

Gender mainstreaming: the comparative case of the Nordic Development Agencies

KEY FINDINGS

- The three Nordic development agencies Danida (Denmark) Sida (Sweden), and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (FMFA) all recognise gender mainstreaming as an important part of the policy-making process.
- Gender equality is a well-funded objective in all three agencies, but Danida and FMFA lack a separate budget for mainstreaming activities.
- While all three agencies include gender analysis as part of their programme development process, this commitment often evaporates when it comes to implementation.
- The aid effectiveness agenda and changing aid modalities represent challenges to the future of gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming is the idea that when designing policies, the different effects the policy will have on men and women, due to their particular roles in society, should be considered at every stage of the process. Gender mainstreaming has three components: the integration of gender concerns into policy and programme cycles; targeted initiatives aimed at addressing gender equality concerns; and political dialogue about gender and development.

Budgets and financial resources

The levels of funding for gender equality programmes and mainstreaming activities means that, at least on the face of it, gender equality is a well-funded objective.

- In 2011 Danida devoted 18 per cent of its total development budget to gender mainstreaming and special interventions.
- During 2008-10 6 per cent of Sida-funded development interventions had gender equality as their primary objective, and 71 per cent of development interventions had gender equality as a significant objective.
- FMFA currently targets 54 per cent of its total aid budget towards gender issues.

However these figures may lead to an overestimation of the financial resources available for gender. There is a need to distinguish between budgets for special interventions for gender, and integrating gender into existing programmes (the latter specifically referred to as mainstreaming in FMFA and Danida). Danida disburses most of its resources on special interventions and has no specified budget for mainstreaming activities. Similarly, FMFA does not have a separate budget for mainstreaming activities—instead it advises that each project should assign a proportion of its budget to mainstreaming, which does not always happen in practice. Sida recognises that gender budgeting is an area where increasing attention is needed.

Internal responsibility

In each agency, all staff are ultimately responsible for gender mainstreaming. Notwithstanding this, all three agencies have staff assigned to give advice and guidance on gender mainstreaming issues.

In FMFA, the gender equality adviser is part of a cross-cutting objectives team which also focuses on inequality and climate sustainability. There are no resources available for staff in country embassies.

Danida has a gender adviser within the ministry, as well as two staff members responsible for integrating gender into multi-lateral assistance. Embassies have 'gender focal points' that spend a proportion of their weekly hours on gender issues.

Following a recent reorganization at Sida, gender capacity is now spread throughout the organization. Two advisers are part of the policy department, others are programme advisers in implementing departments. Sida also has gender focal points in its embassies, and in addition some projects have full-time advisers. All in all, Sida has 83 staff members focusing on gender issues.

The gendered dimensions of an intervention

All three agencies are highly decentralized, and in many cases embassies are responsible for the identification, design, and implementation of interventions. All three also have systems in place which are designed to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in both the design and implementation process. Danish embassies are required to undertake gender analysis before submitting a proposal to Danida. Each proposal has to include a 'gender rolling plan' which identifies the role gender will play at each stage of the project cycle. Once received by Danida, the proposal is further scrutinized by gender advisers.

Similarly, FMFA emphasizes the importance of gender analysis. However according to the gender adviser, due to time and resource constraints, this does not always take place. In practice what happens is that gender advisers based in Helsinki comment on proposals after they have been developed. This leads to the gender dimension being an afterthought rather than an integral part of the planning process recommended in the development policy guidelines.

In Sida much of the checking process for gender mainstreaming takes place in the embassies themselves. However the capacity to do this varies from embassy to embassy.

Challenges to gender equality in development policy and practice

The aid effectiveness agenda

The Paris Declaration of 2005 outlined five principles for improving the effectiveness of aid through managing for results, alignment, harmonization, ownership, and mutual accountability. These principles provide guidance for development agencies. The principles of harmonization, ownership, and mutual accountability may conflict with the Nordic development agencies mainstreaming approach as currently implemented.

Harmonization refers to co-ordinating aid priorities with other development agencies. If development agencies do not prioritize gender to the same extent then harmonizing becomes an obstacle to gender mainstreaming. Similarly, alignment refers to development agencies aligning their priorities with those of the recipient countries. This is problematic if the recipient country does not have a great commitment to gender equality. One response to these two challenges is to deliver through general budget support. Using this aid modality means that development agencies have less control over how aid is used—consequently they run the risk that gender equality and mainstreaming are side-lined.

Changing aid modalities

There is an increasing trend for aid to be channelled through external organizations such as national governments, global funds, multilateral institutions, and NGOs. All three agencies now deliver some of their aid through these indirect means. FMFA works with women's political networks, Sida distributes half its funds through multilateral institutions, and Danida is increasingly channelling money through global funds. These new aid modalities present new challenges with regards to gender mainstreaming. For example, Danida is finding it difficult to ensure that gender is a cross-cutting objective of all the funds it contributes to, and consequently there are worries that gender concerns will not be present during implementation. Similarly, Danida has noted that when it works with NGOs it does not have as much control over their gender-mainstreaming activities because NGOs receive funds from a wide variety of sources with different approaches or activities for gender mainstreaming making harmonization and reports almost impossible. Rather than exercising direct control Danida works with NGOs to try and increase their expertise with regard to gender issues.

Sida is increasingly providing aid through the private sector to make markets work for the poor. This aid modality requires a change in the rhetoric surrounding gender mainstreaming as the private sector is more open to arguments centred on efficiency rather than ones based on rights. Consequently, gender advisers find themselves using different language when talking to their colleagues within Sida and when talking to individuals in the private sector.

Multiple priorities

Staff at all three agencies are concerned about the possibility of a shift away from gender as a priority, and by the possibility that gender will be crowded out by priority overload. At Sida, the duration of their current thematic priorities apply is ambiguous, and therefore it is not clear how long gender will remain a priority. In Danida's 2012 strategy 'Right to a Better Life' gender is only part of a wider human rights approach.

Other priorities—such as HIV/AIDS, climate change, human rights—compete, and sometimes overlap, with gender equality. The proliferation of these different priorities makes incentivizing staff to focus on gender issues particularly important. Each new priority comes with extra training and tools which stretch staff capacity even further. Staff will only continue to focus on gender if there are incentives in place for them to do so.

The post-2015 agenda

The expiration of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and the shaping of the post-2015 agenda is a crucial opportunity for the gender equality agenda. Gender advisers in all agencies want to see the commitment to gender equality continue, and consider the new global development plan as a chance to broaden gender equality objectives. These development trends mean that aid agencies may no longer be the correct place to start when analysing the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming. An increasingly wide range of actors are involved in development decisions and it is increasingly apparent that individual agencies cannot unilaterally implement gender mainstreaming. The solution to this may not be as simple as transferring 'best practices' across development agencies. The result-based agenda should not simply be an alternative to gender mainstreaming. This will require that an explicit link between gender equality and other development outcomes and a disaggregation of development indicators by genders.

IMPLICATIONS

- The results-based agenda should not be seen as an alternative to gender mainstreaming, instead there should be an effort to link gender equality to other development outcomes.

