Research Windows on Gender Mainstreaming

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Abstract

Earlier research on women issues focused on recognition of women as a capable person and raising her socio-economic status .It was associated with feministic movement and women's rights. Present research addresses the contemporary problems of women advancement, like glass ceiling and glass walls associated with gender mainstreaming .In this paper an attempt is made to provide guidelines to researchers for inquiring gender mainstreaming policies of employer organizations.

Keywords: Discrimination, Equal opportunities, Gender, Glass ceiling, Mainstreaming.

The research studies undertaken in the past have articulated the critical connections between the developmental issues and the role, status and resourcefulness of women who may be either beneficiaries or victims; active agents or passive sufferers. The research demonstrated the necessity of the full utilization of women resources, and their full integration into development efforts in both developing and developed countries.

Positive Trend

Of late, there is growing recognition that women are an essential productive force in all economies and that the role of women in development is directly related to achieving the goals of social and economic development. An important objective of development policy in general is increasing the economic opportunities for women. International estimates prepared by statistical office of the United Nations' Secretariat from International Labor Office in1993 indicated that the proportion of economically active women rose in most parts of the world. The IMF and World Bank report notes that approximately 830 million women were active. About 70 percent of them live in developing countries, of who one half were in Asia. During the last decade and half much progress is witnessed in this respect.

With the improvement in the socio-economic status of women throughout the world, young women and men of the future can expect to have a more fulfilling experience of the world of work and family life. A positive trend is towards the full recognition of women's capabilities and rights and on equality between women and men in all fields and at all levels of decision making.

In these closing years of twentieth century, the cause of equality of opportunity and treatment of women and men has undoubtedly made enormous progress. Legal and practical inhibitions such as those barring women from certain educational and employment possibilities have largely fallen by the way side, although in real terms, it is still often the case that a woman will have to show a great deal more ability than a man competing for the same job. Technological changes have affected positively the employment of women particularly in the organized sector.

Negative Shades

Though the above description provides an optimistic and encouraging picture, researchers cannot ignore the painful progress of women to the top positions. They coined the terms glass ceiling and glass walls to describe the barriers to the progress of women to top echelons of management hierarchy.

Glass Ceiling and Glass Wall

The term "glass ceiling" was coined in the 1970s in the United States to describe the invisible artificial barriers, created by attitudinal and organizational prejudices, barring women from top executive jobs. According to a new ILO report, "Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management", it's an apt definition for an ongoing problem. And despite recent progress, the glass ceiling is still relatively intact.

"Almost universally, women have failed to reach leading position in major corporations and private sector organizations, irrespective of their abilities," says ILO labor expert and report author Linda Wirth. "Women represent more than 40 per cent off the world's labor force. Yet their share of management positions remains unacceptably low, with just a tiny proportion succeeding in breaking through the glass ceiling to obtain top jobs."

According to national surveys, women's overall share of management jobs rarely exceeds 20 per cent. The higher the position, the more glaring the gender gap. In the largest and most powerful organizations the proportion of top positions going to women is generally 2 to 3 per cent.

For example, a 1995 survey of the 70,000 largest German companies found that only 1 to 3 per cent of top executives and board members are women. In Brazil, a 1991 survey of major corporations revealed that only around 3 per cent of top executives were women. In the United States women held only just over 2 per cent at the higher-ranking corporate positions of 500 the largest companies (Fortune 500) in 1996.

For example, the increase in women share of positions as personnel and labor-relations managers in the United States was higher than in other areas of management, advancing from 21 per cent in 1970 to 58 per cent in 1991. In Finland, the proportion of personnel managers who are women increased dramatically, from 17 per cent in 1970 to 70 per cent in 1990. Women's career trajectory does not often provide for women to move at an early stage into strategic areas, such as product development or corporate finance allowing an upward movement to key executive positions in the pyramidal structure characteristic of large corporations. Sometimes, these barriers are referred to as "glass walls".

One of the greatest challenges that remain is how to make the structures and dynamics within organizations more conducive and sensitive to gender equality concepts and practice. This is particularly crucial in environments where new management structures and work roles involve restructuring, downsizing, decentralization and delivering in the bid to be more globally competitive. Without such a watershed change from within firms and enterprises, women will, in the years to come, continue to experience "glass ceilings" and "glass walls" as invisible barriers to positions of top management

Gender Mainstreaming - A New Perspective

A new outlook for women problems is evolved in recent years. The new movement is not centered around feminism but on humanism and hence on gender mainstreaming ,while recognizing the reality of sex differences it demands recognition of competencies without gender bias. The main focus of the movement is on career advancement of women and not on entry which is by now mostly outdated.Fig-1 shows the separation of issues.

Figure-1 Women relate issues.

Entry level issues	Career growth issues
Sex role perceptions Stereotyping Sexual discrimination Sexual harassment Sex role spillovers	Glass walls Glass ceiling Mentoring and networking Work life balancing

Concept of Gender

 "Gender" refers to the roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.

"Sex" refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women.

On the basis of these definitions, society defines and lays down the rights and duties of women and men in the following spheres of life:

• Personal and family relations, friendships, occupations.

• Possible life patterns and forms: small/extended family, flat-sharing, singles...

• Child care, education, parental leave (full-time, both parents, single parent)...

• Intergenerational relations: Struggle for survival or cooperation between the generations.

• Possible forms of occupation and employment: full-time, part-time, contingent work, household.

• Care for the sick and elderly in need of aid.

These rights and duties stem from value systems, religious convictions and cultural traditions, which have undergone constant development throughout human history and differ from country to country and from continent to continent.

It is on the basis of these rights and duties that the way in which humans live with, or fight against, one another is described and regulated by laws--written law, and to an even greater extent by the do's and don'ts of a given society.

Accordingly, society assigns or ascribes certain roles, functions, tasks and needs to men and women, jointly and/or separately, and evaluates and predetermines their respective spheres of influence and activities. All these factors and aspects-and others

still, such as geographical regions and features, climatic conditions, nationality etc.-will also influence the definition of such concepts as sickness and health.

Equality of Opportunities versus Equal Opportunities

In the field gender mainstreaming,   two distinct concepts are often confused:

- "the opportunity for men and women to achieve equality" and

- "equal opportunities" for men and women

The opportunity for women to achieve equality with men will always be limited by virtue of the biological differences between men and women.

Gender mainstreaming seeks to offer men and women equal opportunities in respect of their individual and personal choices in all spheres of life. The object is to ensure that

- both sexes have equal opportunities in terms of access to services and activities but are not forced to make use of these opportunities; and that

- Commonalities and differences between them are taken into account, respected and consciously furthered on a basis of equality.

In all situations gender mainstreaming accepts, as a matter of course differences in living conditions and equal –or different-opportunities that men and women are offered in their social context, and tries to assess what would be the likely effects of specific measures on women and men and whether, and in what way, they could contribute to the objective of equal opportunities or the opportunity for women and men to achieve equality.

Gender competence leads to positive action aimed at eliminating or preventing discrimination of men and women and doing away with disadvantages that are first and foremost due to certain structural aspects, the failure to reflect on attitudes and values, and acquired forms of behavior.

Research Enquiry Methods

The 4-R Method

In the mid-90s the "3-R method" was first developed in Sweden. It comprises three sets of questions for the analysis of a given policy field or gender mainstreaming project.

- Questions on the degree of representation of women and men in the field under discussion,

- Questions on the available resources and

- Questions on the realities underlying the gender-specific degree of representation.

Meanwhile, this easily applicable method has been extended to include questions concerning rights and is now applied in most of the European gender mainstreaming projects. The "4-R method" is a useful to for assessing the status quo as well as for evaluating planned measures concerning equal treatment of men and women.

(1) Representation

Gender-specific data concerning decision makers, persons involved, target groups, persons affected etc.

- Composition of target groups (proportion of men and women)?

- How many men and women are involved in the area and/or the project under discussion and in which position?

- How many of the decision makers and persons involved are women?

(2) Resources

In terms of money, time, influence, education, specialists knowledge, staff etc:

- Resources available to men and women, respectively?

- How much money is spent on projects specially targeted on women and how much is spent on projects primarily involving men?

- What is known about the effects of projects on e.g. the unequal distribution of time and money amongst women and men?

- How much expertise on matters of equal treatment can be expected from the decision makers and other persons involved? How are people trained in this field?

(3) Realities

In terms of social conditions, differing concerns, and gender-specific "values' and norms underlying inequalities:

- What (gender-specific) values and norms are prevalent in the policy field in question?

- What are the specific needs of women and men on account of their social roles?

- What specific obstacles or disadvantages affect men or women on account of their gender?

- What action is called for to ensure equal treatment?

(4) Rights

Provided for by laws, instructions, regulations, models, etc.:

- Do men and women enjoy equal rights?

- Are gender-specific realities accounted for by existing regulations?

- What legal prerequisites would have to be created in order to ensure equal opportunities?

Strategies to Promote Women

- Regulatory mechanisms and legal frameworks to eliminate discrimination on grounds of sex;

- Affirmative action and guidelines to genuinely change attitudes, while taking existing diversities into account;

- The adoption of appropriate steps by enterprises, institutions and governments to ensure that employees are aware of obligations and rights, including those stemming from equal employment laws where applicable;

- Positive action and equal opportunities policies to level the playing field and ensure equal opportunities and treatment for women in recruitment and promotion;

- The development of ways, which can include more flexible working hours, reduced hours of work and adequate child-and elder-care facilities, to enable both women and men to combine the building of a career and the raising of a family;

- Mentoring for women to provide advice and develop their professional skills;

- The appointment of corporate officers in the personnel departments of enterprises with responsibility for monitoring and promoting equal opportunities throughout the enterprise; and

- Access of women to business skills-training and entrepreneurship development to help them run their own businesses.

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