Gender mainstreaming may be viewed as a process of systematically assessing ex-ante and ex-post the different implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, development programs or projects, in all areas and throughout the project cycle (at design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages), with a view of taking into account women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences. In short, gender mainstreaming is a holistic concept which essentially advocates a participatory and gender-inclusive approach to development, with the ultimate objective of maximizing the social and economic impacts of policies and programs for all citizens.

Although this concept was first proposed at the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, it took another decade for gender mainstreaming to become officially established and accepted by various institutions as a major global strategy for the promotion of gender equality. At the global level, the Beijing Platform for Action from the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995 provided the right context (UN 2002).

Within the World Bank, the first Operational Policy on Gender and Development was issued in the late 1990s (World Bank 2010). That policy mandated that all Country Assistance Strategies (CASs)—framework documents that inform the Bank’s policy dialogue and assistance to client countries—draw on and discuss the findings of a gender assessment. Specifically, the institutional policy called for the discussion of gender issues emerging from country gender assessments and inclusion of proposed interventions and actions to address these issues in all CASs.

The Operational Policy was followed by the adoption of the World Bank Gender Mainstreaming Strategy in 2001. More holistic and comprehensive, this strategy went beyond merely taking into account gender issues in CASs to recommend integrating a gender dimension into relevant analytical work, as well as supporting the strategic integration of gender issues into operations (i.e. lending portfolios). In other words, the new strategy had a dual focus: non-lending and lending operations. In effect, it was now a priority to
ensure that resources deployed by the World Bank in support of development in recipient countries would benefit women and men equally.

Over time, however, that institutional commitment to a uniform integration of gender considerations across all Bank’s products was reinforced under the follow-up strategic frameworks guiding the Bank’s work on gender. In particular, the Gender Action Plan introduced in 2007 for the 2007-2010 period strengthened the Bank’s Gender and Development work in the economic sectors. The emphasis on economic sectors took cognizance of the Bank’s consistently stronger record in the social sectors (education, health, social protection), and reflected the institutional drive to close the persistent sectoral gap on gender mainstreaming.

More recently and specifically over the last three years, the Bank has adopted and even strengthened accountability and monitoring mechanisms to deepen the breadth and depth of gender mainstreaming across its lending and non-lending operations. Most notably, this has been illustrated by the establishment of institutional targets and binding commitments under the IDA 16 Results Measurement System (RMS) and World Bank Corporate Score Card. This adoption of monitoring targets has strengthened the implementation of operational policy, and all CASs approved by the Board have been gender-informed, essentially meeting the 100 percent target called for under the 2001 operational policy.

The Bank is also doing well with its institutional commitment to improve the integration of gender considerations in its lending portfolios. The initial target of at least 60 percent of gender-informed lending portfolios established under IDA 16 and 55 percent for the Corporate Score Card has been exceeded. More ambitious targets were adopted under the new RMS underpinning the IDA 17 framework. In addition to pushing for gender mainstreaming at design stage, the emphasis is increasingly shifting towards gender development impact—that is, monitoring of project performance on gender at exit and monitoring of results through gathering of sex-disaggregated data.

**Increasing emphasis on gender mainstreaming**

Like in many other development institutions the increasing interest in a gender mainstreaming approach within the World Bank is the direct result of dissatisfaction with earlier approaches to foster gender equality in the quest for inclusive growth and development. Initially, frameworks informing development were essentially gender-blind. The basic assumption underlying these frameworks was that output expansion and economic development mainly depended on capital accumulation, labor and technical progress (World Bank 2011a). In this regard, there was really no need to pay any particular attention to gender relations, especially given that in the absence of barriers to entry, labor provided the path for equalizing access to opportunities for all in the paid labor market.

However, even in the labor market arena, empirical evidence has suggested that development outcomes are largely affected by gender relations (World Bank 2011a; Akyeampong and Fofack 2014). For instance, job segregation within the paid labor market is prevalent in all regions, with certain types of jobs exclusively going to women and others being the preserve of men (World Bank 2011a; Fofack 2014). The disproportionately larger representation of women in informal sector activities across Sub-Saharan Africa is partly attributed to limited barriers at entry.

At the same time the differing amount of time that men and women allocate to care and related household work has confined the majority of women (especially in low-income countries) to either predominantly unpaid labor or to part-time jobs. Globally, Gallup estimates that men are nearly twice as likely as women to have full-time jobs. This gender gap is even higher in the developing world, with men being more than three times as likely as women to have full-time jobs in the South Asia. The gender gap is probably not very different in Sub-Saharan Africa.
Furthermore, results from a review of World Bank’s operations show that gender-blind design at project level delivers gender-biased services and outcomes. In other words, unless development programs to expand economic opportunities are specifically informed by a consideration of gender differences and inequalities the intrinsic barriers at entry and social beliefs are such that the distribution of development outcomes and benefits from such programs are destined to be biased against women.

Against this background, early approaches to narrowing gender gaps exclusively focused on women in the form of targeted initiatives providing women with education and resources. The rise of microcredits to enhance female entrepreneurship over the last few decades has been part of these targeted initiatives. However, while these targeted projects (or components within larger initiatives) are often well intended their impact is limited by the scope of the operations. Thus, structural gender inequalities are going to be resolved not only through marginal initiatives, but through broad processes of change and integrated approaches to development.

Reflecting this history, the concept of gender mainstreaming which is more holistic and encompasses larger initiatives emerged as an alternative to targeted interventions. Not surprisingly, gender mainstreaming has often been defined in opposition to more narrowed targeted interventions to address women’s empowerment and gender equality (UN 2002). However, targeted interventions and gender mainstreaming have also been used as complementary approaches within the World Bank, with the latter drawn upon to achieve greater impacts at national levels, and the former to address constraints which are specific to women in some communities.

Reflecting this duality the coexistence of targeted interventions and gender mainstreaming approaches is very prevalent in low-income countries, and even more so in rural areas where income-generating opportunities are limited. On one hand the design of large-scale infrastructure operations may take into account women and men’s considerations to ensure equal access and distribution of benefits; on the other targeted interventions may be conceived during the design as a project component in the form of a public employment scheme for women’s economic empowerment.

Still, in some cases the Bank is also implementing stand-alone targeted interventions to narrow gender gaps. For instance, in order to support the growth of female entrepreneurs, it committed more than US$750 million through microfinance institutions, specifically targeted to women-owned SMEs between 2008 and 2010 (World Bank 2011). Similarly, in South Sudan, the Bank is concurrently funding a large gender-mainstreamed operation to increase access to income opportunities and provide temporary employment to the poor and vulnerable groups along with an Adolescent Girls Initiative (AGI)—a targeted intervention to promote the transition of adolescent girls from school to productive employment.

The prioritized emphasis on gender mainstreaming within the World Bank over the last few years is based both on the potentially higher development impact offered by such an approach, and on its overall potential for development effectiveness. A major review of World Bank infrastructure portfolios found that the inclusion of gender methods systematically enhances project performance. More specifically, infrastructure projects that mainstreamed gender, when compared with all infrastructure projects, performed significantly better at meeting project objectives. In the most recent review period, projects including gender methods were rated satisfactory or better in 86 percent of cases, compared with 81 percent for all infrastructure projects.

An independent evaluation of a much larger sample comprising 138 projects, including infrastructure, economic, and social sectors, approved by the Board of the World Bank for 12 focus countries during the period 2002-08 produced similar results. While over 68 percent of projects that integrated gender considerations delivered good results for gender equality
and outcomes, less than 25 percent of projects that did not were able to achieve good results (World Bank 2010). In other words, from the World Bank standpoint, gender mainstreaming is not a cosmetic exercise, but a path to increase development effectiveness. In this regard, it may be fundamental in the quest for achieving the new twin goals of ending extreme poverty by 2030 and boosting shared prosperity.

**Monitoring progress on gender mainstreaming**

Efforts to develop an accountability system with ambitious targets and to design and implement a framework for monitoring the integration of gender considerations in both lending and non-lending operations have been significant. The result is improved breadth and depth of gender mainstreaming over the last few years (World Bank 2011b; World Bank 2013). The revised monitoring framework currently assesses the extent of integration of gender considerations in lending and non-lending operations during project design along three dimensions:

- **Analysis** of gender issues relevant to the project objectives
- **Actions** to narrow gender gaps
- **M&E system** to monitor gender impact and facilitate gender disaggregated analysis

The proposed framework allows for ex-ante assessment of the extent of gender mainstreaming during the concept note stage as well as other preliminary internal reviews. Gender-mainstreamed operations systematically consider gender inequalities, as reflected in the underlying analysis, actions and M&E arrangements. At the same time projects are also monitored ex-post after board approval and results that contrast regions and sectors are published on a quarterly basis internally and on annual basis for the consolidated lending portfolios through the World Bank Open Data Initiative.

A focus on the lending portfolio shows that measures of gender mainstreaming have improved consistently and steadily over the last four fiscal years, with the proportion of gender-informed operations approved by the Board rising from 60 percent during fiscal year 2010 (FY10) to 97 percent during FY13,
as the figure shows. The deepening of gender mainstreaming is also consistent across all dimensions. While only 20 percent of lending operations were fully gender mainstreamed in all three dimensions during FY10, more than 54 percent were during FY13.

The deepening of the depth and breadth of gender mainstreaming along the three dimensions of the monitoring framework suggests that more and more lending operations are including specific actions to address gender issues during project design. As far as the non-lending portfolio is concerned, the institutional target of full compliance has been met for CASs that are closely monitored as part of the corporate mandate. More than complying with the World Bank Operational Policy (OP 4.20) more and more CASs are proposing gender-informed actions and programs. They are also including baseline and target indicators in the results matrix to monitor progress towards gender equality during the CAS implementation cycle (World Bank 2013).

In addition to the adoption of targets and design of an operational framework to monitor progress over time other factors have contributed to the significant improvement in the deepening of gender mainstreaming within the World Bank. Most staff have attributed these positive changes to three concurrent factors: a stronger commitment to gender equality and women’s economic empowerment by the Bank’s senior management, the success of awareness-raising efforts to illustrate the value and benefits of gender-equality (made even more evident by the World Bank 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development), and available incentive funding to strengthen the focus on gender in existing operations.

The support of senior management was illustrated in the adoption of the World Bank’s Six Gender Commitments in 2008. Some of these commitments included increasing IDA investments for gender equality, having country directors reporting to the President on what is being done and what should be done to empower girls and women economically, and channeling at least USD100 million in commercial bank credit lines to women entrepreneurs through the International Finance Corporation by the end of 2012.1

More recently, senior management further illustrated its commitment by approving the implementation of a “Gender Tag” that makes the integration of gender considerations into lending operations more systematic during project design. Other relevant initiatives include:

- Gender Data Portal— provides access to various databases on gender
- enGender Impact— provides a compilation of World Bank experimental and quasi-experimental gender-related impact evaluations
- AdePT Gender— makes gender analysis standard practice in poverty analysis and should inform the design of lending operations and CASs

Lessons learned and emerging challenges

The World Bank has made significant progress on the path to gender mainstreaming and gender equality over the last few years. The adoption of institutional targets and systematic monitoring of progress towards agreed targets has played a significant role in the results thus far achieved. However, a successful gender-informed operation at entry does not necessarily guarantee gender equality of outcomes at exit. One of the most important challenges moving forward is to increase the collection and dissemination of beneficiary data disaggregated by sex for impact assessment and for monitoring project performance on gender at exit.

1 The other three commitments include (i) measurably improving the integration of gender equality into World Bank’s Agriculture and Rural Development projects by December 2010; (ii) launching a work program on young women count for economic development, starting with an event prior to the 2008 Annual Meetings; and (iii) creating a Private Sector Leaders’ Forum to convene their first meeting on the margins of the 2008 Annual Meetings. For more details and progress on these commitments, see World Bank (2011).
The push for more ambitious gender targets and emphasis on development impact embedded in the IDA 17 Results Measurement System should enhance progress on impact assessment. At the same time, the success and commitment to gender mainstreaming has not been achieved at the expenses of targeted interventions, which are still needed to tackle specific constraints facing women, especially in poverty-stricken countries and poor rural areas in Sub-Saharan Africa. Besides the increased emphasis on development impact of gender-mainstreamed operations, the coexistence of targeted interventions and gender-mainstreamed approaches augurs well for the push for gender equality and women’s economic empowerment in Africa.

References


