EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT: IF NOT ENGENDERED THEN ENDANGERED

Gender mainstreaming is a process and a strategy. Its aim is to bring gender equality by promoting gender analysis, research, gender approach and evaluation into policies, projects and institutions for the promotion of women's empowerment and their rights. Therefore the focus should be on women and on how to bring gender equality into policies, legislation, planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects. But this has not been an easy task specially when this approach is implemented in organizations that have few financial and human resources and a world wide scope, as it is the case of NGO's and civil society organizations

A broad assessment of gender mainstreaming in several of the development institutions or organizations, including bilateral donors, international financial institutions (IFIs), United Nations (UN) agencies, and non governmental organizations (NGOs)[1] indicate that progress has been relatively consistent in adopting the terminology of gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

For several of the mentioned organizations, results have not been so successful when putting in place gender mainstreaming policies. Even if most of the organizations included a dual strategy (gender and women), they faced several constraints when implementing these approaches.

These constraints can be identified among others as a) the scope to be use in the frame of instrumentalism: a still unsolved discussion on whether gender equality policy is an end

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[1] Mosser C. and Mosser "A. "Gender Mainstreaming since Beijing: a review of success and limitation in international institutions" A systematic analysis was conducted of the following organizations: DFID (UK Department for International Development), CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency), Sida (Swedish International Development Agency), the World Bank, the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank), the ADB (Asian Development Bank), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), UN Habitat, UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women),Oxfam GB, Hivos (Humanitarian Institute for Development Cooperation), Action Aid, and ACORD (Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development).

in itself or to be promoted as a means to development; b) gender mainstreaming activities at institutional level are often inconsistent, scarce and tend to evaporate during the implementation phase either at institutional or operational level due to various reasons: 1. non-committed decision makers and male resistance; 2. male-biased organizational structure (attitudes, working conditions, recruitment procedures, etc.) that discriminates against female staff; 3. "gender experts" and specially "gender focal points" with little power to influence or advice; 4. few gender equality targets or goals in programming, project design, evaluation and monitoring; 5. weak organizational commitment for staff gender training tackled with staff lack of understanding of the concepts and the difference between gender and women issues.

At the international level there are mix feelings on the failure/success of gender mainstreaming due to the few assessments addressing operational and programming implementation. Gender mainstreaming has been focalized, with little delivery and its impact on gender equality is still largely unknown. The reality is also that gender mainstreaming initiatives, mechanisms and instruments have been under-funded and under-resourced. Many organizations, including women movements and feminists groups' advocates for gender equality have resorted to gender mainstreaming because they see it as "the only strategy that will keep women's issues from being swept off to the margins". They see it as the only strategy that will lead to the integration of gender equality and women's rights objectives into the so called "hard issues" of macroeconomics and poverty eradication.[2] For others however, gender mainstreaming is long gone because it has resulted in the disappearance of attention to women's specific needs and the gender-differentiated impacts of policies and programs.

Civil societies organizations and NGO's such as the International Council of Ault Education, ICAE, and its Gender Office (GEO) has been making efforts to include gender mainstreaming as a means to development. But it has also suffered from the constraints described above. With few resources civil societies organizations and NGO's have oriented its work towards lobby and advocacy for women and gender issues. To implement its programme of gender mainstreaming in ICAE, GEO has developed alliances with other international and national organizations. This is the case of the face-to -face training activities implemented together with DAWN, a successful project that organized distance training courses on gender and education addressed to ICAE members from different regions. For this purpose, financial and human resources were allocated. We must also highlight ICAE/GEO advocacy work within the Global Coalition Against Poverty (GCAP) to mainstream gender in poverty alleviation programs by creating the feminist task force (FTF). The active participation in several international Conferences and Meetings, specially in the MDG and the World Social Summit, has provide a forum for ICAE/GEO for discussion of emerging issues in the education sectors and organize front line panels and seminars to discuss poverty eradication and quality of education for women and men.. Several publications on gender, education and social issues have also been produced by ICE/GEO in coordination with other NGO's of different regions.

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[2] AWID, SpotLight nr. 3 November 2004 "Gender Mainstreaming: can it work for women's rights?"

Being gender mainstreaming a process whose impact can only be measured in the long term, CSO and NGO's organizations should continue working to advocate for women empowerment and to achieve gender justice by promoting discussions and organizing activities and programs with regional and national particularities addressed to the education sector. Advocacy and lobby, a successful approach used by CSO and NGO's should continue. The work of embedding gender equality and gender justice concerns into the education sector need to continue to influence policy making processes, a responsibility to be shared by all CSO and NGO's working in the education sectorwith the support of the national and regional women movements organizations and their "gender specialists".

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