of a discussion of progress since the Platform for Action, are taken care of in existing general policies, such as anti-poverty policies, or youth policies.² More information would be needed to assess the validity of such claims. The typical report therefore is a mix of both strategies, unfortunately without a reflection on the respective strengths of both strategies. More generally, equality plans seldom reflect on the choice of strategies or tools.

The Swedish experience shows that “gender impact analyses of policy proposals make the specific needs of women and men visible which results in new demands for specific measures and positive action”.³ Moreover, using gender mainstreaming as a strategy can change or re-focus the role of the equality machinery. Taking the example of Sweden, this means that the Division for Gender Equality now has a pro-active, co-ordinating and advisory role in relation to the ministries. In its co-ordinating capacity, the Division follows the implementation of gender mainstreaming. Summaries and analyses are fed back to the respective ministries in dialogue form.⁴ The gender equality experts at the regional level in Sweden now have the role of consultants, not the role of responsibility for gender equality, as this responsibility lies with the top administrators.

Some countries give a higher priority to positive action than to gender mainstreaming. According to Austria, at this moment gender mainstreaming as a strategy is not developed fully and effectively with an objective system of evaluation, and that is their motivation for

¹ This report has chosen to use ‘targeted’ instead of ‘specific’, as this word makes it more clear that this strategy targets a group for designing a policy.

² See for instance the national report of France 1997.

³ Address by Ms. Margareta Winberg, Minister for Gender Equality Sweden at the Council of Europe Conference GENDER MAINSTREAMING: A STEP INTO THE 21st CENTURY, Athens, 16-18 September 1999, p.2.

⁴ Gender Mainstreaming in Sweden. A Gender Equality Perspective in all policy areas. Fact Sheet. Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications. June 1999.

giving higher priority to positive action. At the same time however, they are working on the development of necessary prerequisites for gender mainstreaming, including supporting the incorporation of gender mainstreaming in guidelines of the European Union.¹

Differences in Europe

Only a few countries have already developed more specific or comprehensive initiatives of gender mainstreaming. Within Europe, it seems that the countries that already had a long history of gender equality policies, or a history of attempts at integrating a gender perspective in their regular policies before the Beijing conference, such as the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway, had a head start. It seems that countries with a historical strong accent on legislation in matters of gender equality, such as the United Kingdom and Denmark, had more problems adjusting to the perspective of gender mainstreaming, as it took them more time to get started. It seems that young bureaucracies, such as the Flemish Community and Slovenia, had an advantage in more easily introducing the new strategy of gender mainstreaming. Moreover, it becomes evident that it is extremely difficult for Central and Eastern European countries to start gender mainstreaming, as they lack almost all prerequisites, and often even have a problem to get gender equality anywhere on the political agenda.

Elaborated examples of gender mainstreaming: Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands

The most elaborated examples of gender mainstreaming as a strategy are found in Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands. Sweden has developed the strategy at the national, regional and local levels. In a very short time – they started only in 1994 – pilot projects have been set up, procedures put in place, and many new and innovative instruments have been constructed. The experiences in the Netherlands are more limited, but started already in the 1980s, and they also involve the construction of innovative instruments and infrastructures. Norway, as one of the first countries to adopt the goal of gender mainstreaming, did not concentrate on the development of instruments, but integrated gender equality in its consensus oriented style of policy making. The experiences of these three countries will be discussed in more detail, as they are of interest to all countries wanting to improve their gender mainstreaming initiatives.

The Netherlands

The strategy of gender mainstreaming is certainly not new in the Netherlands. In fact, it can be seen as a further elaboration of the strategy of ‘facet policy’ developed since the 1970s as one of the two strategies that were jointly embraced. Facet policy stated that equality was to be seen as a facet of all policies. In the beginning of the 1990s, the Dutch were not only one of the few countries to develop a special instrument for gender mainstreaming at the national level (a Gender Impact Assessment called EER) but, more important, they were the only one to actually use the instrument.² The recent study that evaluated the first seven EERs showed

¹ Council of Europe study on national machinery, action plans and gender mainstreaming (EG (99) 12).

² M. Verloo and C. Roggeband. 1996. Gender Impact Assessment: the development of a new instrument in the Netherlands. In: Impact assessment. Vol.14, nr 1, pp. 3-21.

Verloo, M. Integrating gender into law and policy-making: the Netherlands. In: Making Women Count. Sue Nott, Fiona Beveridge and Kylie Stephen. Aldershot Ashgate 1999.

See for a comparison of Dutch and Flemish approaches: A. Woodward and P. Meier. Gender Impact Assessment: Tool in Mainstreaming or Tool to Begin Mainstreaming? A comparison of Dutch and Flemish approaches. Paper for the ECPR Joint Sessions, Bern 1997.

that the instrument as such is a good instrument.¹ The political will to continue to use the instrument is present.

A major problem with the instrument, however, is its position in the decision making process, as there is to this day no systematic procedure to guarantee its use. Policy making varies considerably within the Dutch government, across fields and issues. The departmental autonomy of officials is matched by the autonomy of ministers in the Cabinet. The Dutch civil service is said to be relatively fragmented. In this “kingdom of the disunited ministries”² there is unfortunately still no procedure where salience, relevance and importance for gender relations are the criteria for a compulsory use of this EER, or for any other mainstreaming strategy. One would prefer to see that a minister, and hence the Council of Ministers, decides about this, informed by expert advice (from inside or outside the bureaucracy). A second problem is that the EER so far has been used at a rather late stage in the policy making process, and consequently, that influence on the policies involved has been the exception rather than the rule. The evaluation report recognises these problems, and gives recommendations to solve them. As yet, it is not clear if the recommendations will change the practice. The EER is still more a promise for the incorporation of a gender perspective in policies than a reality.

The different histories of two instruments developed in the Netherlands – the EER and the Gender Bias Research Guidelines – demonstrate clearly that mainstreaming involves more than making an instrument.³ While the first was promoted extensively by the Dutch Equality Unit, by several local women’s policy agencies and by some NGOs too, the second was neither promoted nor supported and ended up in a desk drawer. The lesson to learn from this is that it is not enough to have instruments available, and that the organisation of responsibilities for the use of the instrument is crucial. Certainly in the beginning, promotion activities, such as workshops, articles in department’s newsletters and so on, appear to be necessary to ‘seduce’ civil servants who are new to questions of gender equality to use the instrument. The experiences from the Netherlands also show the importance of organising and supporting gender mainstreaming at the top level. Not only the commitment from the leaders is necessary, but also a clear commitment in the policy formulation. In the Netherlands this commitment is founded on the basis of the former facet policy.

The experiences in the field of Women & Development in the Netherlands show that “quick and dirty” instruments, such as the DAC/WID criteria, have serious limitations.⁴ They are too vague, and the answers have no value as a result. The Netherlands at first had a policy to get all their development projects assessed by these criteria. The ministry had set target percentages to increase the number of projects that were assessed. The idea to set target

¹ See for an evaluation of the EER: H. van de Graaf, M. Mossink and J. Gröflin. Van de EER geleerd. Vuga : Den Haag, 1998

² Toonen, Theo A.J., The Netherlands: A Decentralised Unitary State in a Welfare Society, in: Western European Politics, 1988, 10, pp.108-129

³ The Gender Bias Guidelines were commissioned by the Dutch government, and published in 1995. These guidelines are designed to help researchers that are (co)financed by the government, so that they can avoid gender bias in their research. The aim was to improve the quality of research, and to ensure that research commissioned by the government adopted a gender perspective;

⁴ For the DAC/WID criteria see: Development Assistance Committee 1983. Guiding Principles on Women and Development. Paris: OECD

For an evaluation of the Dutch W & D policy see: Women and Development. Policy and implementation in Netherlands development cooperation 1985-1996. Evaluation report 1998. Policy and Operations Evaluation department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague 1998.

percentages as to what proportion of the policy proposals has to be screened on its gender impact is a good idea, if only the instrument would have been more robust. Of course one would like all proposals to be screened, but to start with a few, and then set target percentages to increase the number every year seems a more realistic option.

The experiences in the field of development co-operation point at another problem that is essential for the implementation of gender mainstreaming: the difficulty of organising responsibility for gender equality in a context of continuing dynamism. It seems that structures and procedures in the Dutch bureaucracy are rather short lived, and the sad consequence for gender mainstreaming is that it is nearly impossible to give gender equality a “safe” place within the structure. The Women & Development example shows clearly how a good attempt at mainstreaming can get frustrated as an unintended consequence of a policy reorganisation. In the beginning, the choice for bilateral aid as the main area for gender mainstreaming was a logical one. But this choice made the whole mainstreaming effort more difficult when that policy area over time became less important in the ministry.

The experiences in the field of political representation finally give a clear example of a mixed strategy (targeted equality policies combined with some gender mainstreaming) that is closely fitted to the Dutch consociational political culture. For the Dutch government the use of law enforcement, such as compulsory quotas for candidate lists, is not a policy option unless all other measures would have failed. Examples of tools and techniques used in this mixed strategy are the report to parliament once a year, the formulation of target figures, analysis and publication of results, subsidisation of projects of women’s organisations, a Gender Impact Assessment on a proposal for changes in the electoral system, a database for women candidates and direct discussion with and stimulation of political parties and other important actors. Targeting women has been combined with ‘changing the whole system’ of selection of political representatives towards gender equality. All these initiatives have undoubtedly contributed to the present relatively high participation of women in the cabinet and the parliament. The main actor responsible is the Ministry for Domestic Affairs. Consensus building, transfer of responsibilities, a lot of talking, top support, the use of all tools available and the engagement of all actors involved seem to be responsible for this success story.

Another interesting initiative is related to transferring the responsibility for gender mainstreaming to all advisory bodies in the Netherlands. In the current (recently reorganised) Dutch system all advisory bodies are supposed to provide advice on equality matters when relevant for their own area. Already the effort that has been put in increasing the number of women in these bodies has been successful, as the percentage of women is now around 45%. The advisory bodies receive some guidance and support for their new task of integrating the emancipation perspective. The temporary TECENA committee (4 experts) is trusted with this important task. TECENA is using an analysis of the programmes of the advisory bodies, annual dialogue with members of the bodies and training as tools.

As to the question of the infrastructure and co-ordination of mainstreaming, we can find various examples in the Netherlands. Monitoring can be in the hands of Parliament, as the example from the Ministry for Domestic Affairs shows. This however will only work if there is both clear political commitment and sound preparation at the bureaucratic level. Co-ordination is the biggest challenge. In the Women & Development field, the co-ordination was in the hands of a unit, whereas in the Ministry for Domestic Affairs a network of contact persons was used. In practice, both seem to be a good option, although theoretically a network

of contact persons fits better with the concept of mainstreaming. At the level of the Dutch government as a whole, there is both a unit (DCE, located within the Ministry of Social Affairs, and Employment) and a network of focal points in all ministries (ICE).

Norway

Norway stated early on that “the promotion of equality should be an integral part of all sectors of society. Consequently, the responsibility must lie with the authority/agency generally responsible in the relevant sector”.¹ The accent in Norway was first of all on communicating the new goal to all responsible actors. Since 1977, all ministries are in theory responsible for gender equality. In the beginning however, this mainly translated into many policies against discrimination and positive actions in favour of women within several different ministries. Many understood the gender problematic primarily as a matter of personnel policy in the ministries. Later on, and especially since 1991, the accent was put on institutionalising gender mainstreaming. A particular responsibility was given to all state secretaries to ensure that gender equality is taken into account in their ministries. Guidelines to assess all relevant proposals on their gender impact were developed to be an integral part of the guidelines for drawing up policy proposals. Training would be made available. Implementation of these ideas has been slow, as earlier attempts at involving high level academic expertise did not connect to administrative cultures. Moreover, changes in government have slowed the process down.

Since 1998, more initiatives at institutionalising gender mainstreaming have been taken. A Committee of State Secretaries responsible for gender equality was set up. The committee meets every six weeks. So far, the Ministries of Employment and Administration, Business, Municipal and Regional policy, Foreign Affairs, Children and Family Affairs are regular members. Other ministries are involved on an ad hoc basis. The committee discusses all policy and legislative proposals before they are presented to the Storting (the Norwegian parliament). In 2000 training will be organised for this committee. Also a network of key persons for equality in the ministries has been set up, and it meets at least once a year. In 1999, the guidelines for the implementation of gender impact assessment, in accordance with the general guidelines for policy-making, were published and distributed.

The experiences in Norway have been evaluated by external expertise, the last one being concluded in 1998. The evaluation points at some weaknesses. First of all, the amount of resources allocated to co-ordination and day-to-day follow-up has not been sufficient. Moreover, there appears to be an ongoing need for more understanding of gender equality, and of the mechanisms that could bring this goal forward. Awareness-raising and visibility of gendered realities remain indispensable. So far, in Norway, no concrete results can be shown, and there is still a long way to go for gender equality to become a ‘self-evident part’ or ‘an automatic reflex’ of the decision making process.² Yet, it is believed that the approach has been positive to the integration of a gender perspective in some policies.

The approach chosen by Norway in the case of gender mainstreaming is closely linked to its more general approach in policy making. The accent is on dialogue rather than on

¹ Action Programme to incorporate gender equality in the central administration. 1986-1990. Translation Anne Havnoer.

² The wording ‘self-evident part of the decision making process’, and ‘an automatic reflex to influence all important decisions’, are from the Follow-up programme 1991-1994 and the brochure Mainstreaming of Gender Equality in Norway (1995) respectively.

enforcing, on convincing rather than on prescribing detailed procedures or instruments. The advantage of such an approach if it succeeds may be solid anchoring of the attention for a gender perspective in the policy making process. Yet, its biggest disadvantage seems to be a dependence on a positive 'attitude' towards gender equality. If gender mainstreaming would require all policy makers to become a feminist, it might never happen. It is argued rightfully by some that gender mainstreaming should rather be concentrating on the organisation of formal commitment and not regard attitudinal commitment to gender equality as crucial for participation.¹ Another disadvantage is the relative invisibility of gender mainstreaming activities, and the resulting difficulty of monitoring a process that tries to work towards 'reflexes'. The recent initiatives taken in Norway indicate that institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming will involve more detailed procedures, and hence will make a more detailed monitoring of the progress possible.

Sweden

Sweden is one of the few countries that constructed its own word for gender mainstreaming. 'Jämtegrering' combines elements of the Swedish words for gender equality (jämställdhet) and for integration (integrering). In a five-year period, the results of gender mainstreaming initiatives are substantial. Every year since 1994, the Swedish government has declared in its annual Statement of Government Policy its political conviction that a gender equality perspective must permeate all aspects of government policy.² For the Swedish government gender mainstreaming means that: different conditions and requirements for women and men should be identified; that every question which concerns individuals should be identified from a gender perspective, and that the expected consequences of changes for women and men respectively should be analysed.³ Developing working methods for gender mainstreaming has been at the heart of the Swedish efforts. Since 1997 a working group has been appointed for methodological development.

One of the first initiatives has been to mainstream statistics. In 1994 the government instructed the Swedish statistics office that official statistics are to be segregated by sex, unless there are special reasons for not doing so. Moreover, courses in gender equality have been organised for ministers, state secretaries, press secretaries and political advisors, for heads of division and other personnel, for committee secretaries and commissioners. Since 1998 more trainers have been trained to give the courses. At the same time, as the need for gender expertise at the ministries proved to be high, some ministries employed a 'flying gender expert' on a temporary basis. Such has been the case at the Ministries of Civil Service, Labour, Health and Social Affairs and Justice. These activities are all aiming at transferring gender expertise and knowledge to the actors normally involved in policy making, so that they can materialise their responsibility for gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming in Sweden puts a strong accent on the distribution of resources, such as money, time, services and space. As the distribution of resources is a core element of policies, it appears to be a legitimate choice. Resources are one of the elements of the 3R Method that will be discussed in the context of local policy making. The accent on resources is clearly connected to the overall historical accent of Swedish equality policies towards equality in employment. At the local level, there is also a strong accent on the immaterial side

¹ Stark, Agneta, 1998

² Information in this paragraph is based on Gender Mainstreaming in Sweden. Fact Sheet. Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications. June 1999.

³ id.

of gender relations (assumptions, norms and values), as will be explained later on. At the national level, this accent is not so elaborated.

From 1994 on, special terms of reference were introduced for all government committees that develop the basis for the government proposals in different fields, directing them to include gender impact in their reports. The results of a recent follow-up study to the directive showed that one third of the committee reports had included thorough information on the gender impact.¹ Initiatives will be taken to find ways to enhance compliance and strengthen the use of the terms of reference. Systematic monitoring of gender mainstreaming is the responsibility of each ministry, but the Division for Gender Equality engages in a dialogue with the ministries on the basis of summaries and analyses.

At the local and regional level in Sweden, the activities on gender mainstreaming have been impressive. Funded by the national government, SALA (Swedish Association of Local Authorities) started the Jämkom Project in 1995.² To make gender equality a concrete way for all policy makers involved, a specific method has been developed by an academic consultant.³ The 3R method has already been tested in many communities. The 3R asks questions about **R**epresentation, about **R**esources and about **R**ealia. The first two elements are quantitative, and they ask for a systematic review of women's and men's representation in the policy field at hand, and for a systematic review of the distribution and utilisation of resources. Realia is qualitative. Questions in this part are about norms and values expressed in both the structure that produces the local authority activities, and in their products. Whose needs are served? Who can recognise themselves in the structure, in the product? Consultation of citizens is often used to answer these last questions.

As a result of the use of the 3R Method, some communities have decided to include gender equality in their budget, to collect continuous information on gender in customer surveys or statistics, and to actively monitor the impact of different measures. Examples of policies and measures screened with the 3R Method are: housing, child care, schooling, social services, water supply, streets and sewage, energy. Evaluation of the experiences with the 3R Method shows that this way of working has engaged new actors who previously had not been included in the equality work, notably men as a category, but also private enterprises in relation to competitive tendering. Recently, the 3R method has spread to other communities and to county councils and county administrative boards. This diffusion of methods is backed strongly by the presence of gender equality experts in all county administrative boards, who act as consultants for their own organisations.

A recent initiative is concerned with the development of E-quality-control labels. At the county level of Västra Götaland, the initiative is about an E-quality-control label for labour organisations.⁴ The criteria for the label concern how seriously the organisation works towards gender equality. The group that works with developing these labels consists not only of public sector organisations, but also of private sector organisations. Another initiative is more concerned with an E-quality-control label for products. A study was submitted to the

¹ Evaluation of Directive 1994:124, the Equality Affairs Division, November 1997.

Address by Ms. Margareta Winberg, Minister for Gender Equality, Sweden, at the Council of Europe Conference GENDER MAINSTREAMING: A STEP INTO THE 21st CENTURY, Athens, 16-18 September 1999, p.2.

² Danilda, Inger & Marie Nordqvist. Equal Opportunities and Mainstreaming at National, regional and Local Level in Sweden. Draft report within the framework of RICETTE PER IL MAINSTREAMING.

³ Aström, Gertud, Mainstreaming in Sweden: Working for Equal Local Government. Unpublished paper 1998.

⁴ Lindsten, Simone, Kriterier for Jämställdhetsmarkering. Lanstyrelsen Västra Götaland 1998:29

government in 1998, including a model for a voluntary E-quality-control label. The main idea was to give consumers greater power and to stimulate companies and organisations to increase gender equality. Such a labelling of organisations and products could also be used in a monitoring system for gender mainstreaming.

It is quite possible that Sida, the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency, has developed the most detailed material for gender mainstreaming. For this report however, not much material from this field has been collected, except from Sweden and the Netherlands. In any case, their material seems to be useful for a much larger audience than their own organisation, especially since much of the material is in English. Already the 1996 report of Schalkwyk and Woroniuk has been disseminated widely, and has greatly contributed to a better understanding of gender mainstreaming. Within Sida, 90% of the employees have had a two-day training on gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

Current best practice tools of Sida include a series of “prompts”, or fact sheets on the gender relevance of specific policy fields, which are meant to help ordinary policy makers to take a gender perspective into account.¹ The “prompts” made so far discuss, always in two pages, the gender relevance of: labour standards, social insurance, cadastral systems, post-conflict initiatives, globalisation, organisational change, housing programmes, irrigation, coastal zone management, electoral support, participatory processes, energy policy, biodiversity, waste disposal, micro-credit, the police, and state support for families. The “prompts” address gender differences, assumptions on gender, tools and methodologies.

Other materials that are of great help for anyone within Sida who needs information to incorporate a gender perspective into a new plan, project or programme, are the Country Profiles on Gender Relations. These profiles are co-operative projects, where seminars are used to identify and prioritise issues for the report.² Organised in this way, the making of an analytical report has educational impact. Sida has much more material where the specific gender relevance of certain policy fields is elucidated.³ The gender knowledge that is most crucial for the policy areas where Sida works, have their own series of handbooks for gender mainstreaming. There is a Handbook on Gender Perspectives available for the Divisions on: NGOs, Health, Transport, Agriculture, Water, Emergency Assistance and Conflict Resolution, Education, Technical Co-operation and Energy. Most interesting is that not all these handbooks have been written by the equality section or by equality consultants. The handbook on energy for instance is made by the Infrastructure Division itself, thereby clearly showing that they have gender expertise and are prepared to use it.

All these materials of course need to be used to make gender mainstreaming happen. Unfortunately, no evaluation report on the use of this material has been found.

¹ Sida Equality Prompt Sheet nr. 1-17. Prepared for SIDA by B. Woroniuk and J. Schalkwyk. December 1998

² The Profile on Gender Relations for Tanzania for instance was made upon the initiative of the social-cultural analyst at the Swedish Embassy in Tanzania. The report was made on the basis of workshops organised by the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme, and a seminar attended by staff of the Embassy.

Towards Gender Equality In Tanzania. Prepared for Sida by Bonnie Keller with Demere Kitunga and the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme. February 1999.

³ See: Overview: Gender Equality and Emergence Assistance/ Conflict Resolution, prepared for Sida by B. Woroniuk, J. Schalkwyk and H. Thomas, 1997

Or: Gender Inequality and Poverty: Trends, Linkage, Analysis and Policy Implications, part I and II, Briefing prepared for Gender Equality Unit Sida, by S. Baden and others. 1998

From equality legislation to gender mainstreaming: the United Kingdom

The new government in the United Kingdom has been very ambitious in its development of gender mainstreaming.¹ Gender mainstreaming is embedded in a broader acknowledgement of the differential impact of government policies on different people in society. Most typical for the United Kingdom is a strong connection to anti-discrimination legislation. This focus is historically rooted in the British tradition of an accent on anti-discrimination legislation in equality policy. Earlier on, the ‘fundamental principle behind policy appraisal guidelines were to ensure that the Government complies with legal conventions and treaties to which it is signatory, and does not institutionalise direct or indirect discrimination in its policies’.² The new guidelines for “Policy Appraisal for Equal Treatment” (PAET) are wider, and ask not only to make sure that measures will not result in unlawful discrimination, but also that it is checked whether the proposal will affect, either directly or indirectly, different groups of people, that it is to be identified whether there is an adverse differential impact of a particular group or groups, and then to decide if this differential impact can be justified (even if legally permissible), and to take action if necessary.³

A second typical feature of British mainstreaming is that they do not only focus on gender, but also on people from different ethnic minorities and on disabled people. The PAET is not only about women and men, but also about on people from different ethnic minorities and disabled people. Mainstreaming equality in the context of the United Kingdom is always about these other dimensions of inequality.

Both features can potentially be of wider interest to other countries. Mainstreaming gender equality can be used to reach beyond gender to address other forms of inequality, and it clear that this can be very important, if only to avoid a lack of attention for differences within the social categories of women and men. Yet, it has to be emphasised how each equality dimension has its own dynamic, which needs to be addressed properly.⁴

Beyond positive action in personnel policy: The Flemish Community

Most policy areas chosen for the introduction and development of gender mainstreaming so far have concerned external policies, as it was more or less common sense to see internal policies, that is policies directed at the personnel of public administrations, as synonymous with positive action, and hence with targeted equality policies. A recent initiative at the Ministry of the Flemish Community shows that this need not be the case. This initiative, that implied a joint project of the Ministry with academic experts to mainstream their human

¹ <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/womens-unit/1999/equal.htm>

² Predicting the Impact of Policy: Gender-auditing as a means of assessing the probable impact of policy initiatives on women. Country report: United Kingdom. Fiona Beveridge, Sue Nott & Kylie Stephen, University of Liverpool: Feminist Legal Research Unit, 1999, p.74

³ <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/womens-unit/1999/equal.htm>

⁴ Verloo, M. On the conceptual and theoretical roots of gender mainstreaming. ESRC Seminar Series The interface between Public Policy and Gender equality, Seminar One, Sheffield Hallam University 1999, p.1-10
Rees, T. Managing Diversity and Mainstreaming Equality. ESRC Seminar Series The interface between Public Policy and Gender equality, Seminar Two, Sheffield Hallam University 1999, p.1-16.

resources management, has been successfully developed in 1999. Since then, a similar initiative is diffusing the experiences from the project in six Flemish public institutions.¹

The Ministry of the Flemish Community was founded in 1992 because of the state transformation of Belgium towards federalisation (<http://www.vlaanderen.be/>). The Flemish government has since been engaged in an ambitious process of transformation of the new bureaucracies, positioning customer orientation, efficiency and performance as central values. For their personnel management, this entailed an elaborate Human Resource Management programme, including a yearly cycle of individual performance planning, coaching, evaluation and appraisal. The Gender in BALANCE project consisted of six steps.

Basis	Consulting opinion leaders to compose a mission statement on mainstreaming gender in HRM.
Adoption	A seminar leads to the adoption of the mission statement by the top bureaucrats.
Learning	The instrument of self-assessments is used to transfer gender expertise to the organisation and knowledge about the organisation to the researchers.
Analysis	Self-assessments are the input for a SWOT-analysis, which is theoretically grounded and results in a preliminary action plan.
Nuance	Intensive consultation leads to a differentiated tailor made approach, in which checklists, procedural commitments and training are central elements.
Selection	The experiences with the project are evaluated, resulting in a selection of action steps for the future.

The first two steps are meant to constitute a joint definition of the gender problem in the organisation. A mission statement is the result of consultation of the top bureaucrats and gender expertise of the researchers. The third and fourth steps involve participation of the middle management, the staff normally involved in designing and implementing personnel policy and a subsequent analysis by the researchers. In the fifth and sixth steps, consultation is the basis again for the researchers to tailor the analysis to a proposed set of instruments and tools to be used in the future. Acceptation of these tools is an integral part of the project.

The project resulted in 28 action points that were assigned to specific civil servants. These actions and proposals remain to be confirmed by the Board of Secretaries General and will then be integrated in the normal annual plans of the units. The monitoring of the Gender in Balance project is in the hands of the Emancipation Affairs Service and will be reported on in the regular reports of this service. One of the results of the project has been that this unit is now a regular member of the task force on personnel policy.

The experiences so far point at some important strengths and weaknesses of this approach. Overall, the impact of the project has resulted in a strengthening of the salience and importance of the gender equality issue. The ‘gap’ between academic gender expertise and administrative knowledge however remained in need of continuous attention. The co-operative character of the project has been positive towards the ownership of the action points that were developed. Yet, it remains to be seen how ‘safe’ the agreements will be in the context of ongoing changes in the Flemish state bureaucracy.

¹ Benschop, Y. & M. Verloo. Mainstreaming gender in Human Resource Management. The development of participatory processes and techniques. Paper presented at the Public Sector Stream of the 1999 Critical Management Conference, 14-16th July, Manchester.

Good intentions and common barriers: Portugal and many other countries

In Portugal, gender impact assessment is the responsibility of a specific government executive body, the CEWR (Commission for Equality and Women's Rights), which is charged with the task of scrutinising policy- or law-making initiatives from the government or the Assembly for their differential impact on men and women.¹ This task is backed up by laws, which give the CEWR the competence to be consulted and to intervene in policies. A recent report mentions that the government repeatedly seems to 'forget' the consultative functions of the CEWR.² The CEWR cannot effectively fulfil this task, as too many barriers prevent it from doing so. The most important barriers are: a lack of transparency in policy making and communication, the absence of any sanction for failure to consult with the CEWR, a lack of a systematic procedure and a lack of resources. The example of Portugal unfortunately seems typical for many countries, as it points in the direction of very widespread problems in gender mainstreaming. All the problems mentioned require the highest attention, not only in the interest of gender mainstreaming, but more widely even in the interest of more efficient and powerful policy making.

Organising a good start for gender mainstreaming: Slovenia

Slovenia has been one of the few Central or Eastern European countries to start working towards gender mainstreaming.³ Since 1997, the accent has been on sensitisation, on capacity building and on institutional development. As a start, three ministries are involved in this initiative: the Ministry of the Interior, Education and Sports, and Labour, Family and Social Affairs. These ministers have signed a 'contract' on co-operation with the Women's Policy Office, and they have appointed members to an interministerial working group. So far, tools and techniques used have been analytical (research on women and men in Slovenia), and educational (seminars, training and hearings organised). Resources have been found not only within Slovenia, but also from UNDP. The experiences so far are positive, but it is felt that the progress will continue to depend on personal commitment of key actors, because resources are so limited.

Assessment of progress in gender mainstreaming

Overall, after the Council of Europe conference in Athens, where several examples of gender mainstreaming were presented, it seems that so far the strong political rhetoric about gender mainstreaming is not always matched by an equally strong development of concrete and detailed attempts at designing gender mainstreaming projects. Five years after Beijing it could be hoped that more tools would have been developed, more examples would have been available. The problem does not seem to be a strong resistance to gender mainstreaming, but rather "cold feet" and a reluctance to experiment. Gender mainstreaming involves a fundamental reorientation and state bureaucracies are extremely hard to change. It is highly important to stimulate the further development of gender mainstreaming in concrete projects,

¹ Predicting the Impact of Policy: Gender-auditing as a means of assessing the probable impact of policy initiatives on women. Country report: Portugal. Joao Casqueira Cardoso, University of Liverpool: Feminist Legal Research Unit, 1999, p.50

² id, p.50

³ Presentation of gender mainstreaming projects at the Council of Europe Conference GENDER MAINSTREAMING: A STEP INTO THE 21st CENTURY, Athens, 16-18 September 1999. UNDP project of the Government of Slovenia 1997.

and hence to encourage further experiments at all levels and in many different contexts, so as not to lose the window of opportunity that has been created by Beijing.

The fact that most experiences with gender mainstreaming are of a very recent nature makes it difficult to assess the respective value of the different tools and procedures that have been designed until now. Often tools and procedures have only been designed in the last year and they have hardly been used until now. As a result, it is too early for evaluation. Yet, some conclusions can be made. First of all, it seems that, at the national level, the focus is mostly on analytical and educational tools. Tools involving consultation and participation are mainly found in gender mainstreaming initiatives at the local or regional level, even in countries that are known for their consociational policy styles.

From the experiences in the Netherlands, where a tool of Gender Impact Assessment has already been evaluated, it seems that the number of areas where gender mainstreaming has been exercised is still quite limited, and more important, there does not seem to be a systematic procedure for selection of the policy areas that will be involved. Even if tools are available, gender mainstreaming then is largely dependent on good will and coincidence, and this obviously weakens the strategy. The lesson learnt is that the accent should not only be on developing more and better tools, but simultaneously on the anchoring of tools in policy processes, and on sanctioning their use.

Some recommendations

Gender mainstreaming initiatives are typically developed in many national, local, regional and supranational settings. The high diversity in languages in Europe makes *dissemination of material on gender mainstreaming* a continuing problem. Without specific attention, resources and activities, information on the details of gender mainstreaming risks to stay contained within the setting where it is developed. Yet, it is exactly a wider diffusion of these details that can boost the progress of gender mainstreaming. It is to be recommended that information is not only translated, but that critical analyses of progress are regularly organised, so as to counterbalance the existing tendency for window dressing. A database on gender mainstreaming could provide for easy access to information.

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy, a choice made, timing chosen and responsibilities assigned to use relevant instruments, actors and procedures to achieve gender equality. The tight connection of gender mainstreaming with gender equality does not mean however that gender mainstreaming comes with a clear *definition of what gender equality is*, or should be. So far, all countries involved in developing and implementing gender mainstreaming have done so within the boundaries of their own definition of gender equality. It is clear that there are many different perspectives on the meaning of gender equality, and even if political discussions on gender equality are always hard, and sometimes even threaten the support that already seems to be gained, an ongoing dialogue is a necessity for the further development of gender mainstreaming, because the development of good tools and strategies needs a sound understanding of the problem that has to be solved.

A few experiences show that *the co-operation of policy makers and academic experts* is not always easy. Both recent experiences in the Flemish Community and the older experiments in Norway show that the different perspectives of policy makers and academic experts can sometimes present a problem. From the perspective of politicians and policy makers, academic experts are seen as too theoretical, and frequently also as too radical. From

the perspective of academic experts, politicians and policy makers are often denying the complexity of the gender problematic, and as a result asking for impossibly simple solutions. Organising dialogue between politicians, policy makers and academic experts is needed to transfer knowledge and ensure a mutual learning process.

The experiences show that there are many different possibilities for organising an *infrastructure for gender mainstreaming*. This infrastructure can and should be a light structure, as it has to be composed of the regular actors, in line with the main accent of gender mainstreaming to engage the regular actors for gender equality. The possibilities seem to range from high level interministerial committees, or committees of secretaries of state, to interdepartmental groups or looser networks that meet on a regular basis, and combinations of these. The choice made has to find a balance between engaging the top level, yet also making an infrastructure that is really committed. It also seems that the terms of reference of these groups should be designed carefully, to consolidate their chances.

It is not very clear what the role of *NGOs* can be in gender mainstreaming. Some experiences show that they can an important pressure group to get gender mainstreaming started. More attention for the development of tools based on consultation and participation could strengthen their position.

More attention is needed for the *relation between gender mainstreaming and targeted equality policies*. It seems necessary not only to stress the joint necessity of gender mainstreaming and targeted equality policies, but also to give some attention to the determinants of the choices involved in deciding which strategy will be followed, and how both strategies can be combined. As a start, more reflection and dialogue on the respective strengths and weaknesses of both strategies should be encouraged.

As the countries in *Central and Eastern Europe* are facing a transformation process that is beyond their institutional capacities, and as gender mainstreaming is extremely necessary in setting up the new democracies, supranational institutions and western countries should do everything possible to create windows of opportunity for gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming should be built into all support programmes for Central and Eastern Europe, transfer and development of gender expertise in these countries should be encouraged and facilitated.