1.1 Introduction

Since the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Gender and Development in 1995, the majority of multilateral and bilateral donors have put in place gender policies and/or strategies to promote equality in the design and delivery of development assistance to partner countries. Mainstreaming has become the ubiquitous process through which donor organizations have attempted to integrate gender into development analysis, country dialogue, sectors and operations, with the aim of making gender “everyone’s business,” and therefore leading to improved gender equality results and more equitable and sustainable development. The conceptual heart of gender mainstreaming is:

“…that questions of gender must be taken seriously in central, mainstream, ‘normal’ institutional activities and not simply left in a marginalised, peripheral backwater of specialist women’s institutions.”

(Charlesworth 2005)

From the mid to late 1990s until 2010, gender policies and mainstreaming processes were the subject of more than 25 thematic and country evaluations by multilateral and bilateral agencies. Some organizations, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation (Norad), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Bank have conducted multiple evaluations of gender over the last decade, allowing for opportunities to assess trends in evaluation findings and in management responsiveness to evaluation. Individual evaluations have shown that mainstreaming has not succeeded in making gender everyone’s business, and that gender equality results have been fragmented and not scaled up. Furthermore, many of the evaluations have been conducted in isolation, and with the exception of the Norad synthesis of eight organizational evaluations completed in 2006 have lacked a broader comparative assessment of findings across organizations (Norad 2006). Currently, there is a strong informal perception that mainstreaming gender equality is consistently underperforming across the majority of donor organizations.

However, in the absence of a comprehensive synthesis review, such perceptions are not sufficient to establish general root causes and thus to influence policy or operational change strategies. This gap in evaluative knowledge needs to be filled.

In response to the evaluative gap, this synthesis intends to build on overview provided in the Norad (2006) study, by making a comprehensive assessment of gender evaluations conducted by donor agencies between 1990 and 2010. The results of the synthesis will provide the Bank and other stakeholders with a clear overview of the challenges and good practices at an organizational level; as well as future options for gender mainstreaming.

This analysis comes at a time when multilateral interest in gender equality is rising again with the creation of UN Women in 2010, and with the forthcoming World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development.
1.2 Conclusions

CONCLUSION 1: Leadership has not consistently supported the implementation of gender mainstreaming policy, resulting in what has been widely described as “policy evaporation.”

Mainstreaming requires change. Organizational culture must break with old ways of thinking and acting, and accept and act on new concepts. Importantly, mainstreaming also needs to resonate sufficiently with the past and present organizational raison d’être to be accepted. Senior management must demonstrate leadership and commitment over time for a policy or strategy to be mainstreamed; and this commitment must be supported by the necessary resources, incentives, and accountability systems. A key challenge to mainstreaming gender equality in donor organizations has proved to be the failure of senior management to move beyond policy rhetoric and to actively commit to the concept, to put in place organization-wide systems and resources necessary to make gender “everyone’s business”.

The underlying reasons for failure are often related to competing leadership priorities. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), aid effectiveness, and governance agendas, to name a few, have crowded out gender mainstreaming. Furthermore, senior management are often most responsive to those priorities that receive the most international attention and resources, and so offer rewards and career enhancement.

CONCLUSION 2: The absence of accountability and incentive systems to systematize the integration of gender equality across organizations and interventions has limited the achievement of results.

The evaluations strongly emphasized the absence of accountability and incentives systems at the organization-wide level as a key factor limiting the integration of gender equality into organizational processes and interventions, and therefore inhibiting the attainment of results (see 4.4).

However, it is important to note that discussion about the effects of such systems is almost entirely hypothetical. In practice, these systems do not seem to exist in a coherent form, and for this reason the status they have acquired as a solution to the broad failure of gender mainstreaming should be approached with caution, until such systems are put in place and can be evaluated.

CONCLUSION 3: Financial and human resources have not been sufficient to enable effective mainstreaming of gender equality within donor organizations and interventions.

Evaluations show that mainstreaming is not a financial or resource-free process. Donor organizations have not devoted sufficient resources to support gender mainstreaming. The lack of resources is largely a symptom of the inconsistent or absent leadership focus on gender equality (see 4.3). Human resources, in terms of the numbers of gender specialists, have been cut or remained at a low level within many donor organizations. Responsibility for gender equality has often been relegated to consultants, or junior or part-time staff, who lack the ability to influence either policy dialogue or operational staff in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of interventions. Many evaluations were unable to identify financial/ budgetary allocations for gender mainstreaming at either the headquarters or intervention level, as such information was not available or tracked. Frequently, budgetary allocations for monitoring gender equality components in project interventions were lacking, contributing to lack of results reporting and learning.
CONCLUSION 4: Many procedures and practices have been introduced following the adoption of new gender policies or strategies, but have been actively pursued for only a short period before gradually declining in use.

The most common organizational approach to supporting gender mainstreaming has been to develop procedures and practices such as Gender Action Plans (GAPs), gender analysis, toolkits, manuals, checklists, and staff training. Evaluations found, however, that few of these are used systematically, because of the lack of incentives or rules mandating their use. Hence, the use of gender mainstreaming procedures and practices often depends on individual country and sectoral contexts and the choices of operational staff.

Experience and derived good practice show that procedures such as GAPs and gender analysis can be effective if they are integrated throughout the design, implementation, and monitoring of the intervention. Presently, these procedures tend to be confined to particular sectors such as education and health, where opportunities for gender-sensitive approaches are more self-evident to operations and partner governments. Cross-sectoral learning and organization-wide adoption have been limited, and this has been attributed to the lack of supporting organizational systems, particularly accountability and incentive mechanisms.

Training has been largely reported to be ineffective in raising awareness and improving the knowledge necessary for gender-sensitive approaches. This is because training has been delivered using a

“Some women are more equal than others”
“one-size-one-shot fits all” approach, with little tailoring to local country or sectoral contexts. Further, resources have not been consistently targeted at providing training; the few gender specialists are overburdened with responsibilities; senior management and non-gender specialist operational staff often avoid gender training, citing heavy workloads and other priorities. Earlier evaluations of organizational responses to women in development (WID) initiatives in the 1980s and early 1990s indicated that similar sets of procedures and practices were developed, and that they encountered similar challenges.

**CONCLUSION 5: Results reporting and learning have been seriously challenged by inconsistent approaches to monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming.**

One of the most common findings reported by the evaluations has been the lack of M&E and supervision systems within donor organizations to track progress, allow for adaptive management, record gender equality results, and document good practices (see 4.5). Even when gender equality and analysis are integrated at the design stage of interventions, the focus on gender is often not continued into implementation and monitoring because of lack of financial and/or human resources. Gender is often included in project design to satisfy bureaucratic requirements for approval and then dropped during implementation, as operational staff focus on the main priorities of the intervention. This situation often creates a vicious cycle—lack of monitoring leads to invisibility of gender results, which feeds back into a lack of awareness and interest in promoting gender equality in future interventions.

Many evaluation findings show that where results are reported, they tend to be focused on: (a) women and not on gender, indicating that in practice a gender equality approach is reduced to women in development (WID); and (b) the education and health sectors, because it is easier to monitor and evaluate effects on women and gender in these areas. However, with regard to (b), the transfer of these operational experiences to other sectors has generally not taken place. Instead of being mainstreamed, gender equality has become focused on specific sectors. The evaluations also found that evaluations themselves often have failed to systematically incorporate gender into the body of evidence. Outside of specific thematic gender evaluations, evaluation offices have tended to place gender on their list of topics for occasional coverage rather than systematically integrating it into all their streams of work (see 5.1).

**CONCLUSION 6: Integrating gender equality into new aid modalities presents many new challenges to donor organizations.**

The emerging evaluative data on integrating gender equality into new aid modalities such as policy-based lending (PBL), general budget support (GBS), and sector-wide approaches (SWAs) indicates that gender is not being mainstreamed systematically into these types of interventions. SWAs focused on education, health, and social safety net sectors report better integration of gender concerns than other sectors and types of modalities, for the same reasons as traditional project-based interventions in these sectors (see 5.1).

The emerging challenges in gender mainstreaming relate to (a) inconsistent ownership of gender within partner governments, which results in it being given a low priority in poverty reduction strategies and country policy dialogue; (b) lack of donor harmonization around gender issues, resulting in inconsistencies in policy discussions and the design of PBL, GBS, and SWA operations; and (c) lack of in-country gender expertise and tools to mainstream gender in policy dialogue and interventions, which makes it difficult for gender issues to gain “a place at the table.”

**1.3 Options for Gender?**

As substantial challenges have prevented gender equality from entering the mainstream, the evaluation evidence suggests that it may be time to consider different options (see Chapter 5).
**OPTION 1: Gender focusing**
This approach would focus on those sectors where gender equality appears to be sufficiently embedded and has made some progress, and attempt to create linkages with related sectors. This approach largely would continue business as usual for most donor organizations and partner governments, as it would emphasize education and health projects or SWAps focused on women’s empowerment and gender equality. Donors could then work with partner governments to add additional entry points for gender in other sectors, such as improvement of labor market policies and the enabling environment for investment, to break down gender-based discrimination in private sector development. This may enhance partner government support, as it would be part of a policy dialogue and intervention strategy designed to increase market competitiveness and economic development. Furthermore, increasing the emphasis on developing women’s involvement and leadership in the corporate world would resonate strongly with debates and experiences in developed countries.

**OPTION 2: WID plus**
Many evaluations have found that, in practice, when gender equality is integrated into country-level interventions, it is boiled down to a women-centered or women’s empowerment approach. This option would make this approach strategically explicit, building on the experiences that have delivered results. However, it would incorporate more fundamental analysis of gender power structures, and seek to position interventions to empower women economically and politically. This would entail a return to a concentration on interventions that empower women (and men where appropriate) and facilitate incremental social change over time.

**OPTION 3: Policy dialogue on gender equality in new aid modalities**
Gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment have been aimed, at the operational level, at traditional project-based modalities. However, the increasing use of new aid modalities has created an additional set of challenges for integrating gender equality into interventions. Within the context of option 1, donor organizations and partner governments could enhance the consideration of gender equality and women’s empowerment through focused policy dialogue and development in key sectors, such as education and health, private sector development, and the investment enabling environment. Policy-based lending could be used to enhance gender dialogue around reforms in specific sectors such as finance and extractive industries. SWAps could continue to build from a position of strength in the education and health sectors to support longer-term enhancements in human capital and equitable economic development.

**OPTION 4: Improving results reporting and learning through more systematic integration of monitoring and evaluation**
Improving results and learning within organizations depends on enhanced M&E within the context of the options outlined above. Gender monitoring would be strengthened in those sectors where gender equality and women’s empowerment are the focus. Gender could be integrated more broadly across all evaluative activities to uncover unintended results, enhance cross-sectoral learning, and reduce blindness.

This report was prepared by Lee Alexander Risby, then Principal Evaluation Officer in OPEV, and David Todd, consultant, under the supervision of Colin Kirk, Director of OPEV, and Odile Keller, Division Manager. Gender experts and focal points in the African Development Bank contributed to the report, which is accompanied by a summary report with the same title.

Full report available at: http://www.operationsevaluation.afdb.org